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## **ACCOUNTING FOR STATE-BUILDING, STABILITY & VIOLENT CONFLICT:**

### **THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF CAUCASIAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES**

Project Proposal

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#### **Abstract**

This comparative, cross-societal project explores (1) the conditions for successful / failed defusing of conflict potential in the Caucasian and Central Asian societies. The analysis is placed (2) within the context of successful / failed state building. Point of departure of the analysis is the assumption that weak states with low capacities and scarce provision of public goods are a breeding ground for violent conflicts. Violent conflict, on the other hand, is often a means to establish regime stability and serves thus a precondition for state building.

Regionally, we focus on the 19 successor polities that have emerged in the Caucasus and in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>1</sup> (hereafter: The CCA-Societies)

From this sample, we select at least case-studies from Tajikistan, Kirgistan, Uzbekistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia and Northern Caucasus. (see page 18 for detailed description).

Some of those post-socialist societies have successfully managed the transition and have avoided violence. Others have succeeded in polity building, but only at the price of conflict

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study we define 19 successor polities:

Former Soviet Republics / first order units within the Soviet Union:

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kirgistan

Second order units:

Within Georgia: Abkhazia, Ajaria, South Ossetia

Within Azerbaijan: Nagorno Karabakh

Within the Russian Federation: Chechnya, Adygeja, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia and North-Ossetia.

and violence. And some of the new countries have completely failed – they have lost their statehood and internal violence has become endemic.

Thus, it is not conflict that needs to be explained, but the different responses of the various post-socialist societies to the conflict potential that arose after the collapse of the central state.

Methodologically, we rely on a multidisciplinary approach, combining political science, social anthropology and contemporary social history.

The interface between these disciplines and the key unit of analysis is the institutional framework of the successor states. By institutional framework, we mean the hybrid combination of institutions that derive from the official Soviet institutions (the Soviet legacy), from unofficial institutions that have emerged as a reaction to the organizational deficits of the Soviet system (such as black market economy or networks of patronage) and from “traditional” institutions that have survived the Soviet system.

Focusing on the institutional framework allows us to depict and understand the incentive structures of local actors engaged in organising or defusing violence. It allows us to understand the micropolitics of local conflicts and place it in the wider context of successful or failed state building.

The project aims at filling a considerable gap in academic writing on the region. There is a considerable literature on the region, mainly because of its geopolitical importance and of ongoing interstate rivalries. However, most of the literature on the Caucasus and on Central Asia either stems from the field of international relations (with limited local knowledge) or from the field of regional studies (with a lacking understanding of comparative analyses). We think, however, that a sound understanding of the political process in the regions must start at the societal level and has to be analysed in a comparative approach.

Specifically, we expect that the findings of the project will provide valuable insights on the impact of unofficial, non-state institutions on conflict escalation and defusion; on the impact of highly institutionalised networks of patronage; on the conditions of success / failure of ethnic entrepreneurs in weak post soviet states; on the state-building capacities of networks of patronage; on the impact of the soviet institutional legacies for conflict escalation / defusion and on the organisation of sustained violence in weak states (cf. our working hypotheses on p.11).

In order to achieve this, all case-studies will closely take into consideration a) the heritage of official and unofficial soviet institutions and their capability of adaptation, b) local social institutions that emerged due to the organisational deficits of the state and c) newly invented or imported institutions. Case-studies will be investigated through extensive fieldwork and executed by scholars from both Western-Europe and from CCA-Countries. This will be one of the few contemporary research projects that will gather empirical data by means of fieldwork, and will not entirely rely on secondary material.

The outputs of the project will considerably add to our knowledge of the 19 transitions societies and to the ongoing conflicts. It will also contribute to theory building, especially in the realm of conflict theory. The results of the project will be published in two volumes: One will encompass the case-studies while the second volume will integrate the results of the case-studies into a theoretical framework on post-socialist conflicts (see page 20).

The project will also establish and strengthen scientific contacts between researchers in Germany and in the CCA-countries. It will thus strengthen the academic capacities in both the CCA-regions and in Germany. Workshops, training sessions, elements of distant learning, jointly held seminars and jointly conducted fieldwork will prove highly profitable for both sides. We especially intend to integrate research results from the CCA-countries in theory building. Within the framework of the project, we will train at least four PhD students (these positions are open for applicants from all countries). Thus, apart from its scientific value, the project will also have a positive middle-term effect with regard to the strengthening of Caucasian and Central Asian studies, in Western Europe, in CCA countries and in Berlin.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> we would like to thank Beate Eschment and Oliver Reisner from the Aufbau-Studiengang Kaukasus und Zentralasien of the Humboldt University Berlin for their cooperation and advice.

## Objectives

The proposed study places itself strictly within the framework of the respective Volkswagen programme

- by promoting academic research within German research institutions on the CCA-societies, and by delivering regional expertise.
- by involving in this endeavour specialists from the CCA countries.
- by delivering theoretical findings which can be generalized and are *applicable* within the broader contexts of ethnopolitical violence /stability and state-building processes.
- lastly, the findings of the study will be relevant for policy makers, for agencies working in the field of development and relief assistance, and for companies active in that region.

## Background

The imperial collapse of the Soviet Union poses a formidable challenge for the successor polities in the Caucasus and Central Asia: The centrally administered Soviet society has fragmented into multiple societies, which have to (re-) build state administrations, (re-)draw boundaries, (re-)invent loyalties. These societies have to establish new institutional arrangements for self-regulation in order to ensure security, political participation, economic development and inter-groups stability after the fall of the empire. These institutions have to be inscribed into a political space, the boundaries of which are often weakly defined and contested. Furthermore, ready-made historical templates are not available, since all of the CCA-societies are latecomers and have not experienced significant periods of independent statehood.

All CCA societies of the collapsed empire were faced with this challenge. Not all societies, however, have managed to find a non-violent solution. Especially those administrative units of the collapsing empire, which have a multi-ethnic population, face particular problems: here, the ambitions and fears of two or more ethnic groups have to be addressed, separatist tendencies have to be avoided, growing antagonism along ethnic (or else religious-ideological) lines need to be defused and attempts of ethnic entrepreneurs to conquer the state by using ethnicity as a resource have to be blocked. Some of the post-socialist societies have successfully managed these tasks and have avoided violence. Others have succeeded in polity building, but only at the price of conflict and violence. And some of the new countries have completely failed – they have lost their statehood and internal violence has become endemic.

Thus, it is not conflict that needs to be explained, but the different responses of the various post-socialist societies to the conflict potential that arose after the collapse of the central state.

A key question is consequently to identify what conditions foster certain new orders. What actors, procedures and institutions are necessary to foster non-violent intra- and inter-group relations, particularly in dealing with conflicts? What combination of factors does it take to build or loose the state?

Based on our preliminary findings,<sup>3</sup> we assume (contradicting the “common sense” of mainstream conflict research)<sup>4</sup> that it is not conflict that needs to be explained, but rather conflict spinning out of the control of institutions designed to deal with it. We suppose that the permissive conditions (the risk-factors, see appendix A, p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) for conflict escalation usually listed for the region under scrutiny – ethnical patchwork, dividing line between civilisations, difficult terrain, history of woe and hatred, economic and political injustice – are of inferior analytical value to an institutional approach. As permissive conditions for conflict escalation we would rather expect

- a) loss of the legitimate monopoly of violence of the state (due to misuse, ineffectiveness or break-down)
- b) loss of binding power of official institutions for certain groups of the society
- c) establishment of effective group-internal mechanisms of coercion
- d) access to material resources crucial for organising violence

Regarding items c) and d), the existence of pseudo-state style administrative institutions with ethnically defined elites, such as the “sleeping beauty” or “zombie” autonomous republics/*okrugs* of the soviet administrative division), seem to offer an extraordinary organizational potential.

Secondly, we would like to stress that the initial rationales and rules that govern a conflict are typically different from the phase of conflict escalation and the subsequent phase of either establishing a stable violent environment (warlord system or market of violence<sup>5</sup> in our terminology) or of containing violence.<sup>6</sup> The latter phase of containing violence is also different from the rules and limits of reconciliation and peace building after collective violence ends.

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<sup>3</sup> Elwert 2001a; Koehler, Zürcher (ed.) 2001

<sup>4</sup> We feel however in line with classic conflict theory (e.g. Coser 1956, Dahrendorf 1954; cf. Koehler, Zürcher (ed. 2001). We find it difficult to cut short our reading on literature as to keep the text comprehensible and therefore decided to furnish an overview over relevant literature in appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> For the concept of markets of violence see Elwert 1999; compare also Berdal, Malone (ed.) 2000

<sup>6</sup> For the differentiation of phases following different internal logics from a comparison of societies at civil war see Waldmann 1999.

## Implementation

### *Theoretical Approach*<sup>7</sup>

#### *Institutionalism:*

-- Institutions are accepted, trained and sometimes enforced patterns of interaction, which can frame conflicts. Conflict potentials can thus be defused. The breakdown of such a framework may enable the risk factors to “go active”.

-- The institutional framework provides the incentive structure for local actors and thus determines their strategic action. Institutions can thus not only diffuse violence, but they can also produce violence, if the incentive structure is “badly” designed.

-- Institutions have distributional effects. They determine the access to resources crucial for organizing violence and determine the relative position of actors.

**All three functions of institutions are of consequence for the probability of the emergence of organized violence.**

To link the institutional arrangements of a society with the potential for organised violence or sustainable non-violent stability is, as far as we are aware of, a relatively new approach - at least for the post-socialist space.<sup>8</sup> Institutions are, according to the classical definition of Douglass North, “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanely devised constraints that shape human interaction.”<sup>9</sup> Institutions are trained patterns of human interaction, which are codified in contracts and rules, or which root in shared norms, values, and codes of behaviour. Because institutions are trained, repeated and “sticky” patterns of interaction, they stabilise social expectations and help reducing transaction costs.

By focusing on the existing institutional framework, we place actors in the context that structures their actions. Thus, the explanatory power of models based on rational choice and

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<sup>7</sup> We are not advocating a new and exclusive theory. The institutional approach for explaining violence derives and incorporates many insights from other approaches, such as rational choice, game theory and micro-economics. We are also aware of the results of large-n, cross country studies. All of these approaches, however, considerably gain explanatory power when linked to the institutional framework of the society in question. Therefore, we restrict ourselves, for the purpose of this proposal, to the institutional approach. For a more detailed explanation of how we make use of other approaches, see Literature Overview, appendix A, pp. **Error! Bookmark not defined.-Error! Bookmark not defined.**

<sup>8</sup> There are a few excellent studies on regime transition, which focus on institutional factors and occasionally touch ethnopolitical violence. See for example Bunce 1999; Rubin, Snyder (ed.) 1998; Roeder 1993; Bratton, van de Walle 1997. See also Snyder 2000: 48 – 47, “Building Nationalist Institutions”.

A closer reading of classical social-anthropological and sociological literature on conflicts on sub-state level, especially in the fields of legal anthropology and feuding, also reveals that an institutionalist approach to violent conflict sporadically has been taken by some excellent scholars (see e.g. Spittler 1980; also Coser 1956). This is the typical perspective of distant observers of conflict. However, under the impression of an inflation of conflicts after the demise of the bipolar world, those perspectives have been even more marginalized by culturalist approaches (see Elwert, Feuchtwang, Neubert 1999).

<sup>9</sup> North 1990: 6

game theory can be significantly enhanced, because the "pathological social systems"<sup>10</sup> that make violence both probable and individually rational, become the central unit of analysis.

Institutions are "sticky" and change, as a rule, only slowly and incrementally. Therefore, focusing on institutions provides us, in many cases, with a better understanding of social developments than focusing on the fast changing ad-hoc alliances of political actors during transition periods. Institutional approaches bring back historical continuity and a measure of path-dependency<sup>11</sup> to the tale of transitions, which, otherwise, is characterised by disruption, voluntarism and contingency. A careful consideration of pathdependency and history amplifies the limits of social engineering. Traditions and we-groups cannot be invented at random but always depend on the existing institutional raw-materials. An institutionalist perspective may provide insights into the conditions that favour or prevent innovations and inventions.<sup>12</sup>

By taking an institutionalist perspective we are also able to make use of a promising new sociological approach to conflict-theory, namely, understanding conflict as not necessarily disruptive for the stability of a society. This approach assumes that in certain institutional contexts conflict, in fact, is a "glue" of society. The experience of being able to deal with conflict according to defined and reliable set of "rules of the game" is the most powerful mechanism legitimising the institutions of a society.<sup>13</sup> The focus of the analysis of violent conflict thus shifts from the factors leading to conflicting interests, to the break-down of the institutional framing of conflicts in a society (see appendix A, **Error! Bookmark not defined., Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

### Institutional arrangements

The institutional arrangement of a society produces incentive structures for actors, defines the windows of opportunity for political entrepreneurs and establishes the constraints in which actors are locked. Challenging widespread state-centric approaches, we argue that the institutional framework consists not only of the institutional legacy of the "official" state institutions of the socialist systems, but also of the "shadow" institutions that have emerged as a response to the organisational deficits of the socialism. Attention should also be given to locally rooted norms and conventions that have survived in niches not occupied by the socialist state. These three analytically distinct sets of institutions form together a hybrid, eclectic, locally distinct framework, which structures actors incentives, opportunities and constraints.

Such an understanding of the institutional framework is especially helpful in the CCA societies, which have historically been weak states with societies that have never fully adapted to the soviet ("western") model of governance, but have preserved (and, after 1991, reinvented and readapted) many "traditional" institutions.

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<sup>10</sup> Lake, Rothchild 1998: 6-7

<sup>11</sup> A historian commented on this approach, "You call it path-dependency. In past times we called it history".

<sup>12</sup> We think that the finding that traditions or nations are not a given reality but rather a social construct should lead to research aiming at identifying social conditions that make certain "inventions" probable and successful and doom others to failure.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. among others Coser 1956; Hirschman 1994a; Luhmann 1969

### *”Official” institutions*

Under the term official institutions we understand the legacy of the soviet state, which serves as the template for the NIS (Newly Independent States). Soviet ethno-federalism has left behind territories, equipped with titular nations, territorial bureaucracies, territorial media, proto-democratic institutions, such as parliaments (soviets), and a territorial elite that was ready to take over this legacy. In the case of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, these borders thus formed a template for status conflicts.

Other residues of empire are not territorial, but functional.<sup>14</sup> These include military organisations, economic networks of supply and production, networks of party or business nomenclature or parts of bureaucracies that have survived the collapse. Some of them have adapted to post-imperial circumstances. They became the new locus of power and formed the functional backbone of the newly assembled polities.

### *”Unofficial” institutions*

By ”unofficial” institutions we mean such institutions that were not part of the soviet design, but which have emerged as a reaction to the organisational deficits of the system, or have survived the Soviet homogenisation.

These unofficial institutions went largely undetected by political science and ”sovietology”, which focused mainly on ”official” state institutions, but they proved to have a significant impact on the way polities reassembled after the implosion of the central state.

Endemic *black market economies* and widespread *corruption*, both of which are common features of post-socialist societies, are correlated to the economy of favours and have a forerunner in the administrative market<sup>15</sup>. Another widespread unofficial institution of socialist systems, which have retained their importance and functionality beyond the collapse, are the *networks of patronage*. In areas, where the state lacked the resources to penetrate the periphery with bureaucratic institutions, it had to rely on personal networks for governance and control. After the collapse of the central state, networks of patronage became in many places the most cohesive institutional structure, substituting state tasks and concentrating political power and economic resources.

Other unofficial institutions are based on local know-how and local traditions, which retained their functionality during and after the socialist period. Most CCA-societies are structured around the *network of clans*. Political power is vested to a large extent in these structures, a fact that could be easily overlooked, since many powerful clans occupied important positions in the socialist hierarchies. This does not mean, however, that the ”modern” bureaucratic state

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<sup>14</sup> Rubin, Snyder 1998: 6

<sup>15</sup> Kordonskij 1995. We expect that regarding Elwert’s general theory of venality a difference might be observable for socialist societies, where, in most cases, favours and privileges replaced fiscal relations (comp. Elwert 1985).

system has replaced a "traditional" clan system. What actually happened was rather a parasitic exploitation of the bureaucratic hierarchies by the clan system.

In wide parts of the Caucasus and Central Asia, specific forms of local regulation of justice, solidarity and conflict regulation exist, which do not depend on a modern state bureaucracy, even though they might depend in their functionality to regulate conflict on the monopoly of violence of the state. Codified traditional value systems (e.g. *adat* - the "law of the mountains" in many remote parts of the Caucasus) existed together with the Soviet, and later, Russian legal systems. The re-emergence of *shariat- courts*<sup>16</sup> is another example. In this context also the *council of elders*, which is still highly respected in North Caucasian societies, or the *ulemma* in Central Asia have to be mentioned.

On the other hand, the organisational deficits of the official soviet order has also generated morally unembedded systems of allocating power and resources. These systems were solely founded on violence and force (e.g. the "schools of cruelty" that Yuri Levada has identified: prisons and army with its informal rank-system years in service: *dedovshina*)<sup>17</sup> and were relevant for exploiting chances within the newly emerging warlord systems after the implosion of the Soviet Union.

Detecting and describing such local institutions is crucial for our understanding of post-socialist spaces – from the Balkans to Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Turkic provinces of China. It is precisely this hybrid, eclectic combination of official and unofficial institutions that forms the institutional framework, which governs post-socialist, and in fact most political spaces after modernity. Today it is obvious that socialist self-perception and western analysis both dramatically underestimated the residual power of "the local". A better understanding of this simultaneous functioning of different codes and value systems is by no means only of "folkloristic" value, but helps understanding the capacity of a society for dealing with conflicts and state-building.

#### Examples of Institutional reality: hybrid institutions in weak states

Addressing official **and** unofficial institutions is crucial for detecting the real incentive structures of local actors. Actors in conflicts usually veil their real incentives behind a discourse of seeming – but false – clarity. It is especially in situations of insecurity and potential violence that political protagonists put great effort in establishing discourses of unambiguity and creating a facade of clear codes for defining friend and foe, truth and justice.

This discourse veils the typical post soviet condition of hybrid institutions, of integrated and parallel diversity. It also veils the fact that key-players are most successful when they command various social languages (polytaxis) and can thus exploit different institutional settings, official, unofficial or even international. Both the official and informal levels have – when institutionalised and not contingent – their own normative discourses and logic of action. In some cases these discourses compete with each other, whereas in others they are

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<sup>16</sup> Islamic law interpreted according to the Islamic law-schools, *sharia* was strongly repressed in the Soviet Union, whereas *adat* – the localised customary law never ceased to have a considerable influence.

<sup>17</sup> Lewada 1993. 116 pp.

compatible with each other (integrated and parallel diversity in our terminology). In any case all four levels of “the rules of the game” – the official and the unofficial normative discourses and the official and the unofficial practice – have to be addressed to gain a thorough understanding of the potentials of order and disorder in weak states.

To give an example of the gap between official discourse and the real incentive structures on the ground, we could point to the situation on the Armenian –Azerbaijani frontline: According to the official version of the Armenian and Azerbaijani side to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on regularly occurring ceasefire violations on the border both sides are claiming that it is the policy of the adversary to provoke the incidents and fire is merely returned in self-defence. Verifying this claim on the level of involved recruits and officers on the ground this picture changes: on the Armenian side crucial authority in the units is exercised by an institution of informal authorities (*observers*; the *deds* of the Soviet army), in principle inherited from the Soviet Army but bleached with a particular underworld understanding of honour and aspects of the idealised “big men”<sup>18</sup> of the warlord-system of the civil war. The authority of those *observers* over the soldiers exceeds in many cases the authority of the officers and officers have to negotiate their orders with the informal authorities. For ordinary soldiers to survive this parallel system of command physically unharmed they (their family) either have to bribe official and unofficial authorities (these payments may be outright extorted from the families of recruits) or to prove themselves as “good lads”, capable of withstanding and applying violence. Random shooting often occurs because of peer pressure and inner-group violence in those small units of directly associated young men.

The situation in Azerbaijan is different insofar as the official authorities (officers, commanders) managed to “take over” the informal system of authority, not to abandon it but to exploit it to their own benefits.

Prolonged violence paves the ground for the emergence of “markets of violence”.<sup>19</sup> Under the term “markets of violence” we understand a situation, in which violence is economically profitable for the few successful entrepreneurs of violence. Thus, whatever the core of the conflict was, there is a strong rationale for the warlords to stabilize the status quo. If government officials receive a share of the revenues of the market of violence (or are themselves embarking on warlord politics), they might also become interested in prolonging this violence. In such cases sustaining violence becomes a rational objective of all actors. This view contradicts commonly held assumptions of prolonged conflicts as unintended and anarchical outcome, and it also contradicts the official discourse of governments and rebels.

Some of the hot spots in Central Asia and the Caucasus have become markets of violence, most notably Chechnya and Tadjikistan. Aside from the outright war-zones markets of violence blossomed for some time particularly in Tajikistan (1990 – 1998) and Georgia (1991-1995). Armenia, Azerbaijan, part of the North Caucasus and parts of Kirgistan and Uzbekistan are also still affected by the consequences of their own or neighbouring trading-places of violence. While the core of these conflicts may still be socio-political, the strategic actions of the entrepreneurs of violence are more and more structured by short-term economic gains. The organisation of violence is expensive, and sustained violence needs continuous investment: Warlords need to buy weapons for their soldiers, soldiers need vehicles, vehicles need fuel. Therefore, entrepreneurs of violence engage in economic activities, which characteristically combine legal business activities, organised crime and warfare. This

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<sup>18</sup> Sahlins 1963; Godelier 1986

<sup>19</sup> As far as we are aware, this concept has been developed by Georg Elwert, Freie Universität Berlin. See Elwert 1995; 1997; see also François, Ruffin (eds.) 1996

economy tends to be integrated in transnational networks of trade and investment. Entrepreneurs of violence engage in drug or weapons trafficking, in kidnapping, extortion, or in the black economy. Profits are reinvested, or kept in off-shore banks. Sustained markets of violence consequently become more often than not trading routes for goods with a very high value per weight such as drugs, gold, diamonds or weapons. In addition, markets of violence often serve as a hub for a duty free import/export, often with the patronage of big-men (see above) in government institutions and thus blurring the border between legality and illegality. Other sources of revenues include the profits from the kidnapping industry<sup>20</sup> or, where available, the tapping of humanitarian aid.<sup>21</sup> Lastly, when local production and logistics is destroyed, the black economy begins to boom, and it is ultimately controlled by those who have the who have recourse to violence.

A striking observation applying to the whole region is the fact that virtually all hot conflicts broke out in and around administrative sub-units (of pseudo-state character), such as Chechnya, South-Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh or Abkhazia. These used to be so-called “Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics” (ASSR) and were entitled with significant pseudo-state-institutions, such as a constitution, regional media, border, a flag, institutions of higher education and some informal quotas which favoured members of the titular nation. In most of these polities ethnic entrepreneurs succeeded in taking over the governing institutions of the sub-state-apparatus. Subsequently, these entrepreneurs managed to organize their support within the framework of these “kidnapped” institutions. This contradicts the common assumption that conflict broke out because of old aspirations of ethnically defined we-groups for independence.

In areas of compact ethnic settlement, but without the framing of the soviet administrative division, no hot conflicts have broken out (e.g. Armenians in Dzhavakheti/Georgia, Uzbeks in West-Tajikistan). Where, on the other hand, quasi-state structures did exist, e.g. Abkhazia, South-Ossetia, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh and, though to a lesser extent, Tajikistan, violent conflict has also erupted. In contrast to Georgia and Azerbaijan, where the entrepreneurs of ethnically defined violent strife were swiftly ousted by an internal coalition of soviet patrons, the change in the official regime (from nationalist back to soviet apparatchik) did not result in non-violent patrimonial stability in Tajikistan. This may point to the argument that in Tajikistan the internal incentive to a change in regime was less significant in comparison to external interference from Russian lobbies.

Another example of the discrepancy between discourse and strategic action may be found in the state-building rhetoric of most CCA-polities. State building and sovereignty is the key challenge for all successor polities. It is puzzling, however, that all successor polities emphasise their quest for sovereignty, while virtually none of them directs any meaningful resources for the strengthening of state capacities. We argue here that this is not a paradox, but a rational strategy of political elites: international legal sovereignty is a valuable resource. Establishing state capacities, with functioning state bureaucracies, however, is expensive, risky and even contradicts the interests of elites.

Most CCA-societies are weak states, governed by highly institutionalised networks of patronage. In order to stabilize these networks of patronage, the patrons of the networks have to satisfy the needs of their clientele. Not surprisingly, patrons in such weak “networkstates”

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<sup>20</sup> Auerbach, Hagendorn, Ann 1998

<sup>21</sup> Kaldor 1999: 103

usually control access to resources such as oil, gas or cotton. Independent economic activities are not encouraged. In order to secure his position, the patron must furthermore prevent the access to resources of potential challengers. Additionally, patrons also try to hinder independent activities outside of the network. Therefore, patrons will minimize public goods such as safety, protection, economic opportunities or legal protection; instead they will try to privatize these goods and to make them available only within the network. Therefore, the patron will artificially minimize public goods. One means of achieving this is by keeping the state weak; another means is to tolerate or even promote low-level conflict, even within the own state, since this increases insecurity and thus maximizes the dependency of political actors (and the population) on the patron's good will.

State weakness may thus be even a rational choice of leaders, who base their rule on networks of patronage. Governance through networks in weak states may thus stabilize the regime it may also increase the risk of conflict. Patrons trade regime stability for risk of conflict.

The last example draws on the notion of “traditional” local institutions. As mentioned above (page 9), a colourful patchwork of “traditional” institutions, dealing with conflict and negotiating justice and access to resources, had survived socialist homogenisation. Traditional in inverted commas refers to the assumption that there are no traditional societies in the sense of remote, unchanging and static societies that change only with outside, imported or imposed interventions (modernisation, reform, revolution).<sup>22</sup> There are, however, local institutions without official character that use narratives of traditional depth as a resource for legitimacy. The criteria for compatibility and stability of such institutions may or may not be different from these narratives; of crucial importance for the analyses of the social impact of such institutions is that it is functionality that determines stability, not age or tales of tradition. In this very respect the local institutions under scrutiny in this research-agenda are different from the folklore described by soviet ethnography.

Customary law in the Caucasus (called *adat*<sup>23</sup> mainly in the Moslem parts; also e.g. *samortal* in Georgia) is one of the more prominent local institutions that, after the demise of the soviet state, to some extent potentially stabilises society . . . The various and locally distinct institutions under the umbrella of customary law have been of changing influence over time, but some of them proved to be able to adapt to such different legal environments as Islamic unification (established in large parts of the Northern Caucasus during the rule of Imam Shamil in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and attempted again under some war-lords after the death of Dzhokhar Dudayev), soviet rule and protracted civil unrest. Another such institution is the *dzhamaata*<sup>24</sup> in Dagestan. Enver Kisriev<sup>25</sup> describes *dzhamaata* as a “complex system of numerous independent, but interrelated political formations of self-government with [uniform] norms ...”. These units of self-government are based on the principle of neighbourhood, which, in the multi-ethnic patchwork of Dagestan, is distinct from clan-networks defined by descent. The *dzhamaata* adapted to the legal environment by changing in size and by cooperating with other institutions. It thus retained its significance as a political unit governing interethnic reciprocal exchange throughout the changes of statehood. Promising for further investigation would be the question, in how far this syncretic arrangement developed as an integrated innovation between *adat*, *dzhamaata* and the large-scale legal arrangements of

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<sup>22</sup> Elwert, Bierschenk 1988: 99

<sup>23</sup> Arabian for customary law

<sup>24</sup> “Dzhamaat” is an Arabian word, signifying “society”, a distinct organised collectivity of people

<sup>25</sup> Kisriev 2001

*sharia* and state-law - a phenomenon of legal pluralism observed for other parts of the Caucasus.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Tentative hypotheses***

Based on our theoretical background and on our preliminary work, we believe that further research should take the following tentative working hypotheses into consideration:

- Unofficial, non-state institutions have in many cases reduced the risks that come along with state breakdown. Stability against all odds can be explained in many cases by informal, mediating institutions that have defused emerging security dilemmas.
- When institutional arrangements favour old networks of patronage over new elites, the entry of ethnic entrepreneurs on the political scene gets more unlikely, and the risk for ethnopolitical conflict decreases.
- When elites use existing, “trained” institutions for conquering or keeping the state, the risk of social fragmentation is lower than when elites invent new institutions, such as round tables, popular fronts or national congresses. Since, in such cases, entry to old institutions is blocked, the risk of political fragmentation increases. Fragmentation in turn increases the risk of ethnic tension.
- It seems that the most stable way of regime building to date available in the region is authoritarian-patrimonial and is based on old soviet networks. This way of governance, however, tends to perpetuate weak statehood and often tolerates or even promotes limited violence
- Institutions (official and unofficial) dealing with conflict in a procedural way are crucial as a social embedding, if conflicts are to be avoided. They can defuse conflicts by blocking the option of violent self-help or collective violence<sup>27</sup>.
- The single most important institutional legacy of the Soviet system is its administrative-territorial division (foremost the ASSR), which has fostered status conflicts, leading eventually to ethnic violence.

### ***Methodological Approach***

The study will generate generalizable results by using a *comparative approach*. The CCA – countries provide for excellent ” laboratory”-like conditions, since the Soviet institutional legacy is remarkably similar in all successor polities. This allows for keeping similar values on one of the independent variables. Samples (case studies) will be picked on the dependent variable, where we encounter great variance (escalated conflicts vs. stability; successful state building vs. failed states). Comparability will be achieved by applying rigid criteria for case selection and case procession (see pp 16; 17)

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<sup>26</sup> Koehler 1999c

<sup>27</sup> Cf. appendix A (p. **Error! Reference source not found.****Error! Bookmark not defined.**)

We use an *interdisciplinary approach*, combining "tools" from political science and social anthropology. Political science theories have their strengths in social modelling. For explaining conflict/ stability and state-building/ state loosing, we will use approaches from actor-centred approaches, but will "make these approaches work" by connecting them to the institutional arrangements of a polity.

The case studies and the ethnographic data will be supported by background information, especially by quantitative data on risk factors.<sup>28</sup> This data is available.<sup>29</sup> Wherever possible, we will draw on existing data. Only if where such information is not available, will we generate our own data. It will be a key task of one of the project's PhD. students to process these data sets.

Political science, however, has a blind eye to unofficial, non-state institutions. It is, on the other hand, social anthropology that is stronger when it comes to data generation and evaluation on such informal institutions. Conducting traditional ethnographical fieldwork captures unofficial institutions, networks, norms and values systems. Given the weakness of Soviet ethnology and the almost complete lack of literature on this subject, the study will break new ground here.

The potential of social anthropology thus lies in examining local social settings, in which the official (normative) story greatly differs from the politics of deed (story of practice). This is especially significant in situations governed by extreme inequality in opportunities to gain power - even by fear and violence. Social anthropology provides for methodological and theoretical tools to approach such situations and helps understanding the rules, logic and structures determining the settings usually described as "out of bounds" or "anomalous".

Within the framework of this study, *fieldwork* will be conducted in target areas, both by international and local experts. Based on these fieldworks, and supplemented by other data (scientific literature, news reports, social, economic and demographic data) we will provide *case studies* for target areas. The case studies will be used for a *comparative analysis*.

On the ground a key-method of the field work will be semi-structured "expert"-interviews. This method provides good insights into the *arena of strategic action* of the social actors.<sup>30</sup> This will enable us to analyze the perceptions of possible roles and chances of individual actors. This focus on local institutions and local perceptions implies that not only established male political actors will be under scrutiny, but also their followers, including young men and women usually ignored by elite-centred studies. To give an example, one such arena of strategic action could be focusing on an analysis of the network capacity and organisational potential of the "young generation" in post-soviet, gerontocratic societies. Given their organisational resources, the resulting strategies of this young, male and underprivileged part

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<sup>28</sup> see pp. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**. Literature overview

<sup>29</sup> Minorities at Risk: Gurr 1993; State Failure Project: Gurr, Ted R., with Harff, Barbara and Marshall, Monty G, 1997, Codebook: Internal Wars and Failures of Governance, 1954 – 1996.

State Failure Task Force. (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/stfail/index.htm>, 12.3.2001)

The World Bank; Development Economic Research Group (DECRG) Project on "The Economics of Political and Common Violence" (two participants, Koehler and Zuercher, are involved in this project)

Fieldwork of Zürcher/Koehler on the Caucasus and Elwert, Trevisano and colleagues on Central Asia is rich in information on where resources of violence come from, but were obtained in informal conversations and this may imply some bragging. We doubt whether such information can be replicated in formal interviews.

<sup>30</sup> Bierschenk 1988

of society include exit (emigration), voice (seeking to improve political participation) or violence, the AK47-option (seeking chances in emerging markets of violence – criminal gangs or militias).

The time-consuming nature of unguided narrative biographic interviews, notwithstanding, they will also be part of the ethnography, not least in order to critically assess possible bias in the semi-standardised interviews.

### ***Defining the Targets: The Criteria for Cases Studies***

Since we are unable to cover all 19 polities in the two regions under scrutiny, we have to make a selection of the most rewarding cases. In our selection we gave preference to cases with similar, permissive conditions and highly different outcomes (maximum contrast) in order to verify the cases with similar outcome. All case studies will be tackled according to a common research agenda. The key unit of analysis is the institutional framework of a society; the dependent variable is, throughout the study, stability/violent conflict. Regionally, the project will cover 11 of the 19 successor polities and comprise of at least 6 case studies.<sup>31</sup>

The core of this research agenda is organising and acquiring local knowledge at place. This is also the most difficult task of the project. We thus select cases and locations that provide for maximum explanatory power, that are suited for comparative analyses and that are feasible for conducting field work. There is no use in asking interesting questions that get the field-worker on the next plane back home, or in choosing locations, which are too dangerous for field work.

Specifically, the target selection is based on the following criteria:

1. The locations are characterized by most of the permissive conditions (risk factors) for escalation of violence stated above.
2. Cases of escalated violence match with similar cases, in which conflict did not escalate into violent strife.
3. The case studies pay special attention to institutional arrangements, linking micropolitics to the state-level (a functioning institution of blood-feud in a remote Caucasian village, for example, would be only of consequence for our approach, if it interacted in any significant way with state institutions or large-scale social institutions dealing with justice and security and if thus legal pluralism resulted).
4. The case studies pay special attention to informal institutional arrangements such as networks of patronage, clan structures, traditional institutions of local justice, or markets of violence. These insights into the micropolitics of a location / region will produce generalizable results.
5. Since it is the binding power of state institutions that is under question in weak states, each local case-study has to be embedded in the context of regime-building after empire.

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<sup>31</sup> The framework of analysis developed by the project ensures that the number of case studies can easily be upgraded should additional resources be made available.

6. Analysing the micro-studies, special attention should be paid to the organization of resources and therefore to the economic incentives of local actors.

### ***Framing the targets: Analytical Framework***

This study asks **what, when and how institutions make a difference**. Each case study will thus process the following analytical tasks:

#### *Task 1: Identifying the institutional framework*

Task 1 is to identify the relevant institutional framework that governs the strategic actions of regional/local actors. Point of departure is the question, in how far those institutional arrangements are capable of dealing with conflicts in a non-violent way under conditions that increase the risk for escalation. Such an approach takes into account that the formal and informal institutional framework of a polity/region produces the incentive structure for the actors, and that political transition is per default a situation, in which political actors compete in an environment of "soft" institutions. During transformation (weak state phase), the institutional framework is soft – entry barriers to existing institutions are lowered, institutions can be changed and new ones can be invented. In such a situation, competing political actors **(re-)use, conquer or invent institutions**. All of these actions are conflict prone.

An analysis of the institutional framework in the post-soviet space (transformation-space, weak-state space) includes:

1. The soviet institutional legacy ("official institutions") and the particular organizational deficits of those institutions.
2. "Unofficial" or informal institutions, emerging in the shadows of the official institutions to compensate for organizational deficits. They come to the forefront when soviet institutions break down and alternative institutions are not yet in place (e.g. the *dzhamaata* and the council of elders in the Caucasus, the *mahalla* in Central Asia, clan structures, black economy and organised crime).
3. Newly invented state institutions, such as the *Milli Millet* in Azerbaijan, *sharia* courts in Chechnya, models of consociational democracy in Dagestan).

The actual institutional framework of a society is composed of one or more of these analytically distinct set of institutions.

#### *Task 2: External influences on local institutional frameworks*

Task 2 extends the scope: We seek to identify those external factors, which influence or change the institutional framework and hence the incentive structure for local actors. We analyse these external factors from a local perspective, taking into account the local consciousness of opportunity and risk. Task 2 will thus have implications for policy-recommendations concerned with predicting/promoting stability/conflict.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For an overview over the toolboxes of state and non-state actors for outside intervention and influence see Ropers 1995

The institutional framework of a polity is subject to external influences. By asking what external influences affect the institutional framework of a polity and hence the incentive structure of political actors, we extend the scope of the analysis. This allows us to capture

1. trans-societal spill over (diffusion or escalation), relevant for explaining conflict/stability
2. the impact of the integration of key actors in the world markets,
3. the (**intended or unintended**) effects of the policies of third countries (Russia as a key player, US, China, Turkey, Iran, EU) on the incentive structures of local actors
4. the (**intended or unintended**) effects of the policies of International Organisations (UN, OSCE, World Bank and IMF, INGOs and foreign NGOs)

Note that it is not by coincidence that we start with the local settings (task 1) and proceed then to the external influences on local settings (task 2): Differing from most research on the region, we assume that the effects of classical interstate diplomacy are weakened. A meaningful analysis of the region concerned with conflict/stability has to focus on the importance of non-state actors, trans-societal spill over and above all on the local incentive structures. External influences are important, too, but they need to be investigated from the local perspective of micropolitics. This change of perspective is also necessary, when assessing the impact of peace brokering, export of democracy or economic aid.

### ***Packing the targets: The case-studies***

With these conditions and the feasibility of the fieldwork in mind the following loci seem promising as research-packages:

1. Chechnya in comparison with Ingushetia or Dagestan. It is unlikely, though, that classical fieldwork may be conducted in Chechnya. Most likely the collection of interviews and participant observation would be reduced to the Chechen Diaspora and refugees.
2. Dzhavakheti (no pseudo-state administrative framework inherited from the Soviet Union and no escalation of violence) in comparison to Ajaria (inherited administrative framework though no escalation) and Abkhazia (inherited administrative framework and violence)
3. Nagorno-Karabakh as exceptional case since it combines aspects of civil war with inter-state conflict
4. Sadakhlo and Ferghana Valley interregional markets, providing meeting points for the people of the bordering states. Sadakhlo would be an example of the defusion of tensions through economic interests institutionalised as a semi-official market place; the Ferghana Valley is an example of increased tension from conflicting interests in existing (scarce) resources.
5. Southern border zone of Tajikistan; regional networks vs. old soviet networks.
6. Islamism/Opposition to the old networks in Central Asia (Tajikistan, lately also incursions by Islamist armed groups into Kirgistan and Uzbekistan)

## ***Tackling the Targets – who does what?***

We envisage 6 distinct groups of participants with specific tasks:

- 1 **Project Directors:** (Elwert and Sundhaussen). Direct and supervise. Teach PhD Students. Engage in theory building & research framework in cooperation with partners from the CCA-countries.
- 2 **Project Coordinator** (Zürcher): Assists the Directors. Organises disseminating tools (distant learning, workshops, joint seminars etc. ). Coordinates administration of the project. For this task a 1/ 1 (100%) position is required
- 3 **PhD students** will prepare their thesis within the framework of the project. They will receive training at Free U Berlin. They will conduct fieldwork in the region. Candidates need a very good language skills and a sound training in social sciences (social sciences including social) and empirical methods. One of the PhD students will assume responsibility for the **supervision of fieldwork** (Koehler). The fieldwork supervisor will ensure the quality of the fieldwork by assisting the scholars, providing training and guidelines, by preparing questionnaires for semi-structured interviews, by providing background data and by helping organising travel and accommodation in target regions. He will also be responsible for the electronic processing of collected data (storage, accessibility in intranet, multimedia presentations of findings) and for e-publishing of the project results. For this task, a 1/ 1 (100%) position is required.
- 4 **Project Partners / Experts from the CCA-countries** are, from the beginning of the project, included in defining the research agenda and in theory building. In addition, they will conduct fieldwork in the region and, where necessary, provide data and produce background chapters on assignment. It is absolutely necessary that a substantial part of the project's funding is used for covering the expenses of the project partners in the CCA-countries. Group 3 and 4 will closely cooperate during the fieldwork, combining the benefits of intimate local knowledge of scholars on the ground with the benefits of the uninvolved outside perspective of the trained ethnographer. In addition to the goal of maximising scientific efficiency, there is also a academic-political aim to this approach, by training young scholars from the CCA countries together with their western colleagues in a "learning by doing" workshop climate. Obviously, financial resources invested in local researchers tend to have a broader impact than the same resources invested in exterritorial experts only.
- 5 **Advisory board / project partners** from Germany / Europe will provide critical feed-back and ensure maximum synergy. The advisory board will be included in the definition of the research agendas and in theory building. As a rule, members of the advisory board will bring their own funding. Exceptions may be made for experts from the CCA-Countries.
- 6 The **core group** consists of the project director, the project coordinator, the fieldwork supervisor, the PhD students, up to six experts from CCA- countries and individual partners from our Western project partners. The core group will hold workshops for disseminating the research agenda and the theoretical approach. CCA-Members of the core group will be included in seminars held together with the academic staff of the Institute of East European Studies and the Institute for Social Anthropology. The core group is the key tool for defining and harmonising

the research agenda, for disseminating the theoretical approach, for ensuring the quality of the fieldwork and for the joint attempts at theory building.

## Outputs

The outputs of the project will be presented as thus:

- Part one will comprise all case studies and all material of the fieldwork. Here we envisage publishing part of the material also on DVD/CD-ROM, in order to include images and interviews.
- Part two will be an edited volume (in English), which presents in concise and strict form the findings in topical, cross-societal chapters. These chapters aim at theory building and will be of interest to area specialists, political scientist, social anthropologists and policy makers.
- The completion of four PhD-dissertations.
- A further output of the project could be policy recommendations for foreign policy makers, international organisations or agencies engaged in technical assistance. Part of the findings would be presented as multi-media teaching modules, drawing on the organizers experience in consulting and teaching. There is a considerable demand for such inputs by policy makers, (AA), journalists and companies, aid & development agencies. This, however, could be realised in a follow-up project.

## Project Phases

### 1 Preparation (Months 1 – 4)

The preparation phase will be used for establishing, formalising and concluding agreements of partnerships with CCA- institutions. Concluding terms of cooperation will take place during the first implementation visit to the local partners in Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan,, Tadzikistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgistan is required.

During this phase, the coordinators will establish a *core group* consisting of app. six researchers from the CCA-states. This core group will hold *workshops* for disseminating the research agenda and the theoretical approach. CCA-members of the core group will be included *in seminars*, held together with the academic staff of the Institute of East European Studies and the Institute of Social Anthropology.

Apart from the core group, we will also establish a *network of external experts* from CCA-countries, who will be contributing cases studies based on fieldwork. We plan to train at least some of these experts in workshops. The preparation-phase concludes with a kick-off-meeting in Berlin.

### 2 Fieldwork / Case studies (months 4 – 22)

Six months of training for the fieldworker will be needed (PhD-students) to a) learn relevant “sociolects” and dialects and b) to identify the loci of fieldwork minimising personal risks. Only then will they embark on the fieldwork.

### 3 Report writing (month 23 – 31)

Beginning with month 23, the PhD students and the core group will start drafting their chapters.

### 4 Preparation for publication (month 32 – 36)

## The Co-ordination Units

### ***Institutions***

#### *Institute of East European Studies*

The Institute of East European Studies will host the project, provide room and technical infrastructure. It has a long expertise in designing and conducting international research projects, excellent scientific contacts in the Former Soviet Union

#### *Institute of Social Anthropology*

The Institute of Social Anthropology will share with the IEES in hosting the project. The institute mounted considerable experience in conducting fieldwork in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia over the past ten years. Active participation of Georg Elwert and other colleagues based on other funds during the workshops and visits of the fieldworkers in the region will be part of the programme.

### ***Staff***

*Georg Elwert*. Univ.-Prof., is Professor of Social Anthropology and director of the Institute of Ethnology at the Free University Berlin. His publications include *Aid and Development*, 1988; *Nationalismus und Ethnizität. Über die Bildung von Wir-Gruppen*. In: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie* Heft 3/1989, p 440-464; *Boundaries, cohesion and switching: On we-groups in ethnic, national and religious form*. 1995 and 1999, *Dynamics of Violence. Processes of Escalation and De-Escalation in Violent Group Conflicts*, (edited together with Stephan Feuchtwang and Dieter Neubert), Berlin.

*Holm Sundhaussen*, Univ.-Prof., is Professor for the History of South-East Europe at the Institute of East European Studies, Free U Berlin. His research focuses on nationalism and nation building, social and economic history and social change in Eastern European societies. Recent important publications are *Geschichte Jugoslawiens 1918-1980*, Stuttgart 1982; *Experiment Jugoslawien. Von der Staatsgründung bis zum Staatszerfall. 1918-1991*, Mannheim/u.a. 1993 (=Meyers Forum 10); and *Ethnonationalismus in Aktion. Bemerkungen zum Ende Jugoslawiens*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 20 (1994), S. 402-423.

*Christoph Zürcher, Dr.*, is senior researcher and lecturer at the Institute of East European Studies. His research interests are International Relations theories, transformation processes and institutional change in the Former Soviet Union and theories of ethno-political violence. He has widely published on conflicts in the Caucasus. He is, together with Jan Koehler, the editor of *Potentials of (Dis)Order: Conflict and Stability in the Caucasus and in Former Yugoslavia*. Manchester UP. (Forthcoming). He is currently preparing his habilitation on ethno-political violence in post-socialist space. He has participated in various projects, financed by the World Bank and by the European Union, providing technical assistance to CIS-countries. He has recently been commissioned, together with Jan Koehler, by the World Bank to author a chapter on violence in the Caucasus.

*Jan Kohler, MA*, has received his degree from Freie Universität Berlin in Social Anthropology. He has worked as the assistant of the Personal Representative of the Chairperson in Office of the OSCE on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict until November 2000. He has accomplished extensive fieldwork in the former SU over the past ten years and focused his interest on informal organisation of violence and justice in the South Caucasus. The results of his empirical work are accessible in various publications. He is, together with Christoph Zürcher, the editor of *Potentials of (Dis)Order: Conflict and Stability in the Caucasus and in Former Yugoslavia*. Manchester UP. (forthcoming) and, together with Sonja Heyer, editor of *Anthropologie der Gewalt. Chancen und Grenzen der sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung*, Berlin (VWF) 1998. He has recently been commissioned, together with Christoph Zürcher, by the World Bank to author a chapter on violence in the Caucasus.