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INTRODUCTION

The present textbook addresses students of different disciplines, above all sociologists, political scientists, social geographers, economists, and jurists dealing with issues of stability and development at the local level. In real life, mutually exclusive concepts such as stability and development are poorly combined with one another. However, at the current stage of development of sociopolitical processes in the world, where great significance is attached to processes of globalization and increasing demands for development to ensure a certain consistency of local development factors, external threats and challenges as well as the intrusion of innovations and values may undermine local communities and, at times, lead to their destruction. Studying development and stability at the level of elementary social systems helps us to identify major and secondary factors of development. It is particularly important to pay attention to rapidly ongoing local processes in the analysis of contemporary conflicts. There is deficit of knowledge and methodological skills in learning about highly dynamic processes at the local level, which has proven to be particularly acute with regard to the study of state and societal structures emerging on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Despite the severe tests of endurance which befell the countries of the former USSR, local conflicts have not escalated into fundamental sub-regional conflicts, and basic everyday activities continued and continue to function. Anarchy and chaos, which were so frequently predicted in the Caucasus, for example, did not come about. In each separate region there is a tense internal struggle for resources, positions, spheres of influence, etc. Due to a large degree to this struggle, the adaptation to the new conditions has been painful, whereby the inevitable worsening of relations between different social strata and groups also frequently plays a positive role, in particular in multiethnic regions, where large-scale conflicts and violence are most expected. While there is a relatively wide range of literature dedicated to conflicts escalating into violence (for example many publications on Chechnya, Karabakh and Abkhazia), relatively little attention has been dedicated to regions in which conflicts remained on a manageable scale. Up to now, it remains poorly studied why in conditions of severe weakening of the state conflicts over power and limited resources did not turn into violence in most regions. This textbook draws the conclusion that the escalation of conflicts into violence was prevented by internal mechanisms of self-organization and self-administration, which are inherent in local communities and emerge through traditional and hybrid (state/traditional/non-formal) institutions. These institutions ensured the management of conflictual interests within non-violent frameworks.

This textbook is the result originated from research within the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement No. 613004 "Intra- and Inter-Societal Sources of Instability in the Caucasus and EU Opportunities to Respond (ISSICEU)".¹ The topic of stability and instability was also dealt with within the framework of other ongoing and previous studies carried out by employees, teachers and students of the Caucasian Graduate School of Conflict Studies [Gunya, Daksner, et al. 2013; Köhler, Gunya, Shogenov 2014; Köhler, Gunya 2011; Gunya, Köhler, Zürcher 2008].

The structure of the textbook comprises 12 interrelated themes. The themes are structured in such a way that the theoretical theme is accompanied by a theme dedicated to methods and approaches.

The textbook will be published in Russian to allow for a distribution to universities in the Caucasus. An English translation is considered.

¹ Official project website ISSICEU: <http://www.issiceu.eu>