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How NGOs React

Globalization and Education Reform in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia

EDITED BY
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Contents

Illustrations vii
Preface ix
Abbreviations and Acronyms xiii

Introduction: Unwrapping the Post-Socialist Education Reform Package 1
IVETA SILOVA AND GITA STEINER-KHAMSI

1 Championing Open Society 43
The Education Logic of the Soros Foundation Network
IVETA SILOVA

2 The Parallel Worlds of NGOs, Multilateral Aid, and Development Banks 81
The Case of Community Schools in Armenia
ARMENUHI TADEVOSYAN

3 The Free Market in Textbook Publishing 103
Visions and Realities in Azerbaijan
ELMINA KAZIMZADE

4 On Being First 119
The Meaning of Education Decentralization Reform in Georgia
ANNA MATIASHVILI

5 From Educational Brokers to Local Capacity Builders 137
Redefining International NGOs in Kazakhstan
SAULE KALIKOVA AND IVETA SILOVA

6 A Voucher System for Teacher Training in Kyrgyzstan 157
ALEXANDER IVANOV AND VALENTIN DEICHMAN

7 Circulating "Best Practices" in Mongolia 171
NATSAGDORJ ENKHTUYA

8 The Latecomer Syndrome 191
Beyond Project Implementation toward an Education Policy Think Tank in Tajikistan
TATIANA ABDUSHUKUROVA

9 Invisible and Surrogate Education 211
Filling Educational Gaps in Turkmenistan
ERIKA DAILEY AND IVETA SILOVA

10 Quotas for Quotes 231
Mainstreaming Open Society Values in Uzbekistan
JACQUELINE ASHRAFI

Conclusion: Centralist and Donor-Dependent Governments 247
What's Left for NGOs to Do?
GITA STEINER-KHAMSI

About the Contributors 285

Index 289

Illustrations

Tables

Table 1 Features of the post-socialist education reform package 19

Table 2 World Bank and ADB education sector loans to the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia 22

Table 3 Open Society Institute/Soros Foundations (2007) 48

Table 4 Education expenditures of the National Soros Foundations 51

Table 5 Criteria for reviewing education strategies and programs (1999) 59

Table 6 Education NGOs supported by the OSI/Soros Foundations in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia 65

Table 7 Education policy think tanks supported by the OSI and the National Foundations 70

Table 8 OSIAF, Project Harmony, and World Bank community schools models 94

Steiner-Khamsi, Gita, ed. 2004. *The global politics of educational borrowing.* New York: Teachers College Press.
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Conclusion

Centralist and Donor-Dependent Governments

What's Left for NGOs to Do?

Gita Steiner-Khamsi

This book is not about the role of NGOs in educational development in general. Rather, it deals with one international NGO in particular: the Soros Foundation Network in Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia. During the important, early years of transition, the Soros Foundation was arguably the largest and most influential network in the post-socialist region. It was there before other donors and NGOs had set up their branch offices. An investigation of the particular challenges faced by the Soros Foundation Network promises to shed light on the larger issue of how NGOs work under the conditions of centralist and donor-dependent governments.

Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia: A region?

Naturally, the authors of this book pay great attention to the country-specific conditions under which they operate. We will now take a step back to review similarities and differences across the region to draw conclusions from the chapters they have written. This perspective raises the question of whether or not Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan should be considered countries of the same region, an area approximated by the term *the Caucasus and Central Asia.*

To the east is Mongolia, the most sparsely populated country in the world. Eight times larger than Great Britain, the country is home to 2.8 million people, one-third of the population of Greater London. Now an independent country, Mongolia was a close ally of the Soviet Union and distanced itself from the Chinese brand of state socialism. Individuals who grew up under communism know Mongolia best as a country that, according to Lenin, "bypassed capitalism" (Shirendyb 1981; see Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006, 53ff.). The People's Revolution in Mongolia in 1921 was evidence that the four developmental stages of Marxism-Leninist theory—feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism—do not apply to non-industrialized countries. At the Second Congress of the Comintern (Communist International) in 1920, Lenin pointed out that "with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage" (Shirendyb 1981, 20).

In the 1930s a population of cattle breeders, serving Buddhist-Lamaist monasteries, was reconstructed as a "working class" being oppressed by a "feudal class." Mongolia was used to demonstrate to all "backward countries" that a direct move from feudalism to socialism, bypassing capitalism, was indeed possible. As the second socialist state in the world—and the first in Asia—the Mongolian People's Republic was committed to working with the Soviet Union to form the foundations of the socialist world system. As opposed to today's notion of development/underdevelopment, the socialist conception was ideological. It mattered a great deal for the socialist world how advanced a particular member country was on the socialist path of development. Despite the fact that Mongolia was poor, the bypassing-capitalism narrative helped situate the country as an exemplar of successful political, social, and economic development under socialist auspices. At the end of the 1970s the Mongolian People's Republic was said to have established official relations with over forty former colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (see Rathmann and Vietze 1978, 352).

Today, the Asian influence is clearly discernible in Mongolia. The largest donor is the Government of Japan, followed by the ADB. In the U.N. classification system, Mongolia is conspicuously missing from the Caucasus and Central Asia region. Instead, it is categorized as a country of the East Asia and the Pacific region, for

reasons which remain unclear (see Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006, 90ff.).

The five former Central Asian Soviet republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—lie in the center of the Caucasus and Central Asia region. These countries are all well-endowed with natural and mineral resources that help offset, in some countries more than others, the economic hardship people experienced during the first decade of transition. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan export fossil fuel, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sell hydroelectricity to neighboring countries, and Uzbekistan's economic growth is, apart from agricultural production (cotton), based on the export of gold, natural gas, and ferrous metals. In the fifteen years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these five newly independent republics have grown apart.

Kazakhstan began to experience explosive economic growth in 2000, led mainly by the oil sector. The real GDP grew close to 10 percent each year since 2000 and has reached a GDP per capita of US$9,400. The largest of the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan has started to dissociate itself from the other four countries in the region. Recognizing this development, USAID and UNICEF have ceased to refer to these five countries as one region, instead referring to it as Kazakhstan and the Central Asia region.

An El Dorado for multiculturalists and multilingualists, Kyrgyzstan acknowledges both Russian and Central Asian languages as languages of instruction in schools. The political tensions among several of the Central Asian states, however, have made schools for ethnic minorities unpopular. The number of schools offering instruction in Central Asian languages has been shrinking since the 1990s, not only in Kyrgyzstan, but throughout the region.

In Tajikistan, the "de-multiculturalization" or ethnic "un-mixing" was initially involuntary. The civil war (1992–97) left over half a million people internally displaced. Almost all of the ethnic minorities that fled Tajikistan during the civil war—Kyrgyz Tajiks, Turkmen Tajiks, Uzbek Tajiks, and Russian Tajiks—did not return. A second emigration wave has been labor related. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2006), Tajikistan may be the largest emigrant labor supplier per capita in the world. Estimates show that approximately 18 percent of the adult population (600,000 Tajiks) leaves the country each year in search of seasonal work. The most popular destination is Russia, which draws about 80 percent of

all Tajik labor migrants, followed by smaller numbers going to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The IMF estimates that Tajikistan receives between US$400 million and US$1 billion in remittances annually, or between 20 and 50 percent of its total GDP. The UNDP and other multilateral organizations are in dialogue with government officials, seeking ways to channel the remittances, the main drivers of economic growth, into poverty-alleviation programs and toward achieving the MDGs (UNDP 2005).

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have taken a peculiar stance toward international donors and NGOs. Only U.N. organizations and a select few non-Western donors are allowed to operate. The United States has taken the lead, supported by its allies, in criticizing these two countries for human rights violations. Turkmenistan was never open to the West, and Uzbekistan abruptly cut off contact after a decade of openness. The change in foreign relations occurred in 2005 after the government of Uzbekistan came under serious attack for mistreating citizens that it deemed to be "enemies of the state." Throughout the region, as well as in Belarus and Iran, the Soros Foundation has been closely associated with the Rose revolution in Georgia (2003). In the wake of the peaceful color revolutions in Georgia (2003) and a year later in Ukraine (2004), the mission of the Soros Foundation Network, particularly its commitment to building a strong civil society and an open society, became highly politicized. In Uzbekistan, in particular, Soros is viewed as an imminent political threat, and the OSIAF-Uzbekistan was the first international NGO to have its registration revoked in 2004. For this reason, the chapters on Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are different from the others in this book. In Turkmenistan the Soros Foundation was never given access, and in Uzbekistan it was forced to leave behind human and material resources built up during the eight years it had operated (1996–2004).

Similar to the five former Central Asian Soviet republics, the three former Soviet Baltic states, and former Yugoslavia, the three countries in the Caucasus drifted apart once pan-socialist (and in the case of the Caucasus, Soviet) agreements dissolved. The ethnic land dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region escalated to a full-fledged war between Armenia and Azerbaijan from 1988 until 1994, leaving tens of thousands dead and wounded, and hundreds of thousands internally displaced. In "disuniting" they have also become more outward looking. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan

see themselves as part of the European "educational space" (Nóvoa and Lawn 2002) and are in the process of bringing their higher-education systems in line with European reforms. The governments of all three signed the Bologna Declaration and have participated in meetings of the member states since 2005. By the year 2007, forty-five countries were endorsed as members of the Bologna Process, including all former socialist countries in Central, Southeast Europe (except for Kosova) and Eastern Europe. Harmonizing higher-education systems is comprehensive. The six original actions to which the member states subscribe are adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable higher education degrees, adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles (bachelor and master's level), establishment of a system of credits, promotion of mobility, promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance, and promotion of the European dimension in higher education (Bologna Process Secretariat, 2005a). The original action plan was supplemented with four new ones, added at meetings in Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003). States joining the Bologna Process must have ratified the European Cultural Convention. The convention seems to function as a gatekeeper for non-European countries. For example, even though the government of Kazakhstan applied for membership in the Bologna Process at the same time as the three countries in the Caucasus, it was relegated to observer status because it had not signed the European Cultural Convention (Bologna Process Secretariat 2005b, 3). For now, the three countries in the Caucasus constitute the eastern border of European harmonization in the areas of culture and higher education policies.

How do we justify compiling nine case studies, representing countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia, under the same book cover? There are three features that are unique to this region and distinguish these nine from other post-socialist countries: First, they are comparative latecomers within the Soros Network and, in that capacity, regularly met and exchanged experiences among themselves. Second, they are donor dependent, or to be more accurate, they were donor dependent at the time the Soros Network set up national foundations in this region. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant they were downgraded from being treated as poor (socialist) second-world countries to (capitalist) third-world countries. Third, their governments are viewed as highly centralist. These three features deserve further explanation.

Latecomers within the post-socialist Soros Network

In its effort to establish new national foundations in the post-socialist region, the Soros Network moved east. The first national foundation was established in Hungary in 1984, followed by others over the course of the next few years in Central and Southeastern Europe, and then in Eastern Europe as well. By the time the national foundations opened in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia, the Soros Network already had educational network programs and experienced staff in place at the older national foundations. The transfer of existing programs, as well as the dispatch of consultants from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania, was seen as a means to help jump start operations in the new region. George Soros and the board of directors of OSI firmly believe in the limited lifespan of national foundations. They see OSI funding as seed money for initiatives that help create open societies that, after a period of inception and consolidation, should be carried on with funding from other sources. This belief has great repercussions in terms of day-to-day activities.

By the time the national foundations in Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia started operation, the older foundations were in the process of phasing out, spinning off various programs, or exiting altogether. Soros phased out programs that were seen as obsolete, either because they were sufficiently mainstreamed or were being continued by other nongovernmental or private providers. English-language teaching is an example of a network program that was phased out in many national foundations at an early stage because of the proliferation of private language schools or because governments prioritized English-language instruction as part of educational reform. Other programs, such as those in arts and culture or education, were spun off either to professional associations (for example, the International Step by Step Association), or to newly founded local NGOs. Typically, OSI provided a financial cushion or transitional grant until the new associations or NGOs succeeded in securing funding in the form of grants or fees for services. The national foundations in the Caucasus and Central Asia began operating at a time when their counterparts to the west were starting to close down. The closing of older national foundations sent a signal that Soros Foundation headquarters in New York acts upon its belief that assistance should not last forever and that innovative practices, initiated by NGOs, should become institutionalized.

After the millennium, Soros urged the new foundations to prepare themselves gradually to shut down and to seek matching funds as a first step toward exiting. From the outset, sustainability of project initiatives, beyond the limited duration of the national foundation, was a primary concern in the new region. The newly founded national foundations had to work themselves out of business by handing over their programs to government institutions. The hand-over strategy differentiates the Soros Network from other international NGOs such as Save the Children UK, Aga Khan Foundation, or World Vision, which are given a more permanent mission in the countries where they operate. Phasing out the national foundations in EU accession countries and establishing new national foundations in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia meant the new foundations were regarded as, and became, an OSI region. They frequently met in regional meetings, exchanged experiences, and borrowed reform strategies from one other.

Unsurprisingly, the national foundations in the Caucasus and Central Asia aimed at institutionalizing their initiatives within governmental structures as quickly as possible. Having cooperative learning or RWCT taught by regular teacher educators, either in in-service or pre-service teacher education, rather than by their own trainers, was interpreted as a successful strategy for ensuring sustainability. Thus, what other NGOs negatively label cooptation—the government using NGO-developed material and resources without giving credit to the NGO—was, in the early years of the national foundations, seen as a desired outcome (see Najam 2000). There was little concern for copyright or intellectual property rights within the Soros Network as long as OSI practices were mainstreamed and institutionalized. In the last few years, however, spin-offs of the network programs (especially SbS and RWCT) have revised this approach. SbS also pursued a comprehensive reform approach to early childhood education that affected pedagogy, developmental psychology, classroom architecture, teaching/play material, and required close collaboration with parents. This could only be sustained by means of a curriculum reform in preschool-teacher-education institutions. Curriculum reform became, for SbS, an important target that determined whether the program was successfully implemented or not.

A review of the chapters presented in this book conveys the priority attached to having OSI-initiated projects integrated into

government-sponsored structures. The limited time perspective also explains the strong belief in capacity building. A great bulk of OSI funding has been allocated for the professional development of teachers, school administrators, government officials, textbook authors, publishers, teacher educators, university lecturers, and all other groups that have a stake in educational reform. Building capacity in the country rather than relying and depending on international experts from the United States and Europe has been a key sustainability strategy for the Soros Network. The expectation is that these national experts will continue to use their newly acquired skills, and use them for educational reform in their countries even when external funding dries up. Capacity building of OSI staff is taken seriously as well. Staff in the national foundations gather several times each year for regional and international conferences and are funded for professional-development courses that strengthened their skills in project management, needs assessment, program evaluation, and educational policy studies. These skills are seen as core requirements for professionally designing, administering, and monitoring educational projects. During the exiting stage of a national foundation, the commitment to capacity building grows even stronger. The boards of national foundations realize that their staff will soon need either to establish their own local NGO and seek external funding or find employment in other organizations. The belief in professional development of the staff is not an expression of employer's guilt. Rather, equipping employees with the necessary skills is a powerful tool for placing former OSI employees in positions of responsibility in which they can continue to support, and possibly steer, educational reform in their countries.

After 2002 the Soros Network expanded in two directions. Incentives were created to establish educational policy centers that would move beyond project work and instead function as think tanks. These think tanks conducted studies and evaluations of educational reforms and functioned as advocacy NGOs. They initiated activities such as donor watch, advanced anti-corruption legislation, and supported strategic litigation. Funding for these educational policy centers was not only made available to the existing OSI national foundations in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia, but also to the spin-offs in Central, South East, and Eastern Europe. Another development that began to take shape at around this same time was the commitment of George Soros and the OSI board to go global. The Soros Network now began to operate in parts of the world beyond the post-socialist region.

From Second World to Third World

In 1991, Stephen P. Heyneman, now professor of international education policy at Vanderbilt University, was a senior education specialist at the World Bank, responsible for education policy and lending in twenty-seven countries in Europe and Central Asia. As president of CIES he was in charge of organizing the annual conference in 1992. Fifteen years later, in an interview with past presidents of CIES, he recalled the fall of the Berlin Wall and the wave of independence movements that ultimately broke apart the Soviet Union. Having worked for years in the region, he knew the newly appointed ministers of education in each country and sought ways to invite them as presenters and honored guests. A few months before the conference, and only a few weeks after events had culminated in the region, he met with Anthony Richter, then a regional director at OSI-NY. An agreement was reached within hours that OSI would invite the ministers. Heyneman recalls:

> The formal break-up of the Soviet Union was in the fall and we had our conference in the spring. The Soviet Union broke up into fifteen republics. I had been working in some of them through the World Bank and had connections with them. I thought it would be a magnificent event if we as a society could reach out to each of these new countries, independent for a few months only, and invite them to our conference. . . . In the end, our conference, during my presidency, opened up on a stage where they had fifteen ministers of new countries. All I did was announce them: "Colleagues, I would like to introduce you to the ministers of education of these new countries." I read the list of countries: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, etc. The audience went crazy. Everyone applauded. It was very interesting. (Heyneman 2006)

Having only seen the gray-shaded territory of the USSR on their maps, scholars and professionals in international, comparative, and development studies in education in the United States and the West barely knew where to locate these new countries. At first, there was a sense of beginning and revolutionary change, but the initial

excitement diminished once it became apparent that people in the region suffered severe economic hardship. Infrastructure collapsed in the first years after the transformation. Access to safe water became a problem, domestic air travel came to an almost complete standstill, and coal for heating and electricity became rare commodities. Prices for fuel, coal, and electricity soared once the market was liberalized, and residents could not afford to pay for basic utilities. Not only villages, but towns as well were literally in the dark, bringing new meaning to the old slogan, Communism brings light. What people in the early 1990s were experiencing seemed like a return to pre-modern or pre-Communist times. The dissolution of agricultural collectives and collectives for animal husbandry not only generated unemployment but also eliminated an important financial resource for preschools, schools, and boarding schools in rural areas. The unequal living standards between urban and rural areas triggered a massive migration to towns and, in particular, capital cities. Scholars hastily settled upon a label—transition—to describe what had gone wrong.

Socialist countries in the region covered in this book had prided themselves on having universal provision of education and healthcare. Ironically, it was only when Education for All was declared in 1990, that access to schooling was becoming an issue for them. Development banks, notably the ADB and the World Bank, insisted on "rationalization," "concentration," "optimization," or structural adjustment programs in order to make the educational systems more cost effective. Cost effectiveness in the region meant reducing the number of small schools in remote rural areas and encouraging the establishment of large schools in regional centers. This policy proved a disaster for populations in rural areas because they could not afford to send their children to regional schools that were too distant from their homes.

Another common reform was to confine complete secondary schools (grades one to ten; later grades one to eleven) to regional centers. This meant taking the two upper grades away from schools in more remote rural areas, reducing them to grades one to eight schools (later grades one to nine). In Mongolia, parents were incensed when the Ministry of Education, with funding from the ADB, introduced its "rationalization" reform. Under tremendous pressure from parents, principals gave preferential treatment to eighth-grade graduates from their own school and quickly filled the few

available seats in the ninth and tenth grades with their "own" students. Faced with this situation, parents from regular district schools soon realized that the only way to secure a place in a ninth or tenth grade was to enroll their child in a regional school before eighth grade. The regional schools with complete secondary education started to fill up rapidly after fifth grade, and the situation became intolerable for all parties involved. A counter-reform movement from "below" emerged. In an act of subtle subversion, the directors of the regional education and culture departments approved every single school request to reinstate grades nine and ten. By 2004, the reform imposed by structural adjustment policies was reversed. As one of the directors of the regional education and culture departments quite sensibly remarked: "What were they [the central government] thinking, when they closed down grades 9 and 10? The parents were running down our office to undo this unjust reform" (Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe, and Gerelmaa 2004).

A vicious circle of underdevelopment in rural areas was perpetuated. In the early 1990s families left the countryside for towns in search of work and better living conditions. A few years later a mass exodus of families occurred because the infrastructure (schools, hospitals) had either collapsed or was deteriorating. While the first migration wave was labor related, the second was policy induced. Ten years later development banks are attempting to undo the damage of structural adjustment reforms. In Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, for example, the World Bank funds educational projects for rural school development. Since 2005, several countries have been approved for the EFA FTI, and millions of dollars are spent to reintroduce universal access to and completion of primary school.

The quality of education has declined drastically in the past fifteen years. Instructional time for students in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia is shorter than for students in any other part of the world. In Tajikistan, for example, the school year lasts thirty-four weeks, compared to the international average of thirty-eight to forty-two weeks per year. When it comes to a regional comparison, Mongolia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan have the shortest instructional time, and Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia the highest (Steiner-Khamsi 2007). But compared to other regions, students in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia do not go to school nearly as much as students in other regions. Exceptions are Central and Eastern Europe, where instructional time is also low but increasing.

Arguably, instructional time is only a quantitative measure of the quality of education. A qualitative analysis reveals that the curricula in the educational systems of the region are cluttered with too many subjects, with too little time allocated to teach them. To make things worse, teachers are prepared to teach only one or two subjects. Because of the overburdened curriculum, however, they end up teaching several, including some for which they have not been trained. Another quality measure relates to the working condition of teachers in the region. Except for Mongolia, teachers in the other eight countries are paid below the national average (Anderson and Heyneman 2005; Steiner-Khamsi 2007; World Bank 2006). The statutory teaching hours *(stavka)* are, depending on country and grade level, sixteen to twenty-four hours a week. But for teachers to make a living, they must teach multiple *stavkas,* engage in private tutoring (see OSI 2006), and engage in all kinds of additional economic activities outside of school. There is very little time left for preparing lessons and providing feedback to students.

The situation in this particular region was at its worst in the mid-1990s. Not only were salaries low, but they were paid late, at times by several months. Teachers in many countries in the region went on strike, which in turn prompted politicians to shame them publicly, accusing them of being greedy and neglecting the job of caring for and educating "our children." The situation for teachers has improved only slightly over the past fifteen years. The teacher shortage is rampant in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The governments in these two countries issue decrees that, in our opinion, qualify as emergency laws. Details include paying new teachers an additional stipend, provided they stay in service for three years (Kyrgyzstan), or making fifth-year students of teacher education work in schools rather than complete their teacher education degree (Tajikistan). Throughout the region, teacher salaries have been raised, year after year, so that teachers are no longer impoverished, but in some countries they are heavily in debt from loans. In 2007, the average monthly salary for teachers was US$29 in Tajikistan (100 TJS) and US$13 in Kyrgyzstan (530 KGS)—far below the national salary average.

This is not to suggest that external assistance has drastically decreased during the transition period. The countries presented in this book have always been dependent on central funding from Moscow, or in the case of Mongolia, external assistance from other

socialist countries. The problem is not so much the level of loans and grants given to the countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia, but the lower commitment to education. Mongolia is a good case in point to illustrate the shift in priorities. In 1962, the Mongolian People's Republic was accepted as a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), composed of Eastern bloc countries (at the time, the USSR, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia). It received ample external assistance to develop its educational system, and has been aid dependent since the 1960s. The "internationalist" aid from the Soviet Union and CMEA at the end of the 1980s was 30 percent of the GDP, and ten years later the international development aid (ADB, Japan International Cooperation Agency, World Bank, GTZ, USAID, and others) was 25 percent. Aid dependency has not changed, but the priorities for external assistance have shifted, with less funding given to education and the social sector in general. From 1991 until 2004, the government of Mongolia received US$2.6 billion in external assistance (half in loans), heavily concentrated in the economic sector, for transport, industry, construction, electricity, and heating (World Bank 2004). Of all large donors, only the ADB appears to be focused on education. Yet its allocation to the social sector (health, education, social insurance reform) is a meager 9 percent of its overall financial commitment to Mongolia (ADB 2000,7). Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are aid dependent as well, and categorized, according to the debt sustainability analyses carried out by the IMF and the World Bank, as having a "modest" or "moderate" debt burden. The only exception is Kyrgyzstan, which is in the process of being rated as a "heavily indebted poor country."

Working under centralist governments

The OSI has been criticized in some countries in the region for not being close to the people but rather exclusively focused on influencing large stakeholders, such as governments and donors. Even though OSI provided start-up funds for local NGOs as part of its mission to strengthen civil society, it regarded itself, according to critics, as one of the "big players" when it came to its operations among national foundations. It is accurate to state that the national foundation in this region targeted systemic change in education

and therefore had to win approval, or even better, support, from governments. Both a donor and an implementer, the national foundations insisted on being included in donor-coordination meetings, demanded a broader participation in education-sector reviews, and held public events to discuss education-sector strategies. The last are typically prepared by international consultants from multilateral organizations, and merely rubber-stamped by ministries of education.

There are two explanations for this particular Soros reform strategy. First, as mentioned before, national foundations were set up with a limited life span, generating pressure to institutionalize their initiatives within existing government structures as quickly as possible. More often than not, OSI-funded projects were designed as incubator, demonstration, or pilot projects, with the expectation that the government, often with financial support from donors, would carry on and mainstream the OSI initiative. Second, the national foundations worked under politically unstable, centralist governments characterized by rapid turnover of senior officials. With every political change, senior government officials at the central, regional, and local levels, as well as at the school level (principals) are replaced with allies and supporters of the new administration. Schools are treated as government sites and not as public sites, making it necessary to realign the leadership locally whenever there is a change at the central level. It became a routine procedure for national foundations of OSI to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding with their respective ministries of education, in which agreements, such as cost-sharing arrangements, support of a pilot project by providing release time for teachers, administrators, and so on, were put on paper and signed. As with other international NGOs or donors, these agreements have not always been honored, especially if there was a change in political administration. A compilation of Memoranda of Understanding assembled from the national foundations operating in the region would by far exceed the volume of this book, and probably fill an entire bookshelf.

The World Bank regularly evaluates six governance indicators in 212 countries. The ratings are taken from thirty different organizations, mostly commercial risk-rating agencies, NGOs, multilateral-aid agencies, and other public-sector organizations. The report,

Governance Matters 2007, provides time series data for the period 1996–2006 on the following six governance indicators:

- *Voice and Accountability*—measures the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media;
- *Political Stability and Absence of Violence*—measures perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including terrorism;
- *Government Effectiveness*—measures the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies;
- *Regulatory Quality*—measures the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development;
- *Rule of Law*—measures the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence; and
- *Control of Corruption*—measures the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests. (World Bank 2007, 3–4)

A review of the six indicators for the nine countries presented in this book reveals the following findings for the year 2006: *Voice and accountability* are virtually nonexistent in Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, but close to the 50th percentile mark in Georgia, and over the 50th percentile mark in Mongolia. *Political stability* is very low, particularly in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan. It is in the 0–10th percentiles for the data on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where political stability is seen as a problem. For the remaining four indicators—*government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law,* and *control of corruption*—Armenia, Georgia, and Mongolia are assessed much more positively than the other

countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan) but are still only around the 50th percentile. In contrast, former socialist countries in Central, Southeast, and Eastern Europe that are now part of the EU are in the 90th-100th percentiles, with only a few in the 50th–90th percentiles.

Corruption in education has become a hotly debated issue in the local media of these countries, as well as in educational research (see OSI 2006). Three of the nine countries discussed in this book (Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan) successfully introduced standardized university exams to curb bribes given to university lecturers and administrators in return for a seat in a prestigious university. Mongolia and Tajikistan are currently piloting standardized exams. Efforts to combat corruption in education are strongly advocated by civil society organizations working in these countries, and the establishment of testing centers has been funded by the World Bank and USAID.

Ketevan Rostiashvili (2004, 27ff.) presents estimates of how much families in Georgia had to pay to place their child in a university before unified entrance exams were introduced. On average, parents paid up to US$2,100 for private tutoring to have their child prepared for the three to four subjects tested in the university entrance exams. With nearly thirty thousand students entering universities each year, the private tutoring business was worth nearly US$65 million annually. Additionally, parents were requested to pay bribes if their child scored below the required grades. For example, bribes cost, on average, US$8,000–9,000 for admittance to the journalism faculty at Tblisi State University (TSU). The most expensive bribes were for the law faculty at TSU (US$20,000–30,000), but when the new State Technical University opened a competing law-degree program, the law faculty at TSU had to lower their bribes to US$10,000–15,000 per admitted student. Rostiashvili finds that parents paid on average US$5,500 in bribes per child. Approximately ten thousand of the thirty thousand admitted students scored below the required grade and only secured a place thanks to bribes. This means that annually US$50 million were spent on bribes. The findings from this fascinating study on corruption in the higher education system of Georgia, pre-Rose revolution, can be summarized as follows: Parents in Georgia paid US$50 million in bribes and US$65 million on private tutoring in 2003. In

the same year, the government's expenditure on education was only US$34 million.

The variety in dealing with centralist governments

The governance features, summarized in the previous section, have a bearing on how NGOs, including national foundations of the Soros Network, function. In analyzing how NGOs define their relationship with governments, Adil Najam (2000) identified four types: cooperation, confrontation, complementary, and cooptation. While his typology might apply to NGOs in other parts of the world, we found a different set of NGO-government relations in the post-socialist region. The case studies reflect a fascinating range of strategies in the post-socialist region to cope with a governance environment that is centralist and, for the most part, donor dependent. We propose the following three terms to distinguish the roles of NGOs, exemplified in national foundations of the Soros Network: *complementary, cooperative, surrogate.*

The complementary role of NGOs

The most common strategy for dealing with a centralist government is to present a corrective to ongoing reforms that is in line with the mission of the NGO. An NGO incubates an innovative practice in an area that is neglected by the government with the expectation that the complementary project will later grow into an institutional practice, inscribed in educational policy. In practice this means that the NGO initiates, designs, and monitors a project that, upon successful completion of the pilot stage, is to be implemented on a large scale. Preferably, it will be funded by the government or, if this is not possible, by other donors. As illustrated in the following examples, strategies for persuading centralist governments to pay more attention to civil society involvement vary.

In Armenia, OSIAF initiated community schools in 2000 with the expectation that other donors, and ultimately the Ministry of Education, would take the pilot project to scale. It established twelve Community TeleCenters throughout the country that were used as learning centers for individuals of all age groups, as well as cultural and recreational centers for the community. These centers integrated

information technologies and thereby provided an opportunity for students and community members to communicate by email and to use the Internet. Additional project components, such as e-curricula in the Armenian language, ICT training for teachers, and the creation of an interschool Web portal, maximized the usage of resources made available in the Community TeleCenters.

Armenuhi Tadevosyan examined (Chapter 2) the reception of these centers by the government and other donors. Two projects, in particular, were closely related to what OSIAF had already established in the year 2000. The Armenia School Connectivity Program, implemented by the NGO Harmony and funded by USAID, fully integrated the twelve pilot schools and involved them in all activities of the new project. An important side effect of integration into the USAID-funded project was the ability to reach out to a greater number of schools in the country that were members of the Armenia School Connectivity Program. The newly established computer centers, created in over three hundred schools, used material and best practices developed in the OSIAF-Armenia pilot project. The integration of the pilot project into the larger Armenia School Connectivity Program, funded by USAID, occurred smoothly. However, the subsequent project, carried out by the Ministry of Education and funded by the World Bank, very selectively drew only on networks, resources, and expertise already built in the two previous projects. The similarities in the three projects are striking, and yet the World Bank–funded project insisted on the novelty of its approach and did not integrate the existing network of schools into its project.

In most of the case studies presented in this book, a "policy window" (Kingdon 2003, 165; see also Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Howlett and Ramesh 2003) opened, in which the government first signaled a commitment to change. In the Armenian case study, the Financing and Management Reform Project—approved in 1997 and funded by a World Bank loan of US$15 million—targeted community and parental participation in school funding and management, and at the same time assured schools that they could decide how to use the income that was generated at the school level. The OSIAF-Armenia–funded project, Community TeleCenters, built on the promise made by the government, and at the same time put a civil society spin on it. Rather than merely exploiting the parents and the community for financial support of schools, the centers were

created to provide services *to* the community and increase their participation in schools.

Elmina Kazimzade (Chapter 3) also highlighted the window of opportunity for OSIAF-Azerbaijan to become actively involved. The "new quality standard of textbook provision" was signed by the government of Azerbaijan and approved by the World Bank for a loan of US$73 million for the period 2003–13. OSIAF-Azerbaijan used this broader legal framework and larger educational reform to "'de-monopolize' authorship, improve pedagogical and technical quality by stimulating competition among publishers, and open up the market to provide a wide range of free textbooks and teaching/learning materials" (Crighton 2001, 19). It was an opportune moment to design a project in line with the mission of the NGO: to train innovative practitioners and academics, based in the country, as textbook authors. Besides building local capacity, OSIAF-Azerbaijan insisted on a practice that was unprecedented in textbook publishing: the textbooks had to first be piloted and then, based on feedback from practitioners, revised before being printed for general use. OSIAF managed to persuade the Ministry of Education to "de-monopolize" the market and to stimulate competition among publishers. It proposed to the Ministry of Education the establishment of a Textbook Approval Board that, functioning as an external and independent body, determines the rules for competition and criteria for textbook evaluation.

In Mongolia, the project School 2001, described by Natsagdorj Enkhtuya (Chapter 7) originated in the context of standards-based curriculum reform. In 1997, the Ministry of Education planned to revise the curriculum with funding made available by the ADB. The MFOS anticipated that the ADB-funded reform would consist only of cosmetic changes, proposed by Mongolian government officials and academics who were far removed from educational practice. As a result, the curricula would be revised only on paper and never make it to schools. To counter this trend, the MFOS generated a movement "from below" and launched a school-based curriculum-reform project that lasted from 1998 until 2001, labeled School 2001. The project offered school-based professional development on student-centered learning, lesson planning, and curriculum design for school hours. The term *school hours* refers to the proportion of the curriculum in which schools were entitled to develop and teach their own content. The project provided schools

with grants to publish their own curricula, such as booklets on local history, local fauna, local art, and so on.

What triggered the interest of the Ministry of Education and other NGOs and donors was not so much the curricular aspects of School 2001 but how the project operated. School 2001 was committed to peer training and peer mentoring, that is, teachers training teachers. To do so effectively, the project paired schools and actively supported and funded school networking. The school networking approach, in which schools "adopted" (trained and mentored) surrounding schools, as well as new partner schools, was novel. The school-adoption feature transformed it into a nationwide project in which schools enthusiastically adopted other schools and promulgated practitioner-driven reform. The sheer number of schools involved in this reform movement—one out of every eight school in the country—made it impossible to overlook.

Unfortunately, the curricular objective was not embraced by government officials. The Ministry of Education invited only a few practitioners to participate in the ADB-funded curriculum reform. This was merely tokenism, as the practitioners in the working groups were outnumbered by government officials and academics who insisted on having curriculum reform strictly under their control. Anticipating such an outcome at the end of the project, government officials in charge of curriculum issues were included from the beginning as participants and attended, alongside practitioners, all project activities.

Ironically, though the original purpose of the project—ensuring practitioner input in curriculum reform—failed, the project was a great success in other, unanticipated ways. In effect, School 2001 was not only a school-based reform movement for practitioners, but it also functioned as professional development for government officials in charge of curriculum reform. The initial purpose was to some extent unrealized, but what caught on were the ideas of peer mentoring, peer training, and school-based training. These features resonated with the Ministry of Education and other donors, notably DANIDA, because the centralist in-service training was too expensive and ineffective, and alternatives were not apparent. School-based training filled a vacuum at a time when teachers were complaining because the Ministry of Education had discontinued in-service training for teachers. The Ministry of Education was

convinced that school-based training, successfully demonstrated in School 2001, was the way of the future.

In May 2002, the deputy minister of education submitted his proposal, "School 2004," to a meeting of donors, held in Paris. The proposal requested funding for a continuation of School 2001 so that by 2004 every school in Mongolia would be adopted, mentored, and trained by another school. The donors did not approve the proposal. However, a Danish-Mongolian NGO, funded by DANIDA (which had been committed for years to rural school development), adopted several key features of School 2001 and successfully implemented them for its school-based training. Enkhtuya explains the close cooperation among NGOs in Mongolia, which results in the best practices of NGOs circulating with the help of other NGOs.

The Georgia case study, presented by Anna Matiashvili (Chapter 4), captures the struggle over the semantics of decentralization. On one side are international development banks, which tend to reduce decentralization to a matter of finance, and on the other side are civil society organizations, including OSI, which attempt to uncover the social accountability potential of decentralization reform. On this issue, the centralist governments tend to side with the development banks. This is because the ministries of education are provided with ample technical assistance to implement the financial aspect of decentralization and are left on their own when it comes to reforming the governance of education. The development banks are indecisive about whether they want to have a strong centralist government that oversees and administers grants and loans or whether they support a devolution of power to the regional and local level, which could entail less accountability for the borrower (government). The ministries of education themselves are reluctant to delegate decision-making authority to lower levels of administration.

It is important to keep in mind the size of the education sector to understand the importance given to controlling it. In Mongolia, 73 percent of all public servants are employees in the education and health sectors (ADB 2004). In Tajikistan, education salaries make up about 56 percent of the total wage bill of the public sector, which, besides education, includes public administration, defense and law enforcement, health, social protection, and several other areas (World Bank 2005). The political significance of education is not

to be underestimated. It is the largest sector in post-socialist countries in terms of individuals employed by the government. Given the tendency of governments and development banks only to advance decentralization of finance, it has become a top priority of NGOs to act as a counter-force and emphasize the neglected aspect of decentralization: participation and governance by community members.

The Georgian case represents a prototypical reform of OSI, also pursued in other countries of the region. The government of Georgia issued the Decentralization Decree in 1999, and a year later signed a cooperation agreement with the OSGF to pilot several models of administrative decentralization in the education sector. The Memorandum of Understanding explicitly framed the OSGF as a pilot that would be used nationwide upon successful completion of the project. The project was enthusiastically endorsed and successfully implemented. However, two unexpected events occurred that annulled the agreement. First, a much bigger donor stepped forward with a US$60 million credit, disbursed over a period of twelve years, provided that the government of Georgia would give financial autonomy to schools. The big donor was the World Bank, and the program to which the government of Georgia committed itself was the Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program. As part of the program, per capita financing was introduced and vouchers issued for both public and private schools. In term of governance, the project was very narrowly defined in that it provided training for school administrators and educational authorities, mostly in the domain of educational finance.

The second key event was the peaceful Rose revolution of 2003, in the wake of which former agreements with NGOs were discontinued and replaced. OSGF was not exempted from this general approach to agreements made with the previous government, even though the Soros Network has been credited or discredited, respectively, for having been closely associated with political events leading up to the revolution. The new government and the World Bank brought in their own stakeholders and experts, disempowering the local capacity built in the previous period. Matiashvili's observations concur with those made by other authors in this book: the centralist government changes orientation and alliances whenever a bigger donor, typically a development bank, enters the field of

educational reform. In order to justify a multi-million dollar loan to its own constituents and the public media, the government downplays existing projects and best practices that NGOs already had in place for years. The government pretends that the proposed new project, generously funded by multilateral donors, fills a great need that had not been addressed in the past. The distancing posture and the institutional amnesia have more to do with legitimacy issues surrounding large loans and credits than with the actual outcomes of similar projects already in existence, funded by NGOs or other small donors.

One of the initiatives traveling throughout the region—Turkmenistan excluded—is curriculum reform, induced by the decision to extend general education from ten to eleven, and then from eleven to twelve years. The SFK first became involved in national curriculum reform in 2001, when it realized that the government-sponsored reform entailed, in reality, merely stretching the current curriculum content by one year. There was no talk of revising curricular content, nor was there any mention of systematically using standards or outcomes as a foundation to develop a new curriculum. By the end of the same year, SFK mobilized approximately seventy policymakers, academics, and NGO representatives to discuss how to proceed with curriculum reform in ways that would be pedagogically useful. Saule Kalikova and Iveta Silova (Chapter 5) list the series of eighteen conferences—organized at international, national, and regional levels—workshops, and public events aimed at creating public awareness of and civic participation in curriculum reform on one hand, and generating local capacity for curriculum reform and educational policy analysis on the other. A permanent working group was established that prepared, over a period of two years, policy papers emphasizing the need for an outcomes-based curriculum reform.

This approach, along with demands to move from teacher-centered education to learner-centered and from facts-based to skills-based learning, was endorsed in a government review and incorporated in subsequent decrees. The economic boom in Kazakhstan has made the country donor independent. This has had huge repercussions for international donors, multilateral organizations, and international NGOs that had been operating in Kazakhstan. Their relationship to the government has changed from

one defined in terms of donor-recipient, to one in which international organizations are placed in the backseat. NGOs are only called upon selectively, whenever the government requires technical advice and expertise to implement reforms in accordance with what it chooses to perceive as international standards.

The complementary or corrective function of NGOs, as illustrated in the four case studies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan, is closely associated with the type of work attributed to "transnational advocacy networks" (TANs). The term was introduced a few years ago in international and comparative education (for example, Mundy and Murphy 2000) and in the social sciences (Appadurai 2000) to capture the response of NGOs and grassroots organization to globalization. These organizations attempt to influence not only world politics, but also, in their capacity as a global civil society, national governments. Arjun Appadurai relates his demand for a "globalization from below" (2000, 16) to George Soros's vision of a global open society (Soros 1998). Established for the purpose of "doing good" (Fisher 1997), international NGOs usually adhere to values of social justice, civic participation (civil society building), and transparency. Arjun Appadurai also had the good cause of NGOs in mind when he proposed that TANs should be viewed as the only international force to counter corporate globalization. Economic globalization is, according to Appadurai, "a run-away horse without a rider" that can only be tamed by successful TANs that "might offset the most volatile effect of run-away capital" (2000, 16).

In the countries of the region, the IMF and the development banks represent first and foremost the interests of global trade. Even though political stability, economic growth, the rule of law, and so on benefit citizens, they are primarily advanced by international financial institutions to facilitate international trade. The decentralization of finance, creation of an open textbook market, privatization of preschools and higher education—to name just a few features of the post-socialist reform package—target a reduction of public expenditure and an increase of market forces in education. Several national foundations of the Soros Network attempted to counter the dependence on global capital, represented by international financial institutions in their countries, by building local capacity and enhancing civic participation. Two of the case studies, on

Armenia and Georgia, best represent how OSI has attempted to broaden decentralization reforms. Governments and development banks narrowly define the decentralization of finance as the ultimate goal and thereby reduce the community to a "cash cow." The role of the community is simply to pay fees and to generate income for schools. In contrast, the national foundations have supported community participation, community schools, community newsletters, and a series of other projects that emphasize the other aspect of decentralization: civic participation. Their goal is ultimately more transparency and more social accountability of governments, seen as prerequisites for an open society.

The cooperative role of NGOs

Counterbalancing negative outgrowths of the post-socialist reform package represents only one of the strategies that NGOs use in a governance environment that is centralist and donor dependent. Another common strategy is to strengthen governance capacity selectively in areas that comply with the NGO's own mission. There are numerous examples from the national foundations of the Soros Network that reflect this particular strategy. A common practice, not addressed in any of the chapters of this book, deserves mention here: professional development courses and fellowship for government officials. Study tours for government officials have, for good reasons, gone out of fashion. More often than not, these study tours fell into the category of "reward travel." They often, like buying jeeps or computers for government officials so they would presumably be better equipped to monitor a project, led to corruption. Instead, OSI supported fellowships that enabled government officials to travel to other post-socialist countries and learn by experience from reforms that were already implemented in a similar context. This East-East collaboration that OSI supported throughout the 1990s is noteworthy and should be viewed as a precursor to South-South collaboration, advanced a few years later by UNDP and UNESCO. South-South collaboration is generously funded by a few bilateral donors, notably the government of Japan. The cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, presented in this book, illustrate two concrete examples of the supportive role of the national foundations.

The Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan and the Foundation for Support of Educational Initiatives (a Kyrgyz NGO) assisted the regional department of education in implementing a voucher system for teacher training. The pilot project in the Issyk-Kul region began in 2005 and ended in 2007. It pursued several objectives: enhancing the quality and quantity of in-service teacher training, enabling NGOs to provide it, and giving choice to teachers to select courses they find relevant for their work. Different from most case studies in this book, where the national foundation is at the same time the donor and the implementer of a project, the voucher project was funded as part of the USAID project PEAKS, and the implementer was the regional department of education. The integration of the pilot into existing government structures was a key feature of the project. The regional department of education agreed to "de-monopolize" in-service teacher training and permitted NGOs and other organizations to serve as training providers. Furthermore, the training facilities were provided for free, and the transportation costs for teachers were to be covered by government funds. There was also a hand-over planned with regard to financing the project. The original agreement was that the department of education would not need to contribute any funds in 2005, would pay 40 percent of the project cost in 2006, and would fully cover all costs in 2007.

The Tulip revolution and other political changes in 2005 ended with a replacement of senior government officials throughout the country, and previous agreements were annulled. Regional education authorities only agreed to honor and fund the popular voucher pilot in 2007 after massive public pressure. As the authors of the case study Alexander Ivanov and Valentin Deichman convincingly point out (Chapter 6), the voucher financing mechanism is demanding from a management perspective. It requires that the centralist government, represented at the regional level, coordinate, facilitate, and negotiate. None of these practices is familiar to Kyrgyz government officials. Even though the pilot project was financed in the end with government funds, for the time being management of the pilot, both in the Issyk-Kul region and possibly in new regions as well, relies on support from NGOs.

The case study on Tajikistan also stands as an example in which NGOs cooperated with the government. After the end of the civil war in 1997 the government of Tajikistan finally adopted reforms

that had already been implemented in neighboring countries. International donors poured in as soon as the country received "security clearance." OSIAF-Tajikistan observed with great concern as Tajik experts were reduced to project implementers, rather than acting as sector reviewers or designers and analysts of reforms. OSIAF-Tajikistan agreed to support the Ministry of Education in formulating country-specific needs for donors and international organizations by creating a national policy unit—ERSU. From a group of twenty-eight applicants, seven experts were hired and given extensive training in policy analysis. Funded by OSIAF-Tajikistan, ERSU was supposed to become the policy analysis unit of the Ministry of Education. Even though collaboration between ERSU and the Ministry of Education remained strong, the integration of ERSU into the institutional structure of the ministry failed. The author of the case study, Tatiana Abdushukurova (chapter 8), provides a detailed analysis of factors that hindered the successful integration of ERSU into the Ministry of Education. ERSU was eventually reorganized as an independent local NGO and registered under the name of PULSE. It now functions as a think tank conducting research on behalf of different organizations. The employees of PULSE continue to advise government officials on educational reform, but the collaboration is based on interpersonal contacts rather than on institutional agreements.

In reviewing the types of government-led educational reforms that the national foundations of the Soros Network have supported, one is at first surprised to find controversial reforms imported from Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The Soros Network has supported voucher schemes, standardized testing, and OBE, to list just a few, that were originally both ardently supported and vehemently opposed in their countries of origin. A closer examination, however, reveals that these reforms are reinterpreted, modified, and altered once they have been transferred into the post-socialist context.

The introduction of vouchers in in-service teacher training in Kyrgyzstan, for example, is seen as a "bottom-up" reform, offering practitioners a choice. Vouchers replace a system in which government officials and school principals determined what was good and necessary for teachers. Standardized university entrance exams, now spreading like wildfire throughout the region, are expected to

curb private tutoring and replace bribes given to university lecturers and administrators for a place at a prestigious university. Finally, OBE is a method for finding public consensus on what students are supposed to learn, and then systematically translating the outcome into pedagogically useful tools. OBE in the post-socialist context replaces curriculum revision carried out at the desk of one or two government officials, whose task it is to replace one abstract document with another in order to provide proof to international donors that curriculum reform has been checked off. Development banks have channeled millions of dollars into this type of "top-down" curricula development over the past ten years. However, the revised curricula are shelved in technical reports written in English—and never make it into schools. What comes across as an outburst of neoliberal educational reform often has a different connotation in post-socialist contexts. In the three examples mentioned above, the reforms supported by the Soros Network attempted to support bottom-up reform, curb corruption, create more transparency, and generate public consent on educational reform.

Another well-studied phenomenon in educational transfer research is discursive borrowing, whereby only the label of a reform is adopted to attain an international "stamp of approval" for the introduction of a measure that would otherwise be contested. The association with reforms implemented elsewhere sends a positive signal that functions as a "flag of convenience" (Lynch 1998) to secure external funding. Once funding is attained, however, the project sails under a different flag, with a purpose entirely unrelated to what was stated in the original grant or loan proposal. To date, studies on the following "flags of convenience" have been conducted and published: multiculturalism (Silova 2006), vouchers (Steiner-Khamsi 2005), and OBE (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova, and Johnson 2006).

The surrogate role of NGOs

Almost two decades after revolutionary change swept through the region, individuals and institutions have taken a critical, perhaps cynical, stance toward the idea of transition. No doubt the early stage of transformation was characterized more by chaos than by anything else. However, the new "age of the market" (Sneath 2002)

has created values and practices that are likely to remain. The "new entrepreneurship," for example, has become an object of admiration for some and of ridicule for others. Caroline Humphrey and Ruth Mandel comment on how the New Russians, New Armenians, and so forth—many of them members of the former Party and State *nomenklatura*—came to prominence:

> Their entrepreneurial success derives not from hard work, but from the social capital accumulated during the Soviet period—their already existing networks and connections. . . . In some regions of the former Soviet Union, this practice has been cynically termed *prikhvatizatsia* (from the Russian word *prikhvait,* "to grab"), a play on the Russian word for privatization, *privatizatsia.* (Humphrey and Mandel 2002, 6)

In research literature the term *transition* was used indiscriminately to capture all that was taking place during the period of transformation. The explanatory power of the concept became visibly flat as countries developed in different directions economically, politically, and socially. Yet, as Christian Giordano and Dobrinka Kostova cynically note, the "orphans of transitology" have moved on to study "democratic consolidation" as the step that presumably follows the transition period (2002, 74). The limitations of such abstract stage models become immediately apparent when one compares them with the realities of centralist governments discussed in this book. In addition, the case studies on Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan represent strategies of the Soros Network under regimes that are not only centralist but also authoritarian. In these two countries the initiatives substitute for reforms that have either been annulled (Uzbekistan) or never targeted (Turkmenistan).

The Soros Network has never been granted entry into Turkmenistan. The authors of the case study, Erika Dailey and Iveta Silova (Chapter 9), point out that international organizations based in Turkmenistan have two options: accept government-approved and government-controlled educational initiatives, or operate covertly by implementing alternative educational projects beyond government oversight. In Turkmenistan, the Soros Network operates *in absentia.* It provides scholarships for Turkmen citizens to study abroad, including in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, and sponsors national initiatives that promote open society values, such as youth

seminars, from afar. Clearly, the scope of activities is limited, and the Soros Network is extremely cautious not to create a situation in which its local counterparts or project beneficiaries are subsequently harassed or black listed by government officials.

In Uzbekistan, international NGOs were able to operate until 2004, albeit under an oppressive centralist government. Jacqueline Ashrafi (Chapter 10) documents how OSIAF-Uzbekistan coped during its years of existence with two diametrically opposed expectations: to help create an open society and to abide by the rules of an authoritarian government. In a fascinating account of the regulations in textbook publishing, she focuses on the foundation's support for textbook development in civics and economics. The project was funded by OSIAF-Uzbekistan, but Ministry of Education approval was required for distribution in schools. In other words, the textbooks had to comply with two divergent objectives. On the one hand, Ashrafi writes, they needed to "encourage critical thinking, raise awareness of legal rights, and promote a sense of citizenship among students." Not only did the content of the textbook have to reflect these values, but the process of development had to fulfill the rigorous requirements of OSIAF-Uzbekistan: democratic selection procedures, involvement of teachers in piloting new textbooks, and transparent evaluation criteria. On the other hand, the textbook had to follow the rules of the Ministry of Education. Each law or civic-education textbook had to include at least fourteen direct quotations from presidential speeches and make frequent references to the work of President Karimov. Ashrafi remarks, "Generally, state authorities would be more likely to approve a school textbook if it strictly complied with or—better yet—exceeded the official quotas."

Political schizophrenia is a term used in the post-socialist region to describe the creative ways in which citizens coped in their daily lives with an over-controlling center under communist rule. It was common to insert "official knowledge" in strategic passages that the state censors were most likely to read, typically the first and last few pages of an article, dissertation, or a book. The rest of the document consisted of passages that reflected the author's own opinion, oftentimes conveyed in a coded manner. With the government shut-down of OSIAF-Uzbekistan in 2004, the Soros Network stopped operating in Uzbekistan. It left behind textbooks and other

resources, as well as staff, who now work in other organizations. These individuals bide their time in the current era of non-reform, hoping for a future transformation of the education sector.

Even though the strategies used in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan represent an extreme of how NGOs must operate under a centralist, authoritarian government, their methods for coping reflect legacies from the communist past. Applying a post-socialist perspective that moves beyond the transition period of the early 1990s enables us to see how organizations and individuals dealt with oppressive regimes. In her 1998 analysis of personal networks Alena Ledeneva focuses on economic aspects of the Soviet period and highlights the importance of the informal economy, which existed side by side with the "command economy." She identifies the practice of using personal network to get things done as one of the pillars of socialist governments. Personal networks were used to "obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures" (Ledeneva 1998, 1), The informal economy of exchange networks was "the 'reverse side' of an over-controlling centre, a reaction of ordinary people to the structural constraints of the socialist system of distribution—a series of practices which enabled the Soviet system to function and made it tolerable, but also subverted it" (Ledeneva 1998, 3).

Arguably, residents of post-socialist countries with a centralist and authoritarian government have become masters in dealing with the reverse side of an over-controlling center. Similarly, NGOs identify niches that are beyond strict government control by supporting progressive national initiatives from outside the country or by undermining rules and regulations in subtle and creative ways.

Scaling up by scaling down?

Educational programs in the post-socialist region of the Soros Network are at an interesting crossroads: the OSI board scaled down the budget for educational projects considerably and at the same established education policy centers that are expected to scale up the political impact of the Soros Network. But organizational expansion represents only one form of scaling up.

Throughout the 1990s and until 2003 the educational programs of the Soros Network expanded organizationally within the post-socialist region. As mentioned before, the geographical expansion was eastward, with the MFOS constituting the furthest border of the initial post-socialist Soros Network. Geographic expansion was within the same world system: the post-socialist region, from Budapest to Ulaanbaatar, composed of educational systems that were similar or even, in the case of the fifteen republics of the former Soviet Union, identical. This allowed for meaningful East-East cooperation, where national foundations from one country learned from the experiences of others. Geographic concentration also had a positive impact on individual national foundations. Speaking in one voice to propel open society values across a huge territory, they were regarded as a (post-socialist) network, spanning over thirty countries, rather than as an individual NGO based in one.

The leverage for correcting or complementing ongoing educational reforms in ways that comply with the mission of the network should not be underestimated. In most countries of the region the Soros Network represented the first and financially the largest international NGO operating in education throughout the 1990s and the first few years of the new millennium. Several case studies presented in this book document the moment when the government "changed sides," typically as soon as a larger donor appeared on the scene. In donor-dependent countries, governments tend to side with those with the deepest pockets. In development studies, we criticize large donors, particularly development banks, for imposing their portfolio of best practices on low-income governments (for example, Jones 2004). They attach programmatic "strings"; that is, they transfer reform packages along with loans and grants. The inverse also applies: governments only subscribe to the mission of an external donor if the donor takes full charge of funding and, in some cases, implementing the proposed reform. Thus, scaling down geographically and organizationally risks diminishing the leverage that an organization has for educational change in countries with a centralist and donor-dependent government.

There exists a series of scaling up strategies besides those which are organizational or quantitative. Peter Uvin and David Miller (1996) mention functional and political scaling up of NGOs, which in the case of the Soros Network have been closely related. Functional

scaling up occurs when an NGO expands its scope of activities within a sector, or when it expands the number of sectors in which it operates. Political scaling up captures the attempts made by an NGO to become a political actor and influence policymaking. This is how functional and political scaling was targeted in the Soros Network; the network moved away from pure project work in education and established policy centers that operate in a wide array of sectors (education sector, health sector, legal sector, media sector, etc.). The expectation of the OSI board is that the newly established policy centers, operating as think tanks, advocacy centers, and resource centers, would have a larger impact on policymaking than pilot and demonstration projects funded under the previous project-based OSI strategy.

In another article Peter Uvin, Pankaj Jain, and David Brown remind us that "scaling up is about 'expanding impact' and not about 'becoming large,' the latter being only one possible way to achieve the former" (Uvin, Jain, and Brown 2000, 1409). They analyze the four stages by which NGOs typically increase their impact. First, they expand coverage. Second, they scale up functionally by diversifying their activities. Third, they broaden their indirect impact by means of advocacy, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance or advice. This third stage often implies political scaling up. And finally, NGOs attempt to enhance organizational sustainability by securing for themselves a permanent place within the sector of civil society organizations, or the third sector. Arguably, the fourth stage does not apply for the Soros Network, since Soros believes that not only projects but also national foundations should have a limited lifespan. Uvin, Jain, and Brown contend that small NGOs can have a large impact, and challenge the "old paradigm" whereby scaling up is often confused with an NGO becoming larger and more professionally managed. Their proposed "new paradigm" for scaling up impact builds on "multiplication and mainstreaming through spinning off organizations, letting go of innovations, creating alternative knowledge, and influencing other social actors" (Uvin, Jain, and Brown 2000, 1417). The authors conclude:

> In the new paradigm, the extent to which an NGO successfully scales up can be judged not only in terms of its size, but also in terms of the number of spin-offs it created, the

> number of projects that have been taken over by other actors, and the degree to which it contributed to the social and intellectual diversity of civil society. (Uvin, Jain, and Brown 2000, 1417)

The eight national foundations of the Soros Network presented in this book have spun off dozens of local NGOs in the region that continue to contribute, in one way or the other, to educational reform. They also piloted projects and best practices that were subsequently borrowed by other actors in the nongovernmental sector or mainstreamed into government structures. Even though the Soros Network moved on to policy and advocacy work in the form of policy centers, the educational programs of the national foundations left behind material resources. They also left behind human capital—individuals who continue either to correct or to support ongoing educational reforms, depending on the values they promote. It remains to be seen, probably in the next ten years, whether scaling up political impact in the post-socialist region has worked under the condition of scaling down projects and funding in education.

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