

Soviet system remains pervasive in the thinking and attitudes of all citizens, it is nowhere more apparent than in government circles. Many of the former Communist bosses have adopted the twin mantles of democracy and nationalism in an attempt to preserve their powers. Yet their new-found nationalist ideologies threaten the tentative democratic concepts of pluralism, minority rights, a loyal opposition and freedoms of press and assembly. Presidents Boris Yeltsin in Russia, Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine, Rakhman Nabiyev in Tajikistan, and Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan are among the examples that could be cited. On the other hand, long-time dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia, after only a few months in office, was ousted as President of Georgia in January 1992 for violating democratic concepts. Clearly, there are no "hard and fast" rules in situations where ironies compete with one another.

At the same time, these ironies highlight the importance of building strong instruments of civil society in the republics — an effective legislature, an independent media and judiciary — to balance the excessive powers either of the executive or the bureaucracy. To some extent this is happening in Russia, where the legislature and an aggressive media have helped to constrain the extensive powers wielded by President Yeltsin. Unfortunately, the Congress of People's Deputies, Parliament's largest body, is already out of step with the dramatic changes; many of its members are Communists who were elected under old and undemocratic rules. The Committee witnessed the dramatic debates in the Congress of People's Deputies in April 1992 as Yeltsin struggled to retain the powers he believed necessary to carry out his bold economic reforms. Other attempts have been made to curb Yeltsin's powers. Judges have expressed concerns over amendments made to the law on the press and the legal basis of the economic reforms, while the Russian Constitutional Court, set up by Parliament in December 1991, overruled Yeltsin's decree merging the former KGB and the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the Soviet legacy hangs over many of the institutions essential to democratic development and respect for human rights in the republics. Decisions in the Soviet Union emanated from Moscow and the republics were little more than executing agencies, possessing a minimum of latitude. Initiative and flexibility were not encouraged. All of the republics had legislatures of some kind but they were rubber-stamp institutions, with no actual powers or influence. Adjusting to their new situation of power often places enormous strains on these institutions, and their effectiveness suffers as a result. Consequently, the actual governmental and judicial structures in the republics are underdeveloped and will need time to evolve.

The economic crisis also puts a terrible strain on new democratic institutions. The economic reforms introduced by Yeltsin and other republic leaders to promote solid foundations for future growth and for democracy itself could, in time, undermine the popular support without which no democratic system can long survive. Economic hardship tends to discredit a new democracy and can set the stage for a return to authoritarianism.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women in the new republics are learning first-hand the direct correlation between economic suffering and human rights. As the transition to a market economy gathers steam in the republics, lay-offs from inefficient state enterprises are becoming more and more common. Evidence suggests that women, who made up 51 percent of the work-force of the Soviet Union and were its most highly-educated segment, are being pushed into the unemployment lines before men, regardless of

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<sup>41</sup> The KGB still operates as the Foreign Intelligence Service, although its powers have, on the surface at least, been drastically curtailed.