

Peter Nasuti – Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-dissertation travel fellow (2010)

My Scott Kloeck-Jenson grant allowed me to spend the summer of 2010 in the Republic of Georgia, where I investigated the anti-corruption reforms that have taken place there since the Rose Revolution of 2003. I chose to study this country because its reforms in this area are among the most extensive in the world in the past few decades. By understanding how and why the government of President Mikhail Saakashvili was able to restructure state organizations and eliminate graft within them, I hope to move to a better understanding of how corruption can be combated and the rule of law can be strengthened in other developing countries.

At the turn of the millennium, corruption was rampant in Georgia. The country's police force was notorious for taking bribes, and the government had a low rate of official tax collection. Discontent with this state of affairs led to the Rose Revolution of 2003, through which the administration of Mikheil Saakashvili came to power. As a part of his mandate, Saakashvili prioritized anti-corruption reforms. In order to clean up the police force, he eliminated the majority of the police positions in the country, and then raised the salary of the remaining members. He also detained businessmen accused of withholding funds to the government, and only let them go when they had paid their back taxes. Although such methods were often extreme, they resulted in the elimination of most petty corruption within the country. In the Transparency International rankings, which measure the extent of corruption in a state, Georgia moved from 124th place (out of 133 states) in 2003 to 68th place (out of 178 states) in 2010, a gain unmatched among any other country in the world.

In order to look at this transition more closely, I plan to write my dissertation on the changes in Georgia. My pre-dissertation research was the first time I had traveled to Georgia, however. For this reason, one of my major objectives was to make contact with organizations that I could partner with in my future research. I was able to develop such a relationship with the Caucasus Research Resource Council (CRRC), a consortium that helps to coordinate social science research in Georgia. Among the resources of the Council are a database of original survey research available to members and an extensive library of books and periodicals pertaining to the South Caucasus. They also host a lecture series in which scholars of the region can present their findings. My meeting with the director of CRRC, Dr. Hans Gutbrod, was both helpful for suggesting avenues for future study and introducing me to different members of the Georgian research community. CRRC has agreed to serve as a partner organization for me when I return to the country for more extensive fieldwork.

In addition to making this institutional contact, I held a number of in-depth interviews with members of the Georgian NGO and policy communities. Some of the organizations I met with, such as Transparency International and the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, explicitly focus their work on anti-corruption issues. For this reason, they were able to give me a good perspective on the ways in which the Georgian government had managed to curb corruption. My other interviews put me into contact with Georgian analysts, such as Levan Ramishvili, who have been in close consultation with the national administration over the reforms and so could present me with an inside view into how these changes came about. The people I interviewed also shared with me

their contacts within the government, with whom I intend to meet when I return to the country.

From these interviews, I gained a new perspective on the reasons behind the success of the Georgian reforms. Most importantly, I came to see the extent to which macro-level features potentially shaped Saakashvili's actions. Many of my interview subjects mentioned how the poor relationship between Georgia and Russia led Georgia to seek close ties with the West as a counterbalance. As a result, Georgia was especially receptive to the need to conduct pro-Western reforms, and few opposition leaders would have wanted to stand publicly against such actions for fear of looking anti-Western and pro-Russian. This may have prevented the rise of an opposition coalition during the crucial years of 2004 to 2006 and allowed Saakashvili to accomplish his goals. Although this account is still a hypothesis that requires further testing, it has the potential of suggesting a new way of looking at institutional reform processes that takes into account broader structural issues.