

The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center Caucasus Office sponsored a guest lecture by Dr. Rebecca S. Katz, Professor of Sociology and Criminology, who discussed transnational corruption and organized crime on Thursday March 16th at the American Studies Library at Tbilisi State University. Dr. Katz spoke about the findings of her forthcoming book, “The Georgia Regime Crisis of 2003-2004”. Dr. Katz described the problem of organized crime as a problem rooted in the context of growing economic inequality both within Georgia, the United States as well as globally. Within this context as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer demands for otherwise unavailable or costly consumer goods is met by organized or what she referred to as disorganized crime groups with the participation of corrupt government institutions. Corruption and disorganized crime have become a way of life institutionalized for economic survival in the soviet period and as a method of resistance to communist control and remains a current method of economic survival. Additionally, Dr. Katz argues that the problem of corruption is rooted with the context of what is commonly referred to as, “free trade” especially as developed by World Bank and IMF policies that often facilitate corruption of local and federal government officials globally as well as within Georgia. This occurs through domination of transnational corporate elites who exploit the labor and resources of developing countries. Finally, Dr. Katz discussed the need for programs that address the demand side of organized crime. Specifically, the policy makers must address reducing the demand for drugs, guns, and people for both sexual and economic exploitation in order to prevent the on-going development of organized crime and corruption. Participants at the lecture wondered what kind of programming might aid in reducing the corruption of World Bank and IMF funds, how demand reduction strategies might be implemented, and how the West may need to change their policies of assistance to developing countries and emerging democracies in order to facilitate a reduction in corruption and organized crime. External oversight boards must monitor the World Bank, and IMF and American and European corporations must be forced to adhere to the stronger regulator laws of their own nations in order to prevent them from exploiting weaker regulatory laws of new democracies and free markets. The director of the Anti-corruption office presented an alternate view that organized crime groups are more hierarchical and resemble government structures. Conversely, Dr. Katz’s argument focused on the disorganized nature of criminal groups who simply maintain a diverse network of communication facilitated by other forms of globalized communication currently available such as the internet, banking, and telephone and wire communication. Finally, what one scholar refers to as the “**NGO-ization**” of civil society (Hemment, 2004) was discussed as facilitating a weak state and perhaps encouraging the provision of inadequate social and economic services by the government to its citizens. Hemment states that “the **NGO-ization** demobilizes social movements and “allows former elites to flourish while the Washington Strategy puts their agendas above local concerns”. Reducing economic inequality and addressing the demand for illegal products and substances may go a long way toward ending corruption, bribery, and organized or disorganized crime.