

CPSU, which was increasingly under threat from the radical turn of events in Moscow. The anti-communist deputies seized the opportunity, and after making certain conditions they offered support for the proposal.

THE PARTY LEADERSHIP MAY HAVE WON A Pyrrhic victory, for its activities were nonetheless suspended pending investigations, and its property was to be seized. Politics had indeed made strange bedfellows, and the party's gamble in playing the independence card may yet backfire. The declaration of independence represented an ambiguous compromise between the party establishment and the forces of reform. The anti-communist forces turned the last-ditch attempt of the old party structure to protect itself into a mechanism for loosening the grip of central authority. However, real independence does not seem to be on the immediate agenda and the struggle over democracy is still in its beginning stages in the republic. The republic's dependence on suppliers and buyers in the rest of the former USSR helped spur economic discontent but at the same time binds the region to the others. And the continuing burden of the Chernobyl clean-up would make true independence a costly gain. The declaration of independence signals a change in venue for the political battle, but does not assure its final outcome.

Traditional political culture, perceived injustices of the Stalinist system, economic needs, and more contingent twists of events produce a different configuration in each republic. In Georgia, yet another tendency is evident. Here, the former dissident, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was elected president with 87 percent of the popular vote earlier this year, buoyed by strong nationalist and anti-communist sentiments in the republic. His subsequent actions, however, suggest serious deviations from democratic practice.

A 99 percent vote in favour of national independence was reportedly achieved in April 1991, when pressure was exerted on voters by threatening to deny Georgian state citizenship or property rights to the population in regions where the majority voted against independence. Gamsakhurdia's equivocations during the coup and his suppression of opposition after its collapse spurred public demonstrations calling for his resignation. Violent clashes between the government and its detractors have occurred on the streets of the republic capital, Tbilisi. Particularly noxious has been the sometimes violent suppression of demands for autonomy

made by national minorities (for example, the South-Ossetians) residing within Georgia.

A deep-seated national revolution has occurred in Georgia, but social revolution has not yet placed power in the hands of an accountable system of democratic control. Gamsakhurdia and his entourage have expelled the communist model and institutions, but the absence of indigenous democratic traditions and the, at least, short-term dominance of the "exclusionist" variant of nationalism have produced political violence, polarization, and personalistic politics in the wake of the coup.

Ukraine presents perhaps the most difficult case for Western policy-makers. With over 50 million people and territory rich in agriculture and industry, Ukraine is, alongside Russia, the linchpin of the former USSR. Her fate will help shape the destiny of all of her neighbours. A strong democratic groundswell is active in the republic. When the republic's parliament declared independence on 24 August

1991, a popular referendum on the issue was set for 1 December, along with an election for the post of president. (The results of those votes were not available when this issue went to press.)

HOW ONE INTERPRETS THE RESULTS DEPENDS ON a careful assessment of the voting procedure itself. Was the referendum question worded in an unambiguous manner? Was the secret ballot respected? Did all sides have the right to express their views prior to the vote? Was the presidential post contested? To what extent was the favoured candidate (the president prior to the election, Leonid Kravchuk) able to influence the election through his old party connections?

If the vote for independence passes strongly in the Crimea and in the highly Russianized eastern portion of Ukraine, as well as in western Ukraine, where Ukrainian nationalism reigns strong, this will suggest a strong national consensus on the issue. If there are substantial regional differences in the vote, on the other hand, this might indicate that an independent Ukraine could face growing tensions in areas that have substantial Russian and other minorities. A successful independence vote might make the republic's leadership more conciliatory toward economic cooperation with other parts of the former USSR. On the other hand, it could legitimize further resistance to any compromises of Ukrainian economic auton-

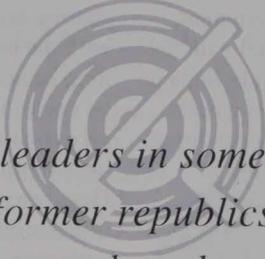
omy. Continued resistance to a functioning economic union with other parts of the former USSR could easily contribute to further economic havoc throughout the entire region.

WESTERN GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE WARY OF quick or easy responses as they weave their way through the complexities of the present war of sovereignties in the former USSR. Historic claims must be carefully assessed, election and referendum processes scrutinized, and the credentials of would-be national spokespersons checked. In addition, the practical consequences of bolstering the independence claims must also be weighed. The Soviet government, however dubious its moral or legal basis, has, since World War II, maintained a sort of international peace in this conflict-ridden terrain of Central Europe and Asia. The costs of that imposed peace must now be borne. Not only was the "peace" forcefully imposed (a non-sequitur perhaps?) but, with it, a silencing of grievances. And when grievances are repressed rather than expressed, prejudices and stereotypes replace dialogue and understanding. Identity may come to be defined in terms of opposition to the other, rather than in self-comprehension. Such delusions and confusions exact a price once controls are lifted.

The floodgates of regional unrest have been thrown open by the final collapse of communist power. The war of sovereignties has already stoked the fires of regional violence in Nagorno-Karabakh, in Georgia, and elsewhere. And regional unemployment and competition for scarce resources have already produced violent clashes in parts of Central Asia. But even larger problems loom if accommodation is not found between the newly-emergent states. Massive population movements, establishment of new regional dictators, strife in border and mixed-population regions, further dramatic declines in economic well-being, ethnic scapegoating, and regional wars are all possible consequences of failed accommodation.

IN THE FORMER USSR, NEARLY EVERYTHING IS in short supply, including time. We have, over the last few months, witnessed history moving at fast-forward speed; numerous crises must be addressed simultaneously, and leaders in some of the former republics are largely unschooled in processes of negotiation, bargaining, and compromise. Each population group faces a crisis of self-identity which will take time to resolve.

From the international community, skills of peaceable conflict resolution may be a much more vital gift than the plum of diplomatic recognition. A further acceleration of the independence train could itself, in some cases, derail democratization, economic reform, genuine national self-determination, and a true and lasting peace. □



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