The Reformers’ Dilemmas:
Fighting Corruption in Ukraine and Georgia

with

Bret Barrowman, PhD (GWU, 2015)

Discussants:

Robert Orttung, IERES

Irina Olimpieva, Center for Independent Social Research (St. Petersburg, Russia)

Both discussants are working on a project addressing anti-corruption strategies in Ukraine and Russia at the Kennan Institute.

Looking beyond the October 25th local elections, what are the prospects for anticorruption reform programs in Ukraine? Focusing on the political environment for reforms, Dr. Barrowman argues that political party building strategies affect politicians’ ability to credibly commit to implementing reform programs. In clientelistic political systems, in which political exchange is conducted through individualized inducements and coercion, politicians will be unwilling to commit to forgo the political benefits of corruption unless they are confident their competitors will do the same. However, politicians may mitigate these dilemmas by contesting elections with political parties based on constituencies from outside the traditional political establishment. Mikheil Saakashvili’s National Movement party, for example, incorporated new constituencies including urban civil society activists, and implemented a dramatic anticorruption program following the 2003 Rose Revolution. In contrast, Ukrainian political parties, including Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine bloc, and Petro Poroshenko’s Bloc have tended to rely on entrenched political and economic elites to produce votes. While the emergence of relatively programmatic parties like Samopomich (Self-Reliance) are therefore promising for reform, the implementation of a comprehensive anticorruption reform program remains unlikely as long as competing clientelistic groups dominate the political system. In fact, the marginal anticorruption reforms that followed the Euromaidan protest movement have tended to reflect these underlying patterns of clientelistic competition.

Bret Barrowman wrote his dissertation on public sector corruption and reform in clientelistic political systems, with a focus on comparing public sector reform in the Republic of Georgia and Ukraine. His research in both countries was supported by the American Councils for International Education Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training Program and the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University. His research interests include corruption, political clientelism, political parties, informal institutions, and state-building, with an emphasis on the former Soviet Union.

Thursday, November 5, 2015
4:00 pm – 5:30 pm
Voesar Conference Room
1957 E St. NW, Suite 412
Please RSVP at go.gwu.edu/barrowman