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## **Chapter 25**

### **Civil Society in the Caucasus: Voluntary Youth Organisations**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter critically examines youth organisations in the Caucasus region as one of the forms of voluntary civil society that has emerged in the region following the collapse of the USSR. The main argument proposed in this chapter is that present-day youth organisations in the Caucasus retain striking similarity to the communist period mass youth groups, in particular the Soviet Komsomol. Even for those post-Soviet youth organisations, which have sought to avoid replicating the communist era mass organisations, politicisation and lack of representativeness became an inescapable reality. State control over voluntary youth association is yet another characteristic of the majority of post-Soviet youth organisations across the Caucasus. All of the above resulted in the low membership in youth groups and the lack of interest towards this form of civil association amongst young people across the Caucasus.

#### **Introduction**

The main goal of this chapter is to examine youth organisations in the South and North Caucasus as representatives of post-Soviet civil society<sup>1</sup> and to emphasise the key dynamics of their development.

Amongst many different types of civil society organisations (CSOs), this chapter focuses on voluntary youth organisations. Youth groups serve as an intriguing case for studying post-Soviet civil society in the Caucasus region not only owing to the importance of youth mobilisation for successful post-communist democratic transformation, noted by many scholars (Ó Beacháin and Polese 2010; Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Nikolayenko 2012; Aliyev 2015a; 2015c), but also because membership in youth organisations in the present-day Caucasus is markedly lower than participation in most other forms of civil association. According to the European Values Survey in 2008, membership in youth voluntary organisations across the South Caucasus was amongst the lowest in the former Soviet Union (Figure 1). Youth voluntary activities also appear to be less popular than participation in other types of civil society organisations. The European Values Survey reports that membership in youth voluntary work in the South Caucasus is well below Western European and Baltic standards and it was also lagging behind membership numbers in all other forms of registered civil organisations in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This trend is also confirmed by a range of country-specific surveys conducted in different parts of the Caucasus, including the North, which is presented below.

Figure 1

### **Membership in civil society organisations**

Country	Type of Civil Society Organization (%)							
	Welfare	Culture	Youth work	Community action	Human rights	Labour union	Women rights	Country Mean
<i>Armenia</i>	1.9	2.7	1.1	1.4	0.4	2.0	0.9	1.2
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	2.5	6.4	2.7	6.3	3.4	9.8	3.9	4.3
<i>Georgia</i>	0.6	1.2	0.4	0.2	0.6	3.5	0.2	0.7
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	
<i>Russia</i>	1.2	3.1	0.9	1.2	0.2	10.0	0.7	2.4
<i>Belarus</i>	2.2	4.4	3.7	0.4	0.5	41.9	0.7	1.9
<i>Moldova</i>	5.1	4.5	1.5	2.5	0.5	4.6	0.8	2.6
<i>Ukraine</i>	1.3	1.7	0.7	1.0	0.3	12.5	0.3	2.3
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>0.6</b>	
<i>Latvia</i>	2.4	7.7	2.0	0.3	0.4	8.5	1.6	3.7
<i>Estonia</i>	5.8	11.9	4.8	3.2	0.6	6.0	4.1	6.2
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>2.85</b>	
<i>Belgium</i>	8.6	15.8	6.5	3.8	5.1	14.5	5.3	11.2
<i>Sweden</i>	8.5	12.9	2.7	1.9	8.4	24.8	1.9	11.8
<i>Netherlands</i>	25.1	35.9	7.3	11.8	24.0	22.1	7.5	24.9
<b>Mean</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>4.9</b>	

Source: European Values Survey, 2008.<sup>2</sup>

Youth groups, examined in this chapter, are selected as based on their membership size, nationwide presence and sustainability. After the break-up of the USSR hundreds of youth groups sprung up all over the Caucasus, yet many are on-paper only organisations and many more survive for no longer than a single fiscal year (Aliyev 2015b). For instance as explained by Hakobyan and Tadevosyan (2011: 26) on an example of Armenian youth organisations: ‘a lot of groups of young people register organizations having some interesting ideas, but due to the serious lack of knowledge on the basics of NGO operation the registration is becoming the one and only work of the majority of the organizations’. They add that: ‘The Ministry of Justice regularly “cleans” the data base from obviously non-functional organizations, but this happens once in some 5 years and ... meanwhile there is a bulk of registered organizations of which only some 30-40 per cent are truly operational (on different levels of activity) (Hakobyan and Tadevosyan 2011: 26)’.

Furthermore, many registered youth groups and organisations have less than one hundred members and only operate in one city. Such groups represent only a narrow segment of young people

and cannot be used as representative examples of national youth organisations.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, while hundreds of youth organisations officially exist in each state in the Caucasus, only few were active and capable of organising the youth work. Russia's *Nashi* ('Ours') and *Molodaia Gvardiia* ('Young Guard') youth organisations, Azerbaijan's *Ireli* ('Forward'), Georgia's *Kmara!* ('Enough!') and the Armenian Youth Federation that are discussed in this chapter are selected as representative cases of national youth organisations as based on their membership size, participation in voluntary civil work, implementation of nation-wide projects and the real-time engagement with population. However, as shown in this analysis, the Caucasus youth organisations with largest membership, nation-wide representation, sustainable funding, effective organisational structure and proven survival skills are also closely associated with political actors, routinely engage in patron-client relations and are ideologically centred on national-patriotism. To explain why the largest and most active and sustainable youth organisations in the present-day Caucasus are suffering from the above listed weaknesses and whether such well-known characteristics of contemporary youth groups as clientelism and nationalism could be traced back to the history of youth activism in the region, this chapter begins with the examination of youth association under Soviet rule.

## **The Komsomol in the Caucasus**

Only two types of Soviet public organisations could boast mass membership throughout the entire history of the Soviet Union: labour unions and the Young Communist League, abbreviated as the Komsomol. According to the Soviet statistics (Raymond 1978), both labour unions and the Komsomol had more members than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) or any of its affiliated organisations. Also both of these organisations enjoyed a special status within the communist state: not registered by the state authorities, unlike other public organisations, they did not have to be monitored

by the Soviet ministries. Rather such organisations functioned under the direct control of the Central Committee (TsK)<sup>4</sup> of the CPSU. If labour unions were expected by the CPSU to oversee and control workers, the Komsomol's task was, in Leonid Brezhnev's (USSR 1975: 148-9) words: '...to work towards making every young person an active builder of the new society'. Yet in contrast to labour unions which operated in an 'overlap' between economic, civil and political societies and were designed to 'supervise' the working class, Komsomol was more of a multi-purpose all-inclusive public mass organisation.

However, the Komsomol is selected here as an example of communist youth organisations not only due to the diversity of its tasks and its multi-million membership, but also because it was the only youth organisation functioning in the Caucasus until the end of the Soviet rule.<sup>5</sup> Founded by Lenin in 1918, the Komsomol's primary task was that of serving the 'goals of Communism' and prioritising socialisation and mobilisation of Soviet youth. The Komsomol also attempted to promote social and egalitarian humanistic values, justice and concern for others. All of the above, nevertheless, were ultimately channelled into forging future recruits for the CPSU. As reported by Unger (1977: 306) over 70 per cent of CPSU admissions throughout the 1970s were from Komsomol candidates. Although, of course, not all Komsomol members ended up in the CPSU, millions of Soviet citizens passed through the all-encompassing indoctrination system of the Komsomol. Designed as a voluntary youth organisation,<sup>6</sup> membership in the Komsomol was in fact necessary for young people in order to gain admission to higher education and decent employment. Notwithstanding its formally high selection criteria, requiring the organisation members' active contribution to the 'building of communism', exemplary performance in work and study, advanced knowledge of Marxist-Leninist ideology and self-sacrifice for 'justice' and motherland, in reality the Komsomol recruited its members *en masse*. According to Marshall in the 1930s, 90 per cent of Komsomol, as well as CPSU members in

Chechnya were politically and otherwise illiterate and the Komsomol organisations in general appeared ‘...as totally useless’ (Marshall 2010: 208) in establishing the Soviet administration throughout the North Caucasus.

Yet the advantages of joining the Komsomol for youth in the Caucasus were obvious: its membership provided young people with access to education and jobs, as well as a necessary background for a future career in politics or in the government sector. As a matter of fact, most senior CPSU members and the Soviet ruling elites from the era of Nikita Khrushchev came from a Komsomol leadership background, including Konstantin Chernenko, Yuri Andropov, Mikhail Gorbachev and the future leader of post-Soviet Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze. By the start of perestroika 65 per cent of all youth of eligible age in the Caucasus and Central Asia were Komsomol members (Kirmse 2010: 382). The Komsomol’s role in the Caucasus, similarly to that of many other Soviet public organisations, was not limited to communist elite-building and indoctrination of Marxist-Leninist ideology, it also served as a venue for acquiring contacts and constructing informal networks (Aliyev 2013; 2014a). As mentioned by Comai (2012: 185): the Komsomol ‘offered a fundamental opportunity to meet people with different backgrounds who could play a key role in determining one’s political or work career’. However, notwithstanding its omnipresence and significance in the Soviet young people’s lives, the Komsomol was evidently disliked by many and while young people had little choice but to join it, they showed no interest in volunteering for the organisation. For instance, the all-Union sociological survey<sup>7</sup> conducted in 1984 reported that only 1.2 per cent of respondents mentioned that they participate in the work of Komsomol committees or any of the organisation’s other elective or governing bodies.

As was the case with other communist public organisations, the end of the USSR resulted in complete dismantling and collapse of the Komsomol throughout the Caucasus. Although some ex-

Komsomol elites in the Caucasus continued to occupy political offices in different countries<sup>8</sup>, the Komsomol itself almost completely disappeared in the region.<sup>9</sup> The end of the Komsomol coincided with the end of mass participation in youth activities and the dramatic decrease in membership in post-communist youth organisations (Howard 2003). The aversion to participating in youth organisations amongst young people with the experience of Komsomol membership is consistent with Howard's (2003) theory of distrust in post-communist civil society as a result of negative experiences with communist public organisations. The Komsomol, in particular, could be described as by far the most invasive, ubiquitous and all-encompassing communist public organisation. Outmatched in terms of its membership numbers only by labour unions, the Komsomol undoubtedly 'invaded' more aspects of its members' lives than the unions; the latter mainly focused on the workers' professional careers. In contrast, Komsomol sought to take part in the education, professional development, leisure, military training and even private lives of its members. For instance, Komsomol members were obliged to follow the organisation's statute in their daily lives, which included denouncing on "bourgeois" ideology and being able to distinguish enemies of proletariat.

What kind of imprint did the Komsomol leave on post-Soviet youth mobilisation? Which organisations succeeded it in the Caucasus and how different or similar were they? The data presented at the start of the chapter (Figure 1), reveals that registered membership in youth organisations in the Caucasus was in dramatic decline in 2000s. In order to establish whether the lack of participation in youth volunteerism can be attributed to the malevolent legacy of the Komsomol and whether it is the continuity of civic traditions that ensures low membership in youth organisations, a closer analysis of the post-Soviet youth mobilisation in the Caucasus is needed.

## **Youth groups in the North Caucasus**

With the end of the CPSU's control over the public sphere in Russia, scores of youth groups began mushrooming in different parts of the Russian Federation during the 1990s (Diuk 2012; Hemment 2012). However, membership in youth organisations in Russia remained low<sup>10</sup> and many young people who took part in voluntary youth activities were members of post-communist Pioneer organisations<sup>11</sup> or Komsomol.<sup>12</sup> Not much data is available on organised youth activism in the North Caucasus in the early 1990s. For as long as armed conflict in Chechnya spread waves of political and economic instability through the region, it is unlikely that participation in youth work in the North Caucasus could have been higher than elsewhere in Russia. Scholars described low participation in youth organisations in Russia and elsewhere as an immediate post-communist phenomenon observed throughout the 1990s and a consequence of negative experiences with the Soviet public voluntary sector (Howard 2003).

However, although individuals with first-hand experience of communist organisations could no longer be defined as 'youth' by the end of the 1990s, the lack of involvement in youth voluntary work amongst people born after the end of Soviet rule persisted. The continuity of negative attitudes towards civic association can be viewed as a consequence of the rise of a 'new breed' of youth organisations in the early 2000s. While youth organisations in the 1990s were generally short-lived, unknown, unpopular and neglected by the state, a new wave of civic youth activism was brought to life in the new millennium through the deliberate efforts of state officials and other political actors. Their goal was to re-create the Komsomol, or at the very least re-introduce its methods and strategies, for a new generation.<sup>13</sup> In the post-Soviet North Caucasus, such state-managed youth organisations became the only type of youth volunteerism available to the vast majority of young people.

The spread of 'colour revolutions' across the post-communist world, and in particular the active participation of youth activists in anti-authoritarian protests in Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia, is often

cited as the main factor driving Vladimir Putin's creation of the youth movement *Nashi* in 2005 (Atwal 2009; Hemment 2012). A brainchild of Putin's aide Vladislav Surkov, *Nashi* was lavishly financed, vigorously supported and tightly controlled by the Kremlin to implement its pro-regime youth mobilisation projects all over the Russian Federation. Although not formally affiliated with any political party, *Nashi* was a staunchly pro-Putin organisation employing classic Soviet-style rhetoric and a personality cult, mixed with anti-Western and anti-opposition ideology based on national-patriotic values. In fact, *Nashi*'s intimate connections with Putin's regime, despite the group's attempts to disguise them, were so obvious that the organisation was often regarded as one of the Kremlin's propaganda tools.

The design, structure and particularly the aims behind *Nashi* were so similar to the Komsomol, that even its functionaries acknowledged that *Nashi*'s rigid discipline and Soviet nostalgia-inspired annual summer camps are meant to serve as reminders of the 'old times' (Comai 2012: 202:3). There is no lack of academic studies comparing *Nashi* and the Komsomol (Atwal 2009; Blum 2006; Heller 2008; Hemment 2012). Some scholars have even gone so far as comparing the linguistic similarities of *Nashi*'s rhetoric and mottos to those of Soviet public organisations (Lassila 2007: 12-14). Regardless of the formal and rhetorical similarities between *Nashi* and the Komsomol, by 2010 the movement claimed to be the largest youth voluntary organisation in the Russian Federation with branches in all regions of the country (Atwal and Bacon 2012). Keen to be perceived as open to ethnic minority groups, *Nashi* were fast to make the North Caucasus into one of its priority areas. This is commensurate with the region's status as having the 'highest percentage of youth population and the highest youth unemployment rate in the country...', as reported by Dafflon (2009: 5), making it the most challenging region in Russia for implementing a youth policy. Despite its boisterous Russian nationalist rhetoric, *Nashi* has sought to attract the North Caucasian youth into its projects, including

the annual ‘Seliger’ summer camps.<sup>14</sup> However, as Comai (2012: 200) observes, ‘*Nashi* seem to be particularly weak in a peripheral and complex region like the Northern Caucasus where they have limited presence and are looked at with suspicion as something exogenous’. A similar opinion had been voiced by a representative of a local civil society organisation, who added that ‘although *Nashi* have brought big money [to the North Caucasus] with them, their ideas and methods are not attractive for the local youth’.<sup>15</sup>

If *Nashi*’s close affiliation with the Kremlin could be accepted as normal in North Caucasus society, itself embedded in patron-client relations, its emphasis on ethnic Slavic nationalism and Russian patriotism could hardly be popular in this multi-ethnic and largely non-Slavic region. Despite *Nashi*’s attempts to emphasise the unity of North Caucasus’ peoples and to embrace the ‘Caucasus identity’, the organisation faced almost an impossible task of re-formulating the concept of Russian patriotism for North Caucasus youth. In contrast to the Soviet Komsomol, *Nashi* was a voluntary organisation and regardless of its access to financial and administrative resources of the state, it lacked the coercive power of communist-era public youth organisations in recruiting its members. Therefore, notwithstanding its attempts to imitate the Komsomol, *Nashi* simply could not force young people to join. As noted by a civil activist in Makhachkala, Dagestan: ‘Pro-Putin activism is only of interest for republican administrators, not for young people who do not see any benefit in taking part in [*Nashi*] rallies and other propagandist events’.<sup>16</sup>

*Nashi* was not the only Komsomol-like organisation with mass membership in the Russian Federation. The youth wing of the ruling United Russia party, *Molodaia Gvardiia*, was also created in 2005, and proved itself a strong competitor to *Nashi* for both the attention of the ruling elite and United Russia’s financial resources. Initially overshadowed by *Nashi*, *Molodaia Gvardiia* began strengthening its position from 2010 onwards, acting as the key tool of United Russia in mobilising

youth in its favour. With over 10,000 registered members all over the Russian Federation by 2013, *Molodaia Gvardiia*, in contrast to *Nashi*, did not attempt to hide its affiliation with United Russia and officially identifies itself as an integral part of the party. Besides, the Kremlin is keen to emphasise that both *Nashi* and *Molodaia Gvardiia* perform important, but ‘slightly’ different tasks for the government.<sup>17</sup> However, the main distinction is that while *Molodaia Gvardiia* was designed to mobilise youth in support of United Russia, encouraging electoral participation and pro-United Russia political awareness, *Nashi*’s structure was more of an all-purpose mass youth movement promoting patriotic values and invigorating young people’s involvement in pro-regime actions.

Therefore, in contrast to *Nashi*’s ‘hearts and minds’-centred approach to young people in the North Caucasus, *Molodaia Gvardiia* has dealt with the challenge in a ‘top-down’ manner. *Molodaia Gvardiia*’s regional headquarters were tightly linked to United Russia’s regional offices with the help of which they gained direct access to Kremlin-appointed republican heads in the North Caucasus. According to a local administrator in Kabardino-Balkaria, ‘[for young people] membership in United Russia often entails membership in *Molodaia Gvardiia*. In fact, being a member of *Molodaia Gvardiia* is beneficial for promotion in UR.’<sup>18</sup> Recruitment of young people into the ranks of *Molodaia Gvardiia*, and in favour of United Russia’s cause was, thereby conducted by regional officials via local ministries or committees of youth affairs. As a result, *Molodaia Gvardiia* claimed a strong presence in the North Caucasus, boasting scores of ‘volunteers’ operating in such *Nashi*-unfriendly areas as Chechnya and Dagestan. On July 2010, in Stavropol’, *Molodaia Gvardiia* organised a summer camp-forum for young people of the North Caucasus, which was designed with broader aims than *Nashi*’s camp in the Lake Seliger. The following month, *Molodaia Gvardiia*, with help from United Russia, organised a large-scale youth-forum ‘Caucasus – 2020’ held in the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, Nalchik. Regardless of serious security concerns<sup>19</sup>, the forum attracted over 900 participants from all

over Russia, and was praised by United Russia as an event of ‘a nation-wide magnitude’ (Kavkazskii Uzel 2010). Although the 2010 summer camp and the youth-forum were applauded by the state-controlled mass media and regional authorities alike as a great success and a key step forward towards the invigoration of youth activism in the North Caucasus (Ibid), the organisers and participants of these two events neither achieved any significant progress, beyond bonding and socialising, nor prepared any plans for future similar actions. As a result, no other youth summer camps were held in the North Caucasus since 2010 and no events similar in scale to the 2010 ‘Caucasus – 2020’ youth-forums were organised by the group.

Having realised the shortcomings of both *Nashi* and *Molodaia Gvardiia* in the North Caucasus, the Kremlin came up with the idea of Caucasus-only youth organisations. For instance, created by the head of the North Caucasus Federal District, Aleksandr Khloponin, the ‘All-Caucasian Alliance of Youth’ in 2010 was expected to serve as an umbrella youth organisation in the region (Kavkazskii Uzel 2010). However, the Alliance remained a rather shadowy government-organised non-governmental organisation (GONGO) with no available membership statistics and limited presence online. Apart from regional youth organisations, the local administrations also set up republican state-controlled youth groups.<sup>20</sup> Without exception, all of the Kremlin-organised youth groups prioritise patriotic development of youth as their key objective. Some even make no efforts to conceal their affiliation with ruling elites and political actors.<sup>21</sup> While many of the GONGOs claim to have hundreds or thousands of members, with the exception of *Nashi* and *Molodaia Gvardiia*, most if not all local state-created youth organisations in the North Caucasus are on paper-only groups as they do not implement any projects, have no contact details apart from their postal addresses and make only limited information about themselves available to the public.

Examples of the two largest regime-supported youth organisations in the North Caucasus demonstrate characteristically Soviet patterns of attitudes and behaviours towards civic participation. For instance, voluntary and presenting themselves as independent, *Nashi* has remained unpopular and has a limited membership in the North Caucasus. In contrast, as a clearly regime-affiliated group that prioritises party-based recruitment *Molodaia Gvardiia* has a far more numerous membership and wider outreach. Both groups were heavily politicised, state-funded, and patriotically-oriented. Similarly to participation in the Soviet Komsomol, membership in *Molodaia Gvardiia* became associated with political interests and incentives, such as advantages in applying for state jobs and other membership benefits offered by United Russia. Since such benefits are few in *Nashi*, the group is less popular. While both groups are emphasising patriotism and ‘national values’, *Molodaia Gvardiia* implements its policies through ethnic elites in the North Caucasus, therefore, distilling its patriotic rhetoric into local contexts. One particular strategy employed by the organisation to achieve that goal was to promote the image of Russia as of multi-ethnic federal state, and of Russian President as patron of the North Caucasus.

The Kremlin’s attempts to re-introduce mass youth organisations analogous to the Soviet Komsomol were far from successful both in the North Caucasus and in the rest of Russia.<sup>22</sup> As a bearer of the Soviet youth organisations’ legacy *Nashi* and *Molodaya Gvardiia* are an institutional effort to re-build the Soviet-style hierarchical state-dependent and propaganda-centred public sector. Rejection of these organisations amongst North Caucasian youth is not merely an effect of post-communist distrust of civic association based on Soviet experiences, but also an aversion to government-co-opted and politicised civil society. The latter continues to sustain the image of the civil sector as closely connected to the state and serving as a tool of pro-regime mobilisation and indoctrination. The Russian government’s failure to re-build state-controlled youth mobilisation has backfired not only in the

young people's distrust of *Nashi*, but also in the disregard of youth organisations and youth indifference to any form of civic engagement. In their study on youth participation in the North Caucasus La Cava and Michael (2006: 40) argue that notwithstanding the government's attempts to spread information about youth organisations: a 'majority of respondents did not know of a single organization that worked with young people in their communities. In Dagestan, the Head of the Youth Department at the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Tourism himself was unable to name a single youth group or NGO or discuss the work that they do'.

In the almost complete absence of independent youth organisations, regime-promoted youth groups serve as the only form of youth activism known, if at all, to the majority of North Caucasus residents. These groups are not only direct successors of the Soviet Komsomol, but are also its ideological and institutional descendants. Rather than 're-purposing' the extant but no longer credible structure of the Komsomol, which continues to exist in contemporary Russia, Russian political elites chose to construct different, but similar structures: voluntary regime-controlled youth groups. These groups, formally unaffiliated with the post-Soviet Komsomol, nevertheless, adopted its methods and structures. They also present a clear example of the survival of Soviet institutional and individual legacies. The very logic behind such groups lies both in the deliberate attempts by post-Soviet elites to preserve the norms and customs of antecedent institutions and in unchanged popular attitudes and mistrust towards civil association.

### **Youth organisations in the South Caucasus**

Although in the 1990s youth civil society organisations in the South Caucasus were disorganised and distrusted by the population, youth volunteerism was relatively free of state intervention.<sup>23</sup> Low participation in youth organisations, as well as in other forms of organised civil society in post-Soviet

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia could be explained by Howard's (2003) theory on the mistrust of communist public organisations. The latter were hated and despised in the 1980s and the early 1990s South Caucasus more than anywhere else in the former USSR, with the exception of Baltic countries. In Azerbaijan and Georgia the mass exodus from the CPSU and its affiliated organisations began as early as in 1988 (Beissinger 2002). For the next decade the negative image of oppressive Communist organisations could certainly be held accountable for weak civil society across the South Caucasus. Yet, in 2000s the *perestroika*-age youth generation was succeeded by the post-communist youth who knew little about either the Komsomol, or the Soviet era mass youth organisations. However, similarly to young people in the 1990s, ten and even twenty years after the dissolution of the USSR, youth in the South Caucasus continued to reject civic volunteerism (Aliyev 2016). In a manner similar to the Russian state, governments in the South Caucasus soon realised the significance of youth mobilisation and the importance of controlling it. The pivotal role of youth movements in anti-authoritarian 'colour' revolutions in the former socialist bloc, in particular in Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia, convinced political elites in the Caucasus that the state control of youth mobilisation is essential in securing the survival of undemocratic regimes. The first to purposefully imitate the re-creation of Komsomol-like youth activities in the South Caucasus was the government of Azerbaijan. The leader of post-communist Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, ensured that the old CPSU and Komsomol cadres were reinstalled as heads of new institutions.<sup>24</sup> As argued by Diuk (2012: 75): 'Under Aliyev, a modified system of official youth structures reminiscent of Soviet times was re-established'. Closely affiliated with the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*), the youth organisation *Ireli* was founded in 2005 by the authorities and similarly to *Nashi* in Russia soon became the largest youth voluntary organisation in the country (Nikolayenko 2012: 48). Unlike Russia's *Nashi* and the *Molodaia Gvardiia*, *Ireli* deliberately avoided associating itself with the regime and refrained from

active pro-government propaganda. Though financed and supervised by the government, *Ireli* formally identified its goals as to: ‘...support the development of democracy and human resources, to protect human rights and to carry out work aimed at ensuring civil freedoms’.<sup>25</sup> Unlike other pro-democratic youth groups, *Ireli* has never had any of its activists persecuted for protests against the government, or in support of human rights and democracy (Diuk 2012: 85). Apart from its focus on democratic governance, *Ireli* emphasised the importance of patriotic education and propaganda. In contrast to *Nashi*’s obvious imitation of the Komsomol, *Ireli* has worked to combine Western democratic values with the Soviet design of public association, placing an emphasis on democracy, civic freedoms and national patriotism entangled with unconditional support for the ruling regime, thereby, defining civic participation as a duty to be performed for the sake of nation and the state. The movement has claimed to have over 30,000 members. Nevertheless, youth participation in civil society in Azerbaijan is low.<sup>26</sup> Although different from *Nashi* and even more so from the Soviet Komsomol, the largest youth organisation in Azerbaijan, nonetheless possesses two intrinsic characteristics of the communist youth civic association: patron-client relations with the state and strong national-patriotism.

Youth mobilisation in Armenia remains amongst the lowest in the Caucasus and participation in organised youth organisations is even lower than in Azerbaijan. The Caucasus Barometer survey in 2011 reported that only 4 per cent of Armenians between 18 and 35 years old mentioned that they are involved in civil society activities, while 96 per cent of respondents indicated that they do not participate in civic work. Although there were no deliberate attempts made to create youth organisations similar to the Komsomol in Armenia, existing voluntary youth groups were not particularly different from their contemporaries in other countries of the South Caucasus. Most active youth NGOs are coordinated by the National Youth Council, accountable to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hakobyan and Tadevosyan 2011). According to the Council of Europe’s report on

youth policies in Armenia, from 2009 the state funding of youth organisations reached over USD1 million per year (Ibid.: 50). The largest Armenian youth organisation is the Armenian Youth Federation, itself an offshoot of a radical nationalist party Armenian Revolutionary Federation founded in the 1920s, claimed to have over 10,000 members. The Armenia Youth Federation maintained close contacts – facilitated by Dashnaktsutyun that have been part of the ruling coalition under Serzh Sargsyan - with the political elites and did not even attempt to conceal its involvement in politics. The organisation's statute defines its two key goals as: (1) '...to develop interest among the Armenian youth toward politics'; and (2) '...struggle for the just resolution of the Armenian Cause'.<sup>27</sup> Although relatively liberal, by the standards of the Caucasus, the regime of Serzh Sargsyan was slow to embark on mobilising youth for its purposes in a manner similar to Russia and Azerbaijan. The situation has changed dramatically after the success of 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018, which involved participation of large numbers of young people. The newly elected government of Nikol Pashinyan seems determined to engage youth in its state-building efforts.<sup>28</sup>

Both the European Values Survey and the Caucasus Barometer surveys almost unanimously suggest that the lowest participation in youth organisations in the South Caucasus is in Georgia.<sup>29</sup> According to Caucasus Barometer survey on 'Volunteerism and Civic Participation' in 2011 only 1 per cent of young Georgians were members of NGOs, professional clubs, cultural or sports unions. Ninety-nine per cent of the survey's young participants admitted that they had no involvement in voluntary civic work. However, the lack of interest towards civil society amongst young Georgians was not always the case. In the late 1990s the corrupt authoritarian regime of the former Soviet leader of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, gave birth to the most democratic and vibrant youth movement in the Caucasus – *Kmara!* Created partly as a student movement, and partly as grassroots non-hierarchical youth organisation, *Kmara!* was strongly influenced by the Serbian anti-Milosevic youth

movement *Otpor!* ('Resistance'), and during its early years adopted many of *Otpor!*'s tactics in their struggle against Shevardnadze's regime (Ó Beacháin and Polese 2010; Nikolayenko 2007). Although *Kmara!* may also be described as a political movement, it nevertheless was more of a civil society organisation than a political force. The group harboured no aspirations for political office and concealed its connections to political actors. In the words of a former member of *Kmara!*, 'the movement was designed as force to challenge crooked and corrupt politicians rather than trying to engage with them in a dialogue'.<sup>30</sup>

As claimed by Kandelaki (2006: 5): 'A new phenomenon in the post-Soviet world, *Kmara!* succeeded in breaking through the public's political apathy, particularly among young people'. At its peak in 2003 *Kmara!*'s estimated membership exceeded 3,000 activists and unknown number of supporters (Bunce and Wolchik 2006: 61). Although unlike *Otpor!*, *Kmara!* was not the leading force in overthrowing the authoritarian government during the 2003 'Rose Revolution', the movement succeeded in mobilising masses of young people against the regime which ultimately led to its collapse. Independent and pro-democratic at first sight, *Kmara!* was nevertheless closely connected to the new Georgian leader, Mikheil Saakashvili. As observed by Bunce and Wolchik (2006: 61): '...*Kmara* enjoyed a much closer relationship with partisan political leaders, particularly those grouped around Mikheil Saakashvili'. Sadly for the Georgian pro-democratic youth mobilisation, the end of the 'Rose Revolution' signalled the end of *Kmara!* and the decrease in youth participation in civic activities. The intimate ties of *Kmara!* with the new Georgian leadership provided political elites with networks to control the youth organisation (Aliyev 2014b). In Hanenkrat's (2011: 37) words: 'Saakashvili appears to have established a relationship with *Kmara!*'s activists that creates fear of the external (Russia and others) and an unwavering trust of and sense of security within the state. In doing so, the likelihood for *Kmara!* to play an active role in checking Saakashvili's power severely

diminished'. Although it remains unclear what caused the dissolution of *Kmara!*, by 2004 the movement had all but vanished. While some of its members joined the pro-government Liberty Institute NGO, others became members of Saakashvili's government, or simply ceased participating in youth activities (Manning 2007; Nikolayenko 2009). As argued by a representative of civil advocacy organisation in Tbilisi, 'such groups as *Kmara!* provided [Saakashvili] government with cadres, ... who, due to their previous experience of challenging the authorities, were very authoritarian and refused to accept alternative opinions [in politics]'.<sup>31</sup> *Kmara!*'s brief rise and fall, nonetheless, could not disguise the fact that the movement was highly politicised and, similarly to other youth civic groups in the Caucasus, heavily relied on national-patriotism as one of its key tenets. It is not surprising that the *Kmara!* movement never managed to gain popularity in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, populated by non-Georgian ethnic minorities (Nikolayenko 2009).<sup>32</sup> *Kmara!*'s pro-Saakashvili stance remained obvious; despite scoring considerable successes in fight against corruption and implementing administrative and judicial reforms, Saakashvili's regime did not achieve any significant progress in democratising the country.<sup>33</sup> Amongst other large youth groups in the Caucasus, the Georgian *Kmara!* was the least similar to the Soviet Komsomol. Unlike youth groups in Armenia and particularly in Azerbaijan, neither *Kmara!*'s birth, nor its short existence was influenced by the legacy of the Soviet mass organisations. Yet it too could be characterised by patron-client relations with political actors and consistent nationalist-patriotic agenda. The dramatic fall in civil participation amongst young people, which followed the dissolution of *Kmara!* in the aftermath of the Georgian 'Rose Revolution', presented another example of post-communist youth's disillusionment with formal civil society.

## **Conclusion: continuity of Caucasus' youth organisations**

This analysis of post-Soviet youth voluntary groups in the Caucasus emphasises two key characteristics of such organisations. Firstly, for many youth organisations across the Caucasus, the state or other political actors were not only the main financial donors, but also the patrons and founders. In fact, many of the groups discussed in this chapter were created with a particular goal of performing analogous tasks to those of the Soviet Komsomol, such as assisting the state in controlling, mobilising and indoctrinating youth. The analysis of post-communist youth groups in the Caucasus shows that the largest, the most prominent and sustainable organisations were also closely associated with political actors.

Secondly, an inseparable feature of all major youth organisations in the post-Soviet Caucasus is an emphasis on patriotism and the nationalist mobilisation of young people. While nationalist mobilisation is a post-Soviet phenomenon, brought on by a wave of rising nationalist self-consciousness in the 1990s, orthodox national patriotism was also one of the core tenets of communist public organisations. However, in contrast to the international socialist patriotism of the Komsomol and other Soviet public mass organisations, post-Soviet youth groups across the Caucasus constructed their notion of patriotic civil volunteerism as based on national or ethnic identity, which often promoted intolerance towards ethnic minorities and inconsistency with principles of regional and international civic cooperation. Whether by design, as in the case of Russia's and Azerbaijan's youth organisations, or by reflecting popular attitudes and perceptions, as in Armenia and Georgia, the continuity of institutional and attitudinal perception of youth activism as politicised, state-connected and patriotic, persistently resurfaced in the post-Soviet Caucasus.

In the North Caucasus and Azerbaijan, patterns of youth mobilisation reveal notable elements of institutional design, meaning that 'new' post-Soviet youth voluntary organisations did not appear

spontaneously as a result of democratic civil invigoration, but were created by Soviet-era elites. The norms and customs of the Soviet Komsomol, which were expected by the elites to ‘revive’ nostalgic individual attitudes and behaviours of the population, were purposefully instilled into the ‘new’ youth organisations. Both in Russia and Azerbaijan, the founders of such youth groups have kept a safe distance from unpopular and archaic communist youth organisations, such as the surviving post-Soviet Komsomol and Pioneer organisations. Carefully avoiding association of the ‘new’ groups with the Komsomol, the founders of *Nashi*, *Molodaia Gvardiia* and *Ireli* encouraged as little institutional ‘conversion’ as possible. However, organisational structure, ideology, operational principles and, most of all, the purpose of these post-communist youth organisations continued reflecting the norms and customs of antecedent communist institutions.

By contrast, youth activism in Armenia and Georgia was not necessarily artificially designed by the elites, or purposefully created to perform the task of pro-regime youth mobilisation. The Armenian and especially Georgian youth groups did not deliberately emulate the Komsomol’s tactics and methods. Yet they too became entangled in patron-client relations with political actors and irrevocably adopted national-patriotism as part of their ideology. While the development of youth organisations in these two South Caucasus countries was not a direct outcome of institutional redesign, the lack of elite transformation and the continuity of Soviet-era institutional and individual legacies resulted in these groups’ adopting politicised and non-egalitarian structures (Nikolayenko 2009; Aliyev 2015c). It has also contributed to their inability to facilitate democratic and inclusive civil society.

The experience of post-Soviet youth organisations in the Caucasus demonstrates that often the continuity of civic traditions is sustained by both the elites and masses. Indeed, survival of regime-supported politicised civil groups is possible as long as they can recruit their members. Since people usually join such groups voluntarily, although apparently also motivated by membership benefits,

popular attitudes towards these organisations are an essential element of their continuity. Unlike thousands of fictitious NGOs, youth organisations such as *Nashi* and *Ireli* succeed in attracting, albeit not *en masse*, young people to join them voluntarily. However, the overall inefficiency, clientelism, nationalism and the emphasis on patriotic duty intrinsic to these organisations, also serve to deter young people from joining them. As memories of the communist past, both negative and positive, are fading with time, it is the current performance of these organisations that matters. As with many other types of post-communist civil association in the Caucasus, the continuity of civic traditions in youth organisations is engendered by the lack of both institutional and individual transformation. With institutional changes in place, it could be expected that attitudinal-behavioural legacy of the communist past would eventually fade away. However, post-communist elites in the Caucasus continue to imitate characteristically Soviet methods of youth indoctrination and socialisation. As elites continue to maintain youth organisations as a wing of their wider political machines and propaganda, the population perceives organised youth activism as an intrinsically political activity.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> When referring to the civil society, the terms 'civil' and 'civic' used here are interchangeable, which is similar to how these terms were presented in the works of Cohen and Arato 1994, Putnam et al. 1994, Keane 1998 and Seligman 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Accessible at: <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/previous-surveys-1981-2008/survey-2008/>. Accessed on 4 January 2019.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, as observed by Diuk (2012) during her study of youth groups in Azerbaijan, most of the pro-democracy organisations, established in the aftermath of 'colour revolutions', had hardly over one hundred members.

<sup>4</sup> TsK is an abbreviation for 'Tsentral'nyi Komitet' ('Central Committee') in Russian.

<sup>5</sup> This includes the Komsomol's offshoots for younger children – the Pioneer and Octobrist organisations.

<sup>6</sup> The statute of Komsomol indicated that only: '...ideologically advanced, young people loyal to the Soviet motherland between the ages of 14 and 28 can become members of Komsomol'.

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<sup>7</sup> The survey's title is: 'Tsennosti-84: Sravnitel'nyi Analiz Interiorizatsii Tsennostei v Razvitom Sotsialisticheskom Obshestve' and it was conducted by the Institute for Sociological Research, the Academy of Sciences of USSR.

<sup>8</sup> The second president of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, as well as the second president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze occupied different positions in Komsomol during the Soviet period.

<sup>9</sup> The Komsomol continues to function in post-communist Russia and officially in the North Caucasus, but it only has several dozen members.

<sup>10</sup> Representative survey conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation (POF) in 2002 in all geo-economic regions of the Russian Federation reported that only 3 per cent of respondents between 14 and 30 years old stated that they currently participate in the work of youth organisations, another 18 per cent mentioned that they used to take part in youth work before and 77 per cent responded that they never participated in youth voluntary work.

<sup>11</sup> The All-Union Pioneer Organisation was the Soviet mass youth organisation for children aged between 9 and 15 years old.

<sup>12</sup> According to the aforementioned POF survey, out of 24 per cent of those who responded to the question on current membership in youth organisations 11 per cent named Pioneer organisation, 6 per cent Komsomol and 2 per cent said they are members of interest clubs.

<sup>13</sup> The continuity of communist public organisations' legacy is a phenomenon occasionally observed even beyond the former Soviet Union. Magner's study (2005: 57-8) on civil association of post-communist Poland confirms that the Polish communist mass youth organisation, the Union of Socialist Polish Youth (ZSMP - *Związek Socjalistycznej Młodzieży Polskiej*), after a drastic decrease in membership following the end of communist rule in Poland, experienced a recent rise in member numbers.

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<sup>14</sup> *Nashi*-organised youth summer camps are not only venues for recreation and entertainment, but similarly to the Soviet Komsomol and Pioneer summer camps include daily lectures, seminars, discussion forums and group activities to increase political consciousness of young people. The *Nashi* has held its annual summer camps on the shores of Lake Seliger in Tverskaia *oblast'* between Moscow and St. Petersburg.

<sup>15</sup> Author's interview with a manager of a local NGO in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, August 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Author's interview with a civil activist in Makhachkala, Dagestan, July 2013.

<sup>17</sup> As stated by the Commissar of *Nashi*, Ilia Kostunov, during the Seliger summer camp programme in 2009: 'The *Molodaia Gvardiia* are the "cardinal's guardians" and *Nashi* are the "king's musketeers". Both organisations were created to perform different tasks. *Molodaia Gvardiia* pursues an intellectual approach and *Nashi's* goal is mainly to implement mass street actions'. Ilia Kostunov's speech at Seliger, 2 July, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Author's interview with a local official, Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, August 2014.

<sup>19</sup> With no apparent connection to the youth-forum, Kabardino-Balkaria's insurgents conducted a high-profile attack on the republic's only hydroelectric plant, nearly destroying its key facilities while the youth event was at its early stage.

<sup>20</sup> Lists of these organisations are available on the websites of the Committee on Youth Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan at <http://dagmol.ru>, Ministry of Youth and Sport of Republic of North Ossetia at <http://molsport.ru>, Committee on Youth Affairs of Ingushetia at <http://kdm06.ru/> and the Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Chechen Republic at <http://chechenmol.ru>.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Chechen Republic specifies that there are only two local youth movements in the republic. First is the Patriotic Movement 'Akhmad' referring to the late Akhmad Kadyrov, father of the incumbent leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and the first Moscow-appointed president of the republic after the Second Chechen

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War. The second organisation is the Patriotic Movement ‘Putin’, obviously named after the incumbent President of the Russian Federation.

<sup>22</sup> According to opinion polls conducted by an independent public survey group, Levada Centre, in 2010 only six percent of Moscow’s youth indicated any interest in *Nashi*.

<sup>23</sup> Based on the World Values Survey in 1996-7, among young people from 15 to 29 years old only 2.7 per cent in Azerbaijan, 9.3 per cent in Armenia and 1.9 per cent in Georgia participated in sports or recreation organisations. In addition, 0.4 per cent of young people in Azerbaijan, 2.2 per cent in Armenia and 0.9 per cent in Georgia indicated membership in charitable or humanitarian organisations.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the first head of Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Youth and Sport, Abulfaz Garayev, was a former Komsomol official.

<sup>25</sup> The Charter of the ‘Ireli’ Public Union, accessible at: <http://www.ireli.az/>.

<sup>26</sup> According to the Caucasus Barometer 2011 representative survey in Azerbaijan only 6 per cent of people between 18 and 35 years old participated in civil society activities. Similar figures are provided by Diuk (2012: 87), whose representative survey in Azerbaijan in 2010 revealed that 93.8 per cent of young people did not participate in voluntary civic activities while only 1.2 per cent of respondents claimed to have taken part in civic activities.

<sup>27</sup> The statute of the Armenian Youth Federation, accessible at: <http://www.ayf.am/>. ‘Armenian Cause’ is the creation of independent and united Armenia.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-youth-the-engine-of-the-revolution-fight-for-a-fairer-society>.

<sup>29</sup> The survey findings from the European Values Studies (EVS) survey findings indicate that only 0.4 per cent of people participated in youth organisations in Georgia in 2008. The Caucasus Barometer survey in 2011 reports that only 5 per cent of people aged 18 to 35 years old

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indicated their involvement in civic activities. 95 per cent of respondents mentioned that they do not participate in civil work.

<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with a former member of *Kmara!*, Tbilisi, Georgia, September 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Author's interview with a member of civil society, Tbilisi, Georgia, September 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Since most of *Kmara!*'s activists were ethnic Georgians, the group was not recognised by Abkhaz and Ossetian minorities. Besides, its close association with Saakashvili, a staunch advocate of unification of Georgia with breakaway regions, was not very likely to make *Kmara!* popular amongst non-Georgian minorities.

<sup>33</sup> According to the Nations in Transit (NIT) democracy ratings, the Georgian democratic score in 2002, that is before the 'Rose Revolution' and Saakashvili's ascend to power, was higher than democracy scores that country received from 2003 to 2011. See at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2003/georgia>. Accessed on 5 December 2018.