



newsletter of liberal international british group

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As reported by Mark Smulian

Liberal International gathered for its Congress in Sofia, Bulgaria, in May barely a week after the UK's general election and so it was a somewhat depleted and exhausted band who formed the combined delegation of LIBG, the Liberal Democrats and the Alliance Party.

Even before the congress opened the delegation found itself enmeshed in a dispute with our Bulgarian hosts over the position of delegates from Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party.

They had had difficulty securing permission to enter Bulgaria, it appeared as a result of pressure from Beijing. A compromise was reached, though the British delegation was firm that LI could not tolerate having the government of one country trying to dictate to the government of another who might attend its congresses from a third country. It was suggested that Beijing is monitoring the DPP's role in LI and may well try to make itself difficult in future.

The congress was hosted by two parties – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, a party supported mainly by Bulgaria's Turkish minority and a long standing LI member, and by the National Movement of Simeon II.

The latter is an unusual political party, which at the time ruled Bulgaria. The 'Simeon' of the title is the son of Bulgaria's last king and a cousin of the British royal family. He founded his party, won an election and became a 'royal' prime minister in a republic with a president. The party was admitted to LI at the congress but lost the general election that was held a few weeks later. How well a party that is such a personal creation can survive is not entirely clear unless Simeon intends to remain active in politics.

The main business of the congress was the theme resolution on freedom and security – a 1,000 word monster that sought to address almost every aspect of this vast subject.

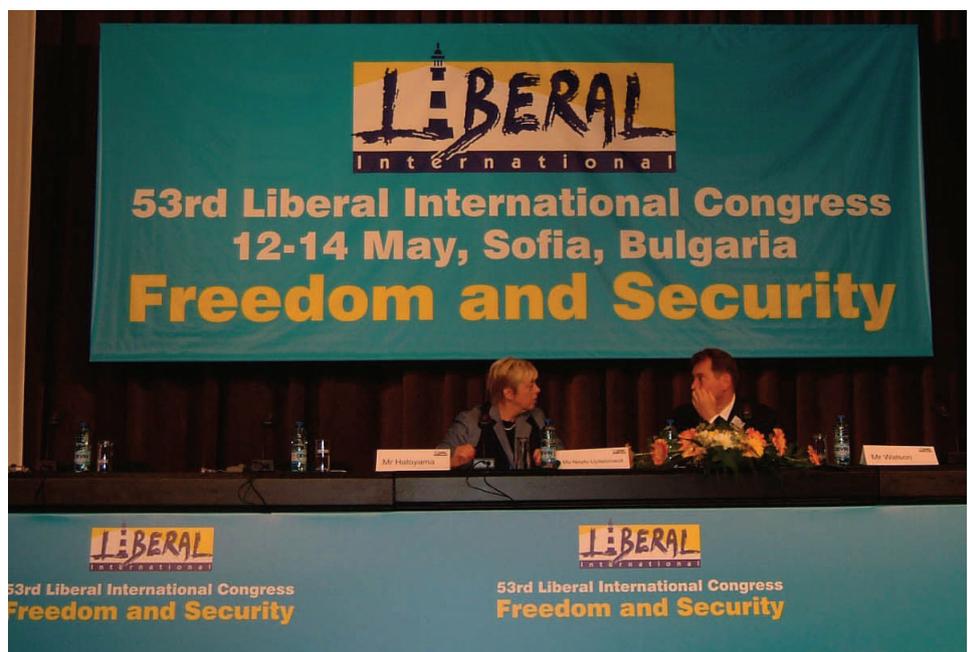
It is for others to describe what happen in the drafting session, as I ended up leading a small band comprising myself, Sue Simmonds and Tony Morris into the 'other resolutions' session.

The problem with this was that a large number of amendments – some drafting and some more substantial – were in the name of LIBG but none of the delegation present had ever seen them before. Nor, in some cases, was it immediately obvious what point they sought to make, and the three of us present had to busk our way through as best we could.

One that was obvious however was in the motion over Iraq, where we achieved a success in fighting off attempts by the VVD, the more right-wing of two Dutch Liberal parties, to water down the motion. Rather startlingly, the VVD objected to the observation that "the Iraqi people are still living under terrible conditions of economic and political uncertainty and in a very poor security situation".

It wanted that changed to "under difficult conditions...and in a problematic security situation". It also objected to the phrase that the Iraq people lived "under the presence of foreign troops". and wanted this replaced with "with the presence".

David Griffiths, who had joined us at this point, argued that this phrase was absurd, since 'with' could apply to any foreign troops in any country even with the full consent of its government and people. This went to plenary session, where we regrettably lost.



Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroek, outgoing LI President with Graham Watson MEP

Many of the 'other' resolutions were fairly uncontentious. Predictably though the one on the Middle East was not.

This was my second LI Congress and it seems, at least from my experience, that this motion has the qualities of a ritual joust.

It always lines up the Israeli delegation on one side and (usually) one of the Scandinavian parties on the other, with everyone else trying to stitch together some compromise wording.

Since a motion that decisively took either side in the conflict, or even decisively praised any action by the Israeli government or Palestinian Authority, would cause a huge row in the plenary session, another vital feature of this ritual is that we end up with a motion that says more or less nothing.

I was among a small drafting group sent away to concoct such a form of words. It was soon evident that no other delegation would have stood for the Israeli's rewritten motion, and that even the more moderate members of the Israeli delegation would not accept anything remotely like the motion tabled by the Norwegian Venstre party, which condemned the barrier that runs between Israeli and Palestinian areas.

I have used that circuitous description since the terms 'wall', 'barrier', 'security fence' and so on are so loaded on or other side that it was initially disputed how we should describe what we were talking about.

We ended up with a shopping list of matters that should form part of a fair and just solution, which included "the location of the border, the relocation and continued existence of the security fence," a formulation sufficiently vague that it passed the plenary session unopposed.

One feature of the congress that is, as I understand it, relatively new, is the growing presence of parties from Africa and Asia. The historic influence of parties from Europe, Canada and a few from South America is now being enriched from countries where it is, perhaps, surprising to find that Liberal parties exist.

Africa Liberal Network is serviced from Cowley Street and supported by grants from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Its members range from the governing PDS in Senegal (host of the previous congress), and the Democratic Party of South Africa (the main opposition and descendent of the old opposition party of apartheid times) to parties that are really up against it in hostile environments.

These include DR Congo's Anader and the Ivory Coast's Rassemblement des Republicains, both of which operate in conditions of civil war.

Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change is not a formal member, since it is a democracy movement rather than an ideological party, but had an observer present.

It operates in conditions where the outward forms of democracy might still appear to exist but in which thuggery and intimidation by the government make the MDC's work highly problematic.

The congress sent a message of support to the MDC and also to the Sam Rainsy Party of Cambodia, in recognition of the difficulties both face and their courage in struggling on. Rainsy had seen various previous names for his party all rapidly appropriated by pro-government organisations and so was forced to use his own name for his party.

Again, Cambodia is in theory a multi-party state but in practice his party has been forced to work as best it can in a system biased to the incumbents.

Even worse human rights abuses than these are taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan, a subject about which the congress tied itself in knots to no effect.

The problem began when a motion to condemn human rights abuses in Darfur had added to it a call for a permanent UN force able to intervene in such situations. There was some feeling that the latter was a separate issue and, regardless of its merits, should not be spirited through congress as part of a motion on Darfur.

This descended into a row in the plenary in which the German delegation sought withdraw the motion, others insisted it must be taken and shouting matches, unassisted by simultaneous translation, broke in various parts of the hall while the British delegation, which had not been involved, looked on in some bemusement.

The matter was eventually remitted to the LI executive due the Majorca in November and the congress thus managed to say nothing on one of the world's principle human rights emergencies and hardly covered itself in glory.

Congress always includes a number of social events, which form a large part of the purpose of attending, since they are a chance to meet members of Liberal parties from around the world.

First find your social event. The initial one was in the congress hall, a communist era building that looks as though it had recently landed from outer space in Sofia's main public park.

The floor numbering system and labyrinthine layout did not lend themselves to finding the venue. Showing an unusual herd instinct for Liberals, about 20 of us followed someone from Slovakia who appeared to know where he was going, only to end up in the street. When we did find the hall the unusual delicacies of 'wolfs salad' and 'garage cake' were among those on offer.

For each of the next two nights were entertained in villas formerly belonging, as far as I could make out, to the former communist dictator Todor Zhivkov and his defence ministry.

So much for the inevitable march of socialism, as several hundred Liberals ate and drank in Zhivkov's own former precincts.

Mark Smulian



MACEDONIA

While Euro-scepticism seems to be on the rise in many EU member states, enthusiasm for EU membership remains high on the periphery of the EU's borders – and nowhere more so than in Macedonia, where JONATHAN FRYER tested the political water during the country's recent local election campaign to see if liberal democracy can thrive in such an environment.

Small and perfectly-formed, the Balkan republic of Macedonia is hemmed in by larger and not always benevolent neighbours: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. Formerly part of Yugoslavia, Macedonia has even had to fight for the right to call itself by its own name since gaining independence, following a plebiscite, in 1991. Greece still argues that it should be called something else, as parts of historical Macedonia are in Greece. But gradually even the United States has lost patience with Athens and told it to stop being silly.

In French, *macedoine* means a fruit salad or other medley of ingredients thrown together, which is apt. Two-thirds of Macedonia's population are ethnic Macedonians, but there is a sizeable Albanian minority, as well as smaller groups of Bulgarians, Turks, Roma and others. Moreover, whereas the ethnic Macedonians are Orthodox Christians, many of the others are Muslims. Indeed, in the capital Skopje, Ottoman architecture, not least mosques, forms the most striking feature of the city centre.

Interestingly, during the awful Skopje earthquake of 1963, many Ottoman buildings remained standing, whereas most of the later European-style edifices came tumbling down. The rubble was replaced by characterless slabs of socialist 'modernism', which remain as a mournful reminder of the Communist past. But it is not only in the buildings that Tito's legacy is alive. Officially, Macedonia now has a multi-party democracy, yet with the exception of a few notable independent conservatives, most of the older faces are familiar as former Communist *apparatchiks*. Even the leader of the Macedonian Liberal Democrats (LDP), Risto Penov, is a former party luminary. And to be frank, there isn't much to distinguish between the policies of the Social Democrats, the major party in the country's ruling coalition, and the Liberal Democrats – the minor partner – or several other parties.

'It's all about personalities,' several interviewees told Jenna Ansell of the (UK) Liberal Democrats International Office and myself, when we went to Macedonia at the beginning of March, with assistance from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, to assess the LDP and the possibilities of bilateral or even multilateral cooperation. The timing was deliberate, at the beginning of the local election campaign, in which Mr Penov was trying to get elected for a third term as Mayor of Skopje. As the Social Democrats were backing him, his chances were in principle good.

The LDP, which seemed to have more money at its disposal in the campaign than was technically legal, had hired a very swish headquarters on Skopje's main square. Huge loudspeakers blasted out music, while inside (clearly visible through the plate-glass windows to passers-by) were state-of-the art computers, smart furniture and even a functioning cappuccino bar. All a bit of a contrast to the daily reality of a population whose living standards have fallen through the floor, and of whom well over 30% are officially unemployed. But Penov's main opponent Trifun Kostovski's billboards were pretty huge, and it

was clear he was spending quite a bit of money as well. He could afford to, as he is a multi-millionaire businessman, who has given the city lots of goodies as charitable donations.

We went to the opening election rally for Penov, which had Jenna rolling in the aisles, mainly because of an extraordinary show-time spectacle on stage, set out as if it were a park, in which kids were playing basketball, cycling and roller-blading, and mothers were happily pushing prams. Mayor Penov wandered amongst this happy throng, symbolically basking in the sunshine of his successful policies. When I quizzed a party functionary later about what these achievements had been, he thought for a few moments, before declaring emphatically, 'A new bus station!'

But to be fair, the LDP, tiny though it may be, and dwarfed by the Social Democrats, does have some impressive and hardworking personalities within it. One will be familiar to LibDems who have been active in international youth and student Liberalism: Emil Kirjas, who has been a leading light in IFLRY. Aged just 29, Kirjas is State Secretary in Macedonia's Foreign Office – the equivalent of the Permanent Secretary in British civil service terms. In Britain, of course, it would be quite unthinkable for such a politically active person to hold such a senior government post, but in several places on the Continent, they do things differently.

Talking with Kirjas was particularly interesting, because he recognized many of the LDP's weaknesses, as well as vaunting its qualities (such as the caliber of some LDP youth). He acknowledged a complaint we heard time and again in Macedonia that the LDP has no real political philosophy, and that it is stuck in the same trap as so many other parties in former Communist states in eastern Europe of functioning within a system in which patronage and corruption are still rife. Indeed, several politicians admitted quite openly that the main reason many people join a political party is because they hope this will help them get a job.

As the junior partner in the ruling coalition, the LDP can hardly criticize government policy openly. But as the natural home for Macedonian-speaking intellectuals, which it is, it could act as an effective forum for political debate and for promoting liberal ideas and ideals. It has spoken up for greater equality for women, though significantly at the Penov election rally, only one of the more than one dozen speakers was a woman. The party says it stands for protecting the environment, but when two young female demonstrators dressed in black bin-liners tried to make an ecological point at the rally, they were quickly bundled out. Gay and lesbian rights, we were told, were such a sensitive issue with the public that they could not possibly be espoused. As the LDP was only registering about 1 per cent in the national opinion polls, one wondered 'What would they have to lose?'

Paradoxically, it came as a breath of fresh air to go to the industrial town of Veles, which has long been notorious

for its pollution. Actually, that has been getting better recently, largely because so many of its factories have gone bankrupt and shut down. Veles also had an LDP Mayor standing for re-election, Ace Kosevski, who gave one the impression of understanding absolutely what community politics is all about. We attended one of his election rallies. This entailed standing on a piece of waste ground, on a freezing cold night, in the middle of a ghastly Communist era housing estate, while people came out of the apartment blocks to listen and put questions. Quite a crowd gathered, despite the subzero conditions. And although my Macedonian is rusty, it was clear that most of them were saying, 'Yeah! We're wiv you, mate!'

The thing that united Penov and Kosevski, and indeed every other politician we spoke to, was an ardent desire to get into the European Union. The EU is seen by the common people as being the likeliest route to salvation for Macedonia, not just because of all the investment and structural funds they hope will come flooding in, but in far more personal ways. With European passports, they will be able to travel, whereas with their current Macedonian passports they can go hardly anywhere without a visa (worse than their situation when they were part of Yugoslavia). And a very high percentage of Macedonian youth, in particular, openly wants to leave. Maybe not for good, but for the short- to medium-term.

Others are determined to stay and fight for the true democratization of the country. There is an impressive number of NGOs, functioning within a diverse civil society. And there are some good newspapers and magazines. So some of the conditions for a more inclusive and open society are there. I came away feeling that this gives the brighter, younger members of the LDP a golden opportunity to be pioneers in building this new society, if the party can break away from the past. And there could certainly be room for collaboration with UK Liberal Democrats and other members of the international Liberal family.

Moreover, the moment for new impetus within the LDP may well have arrived, not least because for all his raz-zamatazz, Risto Penov did not pull off his hat trick in Skopje. He fared so badly in the first round of the mayoral election that he withdrew before the second. And somewhat to his own surprise, the independent conservative opponent, Trifun Kostovski, was therefore a shoo-in. It will be fascinating now to see what happens in this obscure corner of south-east Europe, not just to find out whether we will have yet another country successfully lined up to join the EU over the next decade, but also whether the spirit and values of true liberal democracy can flourish on such superficially unpromising ground.

The writer and broadcaster JONATHAN FRYER is Vice-Chairman of London Region Liberal Democrats, and narrowly missed out on being elected to the European Parliament last year.

Sharon Bowles

Congratulations to last year's chair of the Group on becoming an MEP. Having been elected third to the Liberal Democrats list for the South-East European Elections in June 2004, Sharon became a member of the European Parliament in May 2005, replacing Chris Huhne who stood down following his election in Eastleigh in the 2005 General Election. Since taking her seat Sharon has spoken on malaria and tropical diseases, and the need for pharmaceutical companies to waive or reduce royalties on medicines for poor countries amongst other matters.



Letter from New Orleans

Dennis Graf

Americans have always loved New Orleans. It's different from the rest of the country. If it could be said that we had a "European style" city in America, it would have been New Orleans. Most of the rest of America still has something of a Puritanical veneer; not New Orleans. New Orleans was a place with a Latin soul, a city of great food, wonderful music, frenetic dancing and during Mardi Gras, extravagant costumes, occasional debauchery and not much serious overt religion. Political corruption was almost expected here and there's no question much of the city's misery and poverty flowed from it.

Much of the American Midwest was originally settled by the French, but only New Orleans and the state of Louisiana kept the tradition alive. Louisiana had a quite different legal system, for example, one based on Napoleonic law. A strange sort of French is still spoken by some people. In spite of, or maybe because of these differences, New Orleans was loved by many people, and that's one big reason why the destruction of the city was such a hard blow. There aren't many cities which you can say are "loved." Paris, of course. Maybe San Francisco, and possibly even Copenhagen for a few austere souls.

It was always known that New Orleans was located in a bad place. Much of the city is actually below sea level and while I don't really understand the arcane engineering techniques used to keep the city dry, it did seem to work for many decades. When Bush said that no one had ever expected that the levees would break, he was not telling the truth. The local paper had done a series of articles only a year or so ago on the subject and it was a widespread source of unease. I've never been to New Orleans, but I was aware of the problem.

There were two blows to New Orleans, one major, the other catastrophic. The major blow was a hurricane named "Katrina." (Names are easier to remember than numbers and there are many hurricanes.) This did heavy damage, but most of the destruction was further to the east in Mississippi. Before Katrina hit, the Louisiana gov-

ernor requested a “state of emergency,” which meant that the Federal Government had the right and the obligation to come to the rescue. The real blow to the city, the true tragedy, though, was the breaking up of the levees which held back a giant body of water, Lake Pontchartrain. This is what flooded the city and brought about the horrid suffering which everyone has seen in photographs. You won’t see many more photographs: the Bush people are now controlling the news in New Orleans as securely as they are in Iraq.

When the city started flooding the rather ill defined plan was to evacuate everyone. Since New Orleans, like most American cities is almost devoid of public transport (“A streetcar named Desire” is something from the old days) people were expected to drive out. Most people did, of course. The poorest people, mainly Black, either did not have cars or the money to buy gas, or, indeed, anywhere to go, so they stayed. (The flood inconveniently hit just before payday, the end of the month.) They also tended to live in the lowest and most dangerous part of the city. Many people died and the assumption is that we’ll never know how many.

There is a great deal of speculation, of course, about what effect all this will have on the American political equation. The “true believers” still back Bush. He has the corporate owned mass media behind him. Bush’s initial response was tepid, ambiguous and even a bit strange. His public image suffered and finally after a few days, he flew over the city and was photographed looking down quizzically at the devastation. He later came to the devastated area and had a “photo op” with some bewildered natives clustered in the background.

Bush has a severe public relations problem. He not only gave the impression of being detached and unconcerned, but the Federal agency involved, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) has received almost universal criticism, for inefficiency, arrogance, indecisiveness, mendacity and just general incompetence. There was a massive reorganization of many government departments a year or so ago and a new umbrella organization called the Department of Homeland Security was formed. FEMA is part of that. The Department of Homeland Security is widely considered something of a joke and television comics have had great fun with the yellow alerts, orange alerts and their recommendations for protecting ourselves from biological attacks with plastic sheeting and masking tape.

Bush’s choice to head FEMA was an obscure Republican hack named Michael Brown whose prior experience had been with an organization promoting Arabian horses. He had absolutely no background in disaster planning and apparently most of the people immediately below him had none either. In any case, they seemed ill prepared for the present disaster.

Flood control is the legal responsibility of the Federal Government and since these sorts of engineering projects can be quite expensive, cuts in funding are frequent. The Federal government has not, it is now clear, maintained these levees properly. The finger pointing has begun.

The Army Corps of Engineers is the group which builds and maintains flood control projects and they, apparently, wanted to upgrade the facilities but were not given enough money. An added problem for Louisiana has been that it usually votes Democratic and thus their representatives don’t have the ear of the President. In Washington the thoughts were on Iraq and the travails there and after that the possibilities of terrorism here in the United States. The question of natural disasters were well down the list. Back of all this, of course, is the Republican belief that government is, if not bad, at least undesirable, a necessary evil. The less government, the better – they say. Ronald Reagan used to tell us that “government is the problem.” I think it’s pretty hard to prove this during a time of mas-

sive natural disaster, but the administrations sycophants are already polishing their pitch.

Law enforcement in the face of natural disasters has usually been a local or state concern. When local police are overwhelmed the governor of the state can call out the National Guard, part time military people trained for this sort of work. Unfortunately, many of these Louisiana guardsmen were in Iraq, along with the kind of equipment necessary for disaster relief. It’s worse than it sounds: the kind of people who join the National Guard are quite often professional policemen and firemen in their civilian jobs, precisely the kind of people needed.

Bush’s people may be incompetent in governing, but they’re geniuses at molding public opinion. The Republican “spin machine” is at full speed now. Essentially what they’re doing is shifting the blame onto the local and state authorities in Louisiana. They control the media, so they’ll probably succeed. Both the mayor and the Louisiana governor are Democrats and like other state and local officials, their control over events and budgets is limited.

In any case, Bush and FEMA did have authority to intervene immediately and they did not. The neighboring state of Mississippi was also devastated in many parts, but Mississippi is a Republican state with a Republican governor, a former head of the Republican party, no less, and he faces no criticism from Bush or the national media.

New Orleans will be rebuilt, of course, but the ordinary American has been truly shocked and depressed and shamed by the photographs coming out of this great and sad city. The lasting image – and there is usually one or two photographs from any war or disaster – may well be that of the bloated corpses slowly floating down the street. That and the tens of thousands of Black people stuffed into the Superdome and the Convention center, without water, food or sanitation. For a few days, the curtain was ripped aside and Americans could quite clearly see the two nations.

Caucus on the Caucasus

Tom De Waal head of the Caucasus desk of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting was to be the sole speaker at the Group’s Spring Forum on the Caucasus. He started by outlining the complexity of the Caucasus region. Dagestan for example has 14 significant minorities. Pliny told us that when the Romans called a meeting of the tribes of the area they had to employ 100 interpreters. This is like the Balkans² as a problem. The groups are often isolated one from another, and communications are poor.

The countries of the Caucasus region are Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and within Russia, Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia

There are three breakway territories, Nagorno Karabakh (Azerbaijan), Abkhazia/South Ossetia (Georgia) and Chechnya (Russia). None of these formally exists, even Chechnya. The elites of these countries are criminalised and there is no incentive for regional cooperation.

Reasons for our interest in the Caucasus region:

1) *Frozen conflicts:*

Chechnya - no longer a fullscale war, rather intra-Chechen/criminalised.

Abkhazia / South Ossetia - nominally independent of Georgia, but not recognised as such. Economically annexed by Russia - South Ossetia uses the rouble, but there are indigenous causes as well as Russian manipulation.

Nagorno Karabakh - started in February 1988 in Soviet

days and is a breakaway Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan. In 1991 Nagorno Karabakh became part of an intra-state conflict. Armenia has controlled Nagorno Karabakh since 1994 and much of the surrounding area - around 10% of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan sees itself as the victim of an unresolved conflict.

All of these could destabilize a much larger area.

2) **Economic:** The Baku - Batumi pipeline is the largest infrastructure project in the world and is being built by a consortium led by BP. Caspian oil reserves are not huge, but attractive enough - 2.3% of world production. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey are sympathetic to the west. It will be followed by a gas pipeline through Azerbaijan and Turkey. It brings wealth to Azerbaijan (though this is plundered by the elites) and Georgia. But it creates polarities between Russia and the west; the cold war continues. Russia and South Ossetia versus Georgia is an aspect of this. These pipelines undermine the Russian pipeline. Russia remains a strong ally of Armenia, is ok with Azerbaijan, but has worse relations with Georgia. The pipeline and its pumping stations are potential targets for terrorists.

3) **The Caucasus is the margin of Europe:** The region forms part of EU Neighbourhood Policy - Chechnya included. Armenia is an ancient Christian country - from 301 AD and Georgia from the 5th century. Azerbaijan has a Shi'ite culture with Persian roots. The problem is the Stalinist borders. Separatism has dangerous precedents, but there is a need to respect the views of the *nationalities*. Kosova sets a precedent; it won't return to Serbia. The EU will have to face up to territorial integrity not being a sacred cow. Resources are limited; funds for Foreign Office backed projects have been raided for Iraq. Georgia has a French foreign minister, but is crisis driven.

Russell Johnston interjected that the rapporteur on political prisoners for the Council of Europe in Azerbaijan had had considerable success; Aliyev jnr. was better than Aliyev snr., but will he last? He thought that the solution to Nagorno Karabakh was a link into Armenia, (and similarly a link to the Azeri pocket in NK) and for the Armenians to give back the rest of the land they hold.

Heydar Aliyev - the father was a one man state in Soviet times, a KGB man, repressive but that worked. Azerbaijan can no longer run in that fashion and Ilham Aliyev has no experience. He tends to make things up on the hoof. At the moment he is coping, but there are huge feuds, clan warfare and crime which he is ill equipped to deal with.

Ethnic groups are both intermingled and separate, it is hard to generalise. Georgia is intermingled and is fairly progressive towards its minorities. Armenia and Azerbaijan have carried out mutual ethnic cleansing. The north Caucasus has some very small concentrated groups. The view that any minority is a 'guest' prevails. Russian is diminishing as the lingua franca of the region. In Georgia it is increasingly difficult to use Russian with the young. Russia does nothing to promote its language despite claims of interest in the area. In Georgia every embassy has donated books in their own language, except Russia.

Questions

Can Russia destroy progress?

The Georgian parliament can be irresponsible - declaring Russian bases in Georgia as illegal. The Russian political establishment is anti-Georgian. It has a grudge against the Rose Revolution which it sees as sponsored by George Soros and the CIA. The Georgian president is not diplomatic towards Russia. Russia opposes monitoring the Chechen-Georgia border (which must surely be in their interest). Plenty of people in Washington promote Cold War attitudes in Georgia, but Georgia has ultimately got to deal with Russia.

Crime

Crime is rife and institutionalised - part of the victor syndrome. In Armenia the military controls the oil trade. In the north Caucasus there are huge problems. Chechnya's pro Moscow government steals all and kidnaps its enemies. Drug trafficking is rife - part of the route to the west, and people trafficking.

The Armenian genocide

Richard Moore asked about Turkish recognition of the Armenian genocide. French policy in the region is influenced by it. Russia is keen to stir up Armenian-Turkish hostility. Both sides retain their own rhetoric, but 1915 is well in the past. It is led more by the Armenian Diaspora in the United States than native Armenians.

Russell Johnston commented on the impetuous nature of the new Georgian president and the loss of the prime minister. Did he really die from a leaking gas fire? Only in the Caucasus could a half Armenian prime minister meet a half Azeri friend, die as the result of an Iranian gas fire and everyone blame the Russians as the brains behind the incident.

EU Neighbourhood Policy brings little to the region. Turkish membership of the EU is the next big step, but failure in Cyprus should be recalled. Russell Johnston said that membership of the Council of Europe at least provides a framework for law and human rights.

Institute for War and Peace Reporting - see www.iwpr.net



Tom De Waal head of the Caucasus desk of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting

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21ST SEPTEMBER - 8.00PM

*HELP IS ALSO NEEDED
RUNNING OUR STALL!*

EVENTS

CAABU Forthcoming events

September:

****Wed 21st September**

**CAABU Fringe Meeting
Liberal Democrat Annual Conference**

Title: The Middle East Peace Process: Dead or Alive?

Speakers include Nick Clegg MP, Lib Dem Foreign Affairs Spokesperson and Chris Doyle, CAABU Director

Time: 6.30pm

Venue: Windsor Bar, Winter Gardens, Blackpool

Contact Gillian Watt <wattg@caabu.org> for further information

CAABU (Council for Arab-British Understanding)

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