Thank you, to Georgetown University and Jeff [Fischer].

It's nice to visit one more time after so many years working together and being separated.

My name is Christian Nadeau. I am a Canadian-born attorney. I worked in elections a little bit in Canada at the local and national level, moved to America in ‘92 to study, and then started working with IFES as soon as I finished my graduate studies in ‘94. And if you remember, in the 90s, you had a movement for democracy. There was a lot of hope for the planet in terms of elections and what that would bring to the world, and I was very lucky to join early on work with the International Foundation for Election Systems.

That led me, really, to work and collaborate with people around the world. I started in Haiti with Jeff Fischer, who's responsible for this recording, and then went on to work across Latin America, lived bits in Haiti, lived bits in Peru, worked really across Latin America with all the democratization that happened in that time.

And in ‘97, IFES asked me to leave and go to Russia. And if you go back in time, it was a moment where, in ‘97, Russia was only a few years in, after the revolution of the ‘92-’93, when you had a coup in Moscow, when Yeltsin went in a tank and attacked his own parliament. And really, that was the end of the USSR, and it was the start of a new venture for Russia that was turned to the West, that was hopeful for everybody.

And there was an opportunity… IFES had been present in Russia since, really, ‘91, ‘92, as soon as it opened up, to try to help the country, bring about elections that were more meaningful.

I served as a country director in Russia in the period ‘97 to 2001. So, really, the end of the Yeltsin era and the start and the launch, I should say, and the start of the Putin era that carries on to this day.

The work of IFES in Russia really was to… was very unusual in terms of elections assistance, because Russia, first of all, had had elections throughout its history since the 30s. They did have national elections all the time. They had turnout that was extraordinary, and that was a true turnout, and that was 90% plus, which they would say, “we're a democracy” throughout the 20th century because of their elections. They did attract people to the polls with both fear and vodka, and that both worked very well.

And that got people to vote, and in Russia, until, really, the mid-90s, when you went to vote, you had two choices. One choice was the person of the party, and the other choice was against all. And if you voted against all, the vote was public, and you would certainly be remiss to vote against all, because the consequences would be varied, from not having heat in the winter to losing your place in college, or losing your place at work, or a lot worse during other periods, troubled times in Russia. So, the fact that you had the pluralistic election in Russia was new. And, but you still have, because of the culture, the choice to vote against all. And you might wonder… I'll leave it at that, but it was amazing. During my tenure in Russia, only one time did the Against All candidate

win, in a particular region where people were so upset with the regime that they preferred to vote against all, and when that happened, elections would have to happen again within a certain time frame, and the people that were in power would stay there, and then the process, the political process would resolve.

The work in Russia, in terms of the mission of IFES was, like in other countries, you have a support to the election commission. I was working directly with the Minister of Elections; it was the Centralispiracynikonice, which was a whole office. It's a very centralized system, as you can imagine, in a country like Russia, that spans 11 time zones, and the, Mr. Vechnikov was the president of the Central Election Commission, and he had a body supervised by a board of directors, if you want, that was made of different people, including former communists, right-wing nationalists, Mr. Zuganov, who I met, and also other people from different parties, and his job was really to administer election[s] as pertained… as driven by the State Duma election law of Russia.

The work of IFES at the time, IFES had been in Russia already for 8 or 9 years, and the United States government said, we don't want to fund people who are here like Christian, we want to have Russians open, basically, a think tank of elections in Russia. And the think tank would have to be strong enough to be able to withstand audits from the U.S. government of use of funds or other governments, but that would receive the funds from the European Union or other ones, including Russian funds to, essentially, transform the office that was full of Russians with consultants coming in to consult on campaign finance, or the finer points of election law, or how to do media and elections, and transform this into a Russian think tank.

And trying to transform a foreign office into a think tank was a lot of my job, which is really unusual, because most countries, you'd be in and out for a period of time, whether it's 6 months or 3 years, but not to be there for the long haul and transforming your operation into a domestic operation. So that was the main task.

In terms of election law, we worked directly with the State Duma committee. We had a pass to go in Parliament. Can you imagine a Canadian, an American, going into Russian parliament to talk about election law, bring in consultants, be a reference for them about how democracy works for anything from logistics across time zones, to prisoners' rights and elections, to campaign finance, and things like that? That was at the federal level, and we were invited regularly to conferences, meetings of ministers, finance, if you, the ones who watch this video who are old enough will remember Y2K. And Yeltsin resigned December 31st, 1999, and the whole planet thought that horrible things would happen because of the computer glitch with the year 2000, and nothing happened, but we did work with the Russian Commission to see what could be done with this and things like that at the federal level.

We worked extensively at the federal level and with the State Duma on campaign finance, thinking, in a way, looking back very naively, that if you work in campaign finance and people knew who was financing the different parties in power, and the people in power, I should say, in Russia, it would make a difference. And it, it was a focus of IFES for easily 4 or 5 years. Robert Dahl was a frequent consultant, an American attorney, who came over to talk about this with the

Russians, and essentially bring about more transparency that resulted in changes in the election law in Russia to bring transparency.

And I got there in ‘97, when the law was just passed, and people started to fill out all these forms where they had to detail the square footage of their house, the model number of their cars, the size of their bank accounts, and which wives they had, and everything was listed, and the kids, and who had what, and the kids, which properties they had.

And you had people earning government salaries that had extreme assets, driving luxury cars, having multiple properties, including in France or Switzerland, and they would put all this on the declaration form of being a candidate with absolutely no shame. And we thought, oh, that will have an impact. And it had none whatsoever, because for the average Russian, they were like, this is nothing new. We knew all of these folks were basically corrupt, and here we were as, foreigners, thinking that by bringing transparency in the system, this would have an impact, and frankly, we were wrong, because it had no impact, and the, for the average Russian, the fact that somebody in power had assets was just a given, because that was part of life.

We did a lot of work on the regional level, working because you have 89 different states or provinces, they're called *oblasts* in Russian, but the 89 different regions, and each region has its own governor, its own elections, election board, its own state-level election commission. And they follow, essentially, the federal law, but replicate this at the state level.

And, there again, in the interest of transparency, hoping that transparency would bring about more democracy and more change in Russia in terms of clarity of who's in power, what's influencing them, through working with media. And we did trainings with many, many, many media outlets throughout Russia. DS, a British woman who was spectacular, had a wonderful accent and a way to smoke and drink with the Russians, and who was a Russian… [Russophile], I would say, [International advisors] would be out there in the regions, talking with them, and…honestly, talking about transparency, ethics, bribes, in Russia in the 90s, was a huge effort that was just giving us a lot of blank stares about, basically, what are you talking about, and how does this apply to me, and what do I do if the governor says, do this, or if the local businessman, I was going to say Kesike, but that's Latin America, does tell me to do this, and what do I do with my family, for example? And those are the kinds of issues that you don't think about if you're sitting in an office in a university and saying, oh, these are the principles, but there's lives of people that are directly impacted by what you're trying to do. And it's not an easy task to say, oh, but the principle is this when they talk about their kids and what it means if you go against the local power. And all of this is made in a very hush-hush, indirect manner.

The language they speak will never say, oh, directly, so-and-so is threatening me. They will just say something like, oh, I love my children, I don't want anything bad to happen to them, so what do you do with that?

And… and the way it was approached was completely different and was very challenging to try to reconcile the interest that I had as a young man trying to bring about transparency and help

Russia along the way. We had a lot of hope for the country, but there are realities in the ground where you're dealing with, a long history of working around things, and making things happen, and having things be hidden, but appear to be otherwise. Russia is extremely structured and technical and very focused on the law, and how to use the law to give the appearance of things being a certain way when they're not.

We ended up creating an Institute for Democracy, if you go today to the website democracy.ru, that website is still alive today. There was a think tank created in Russia. IFES had to pack its bag, essentially, after I left, and leave the stage, if you want, of democracy in Russia and a think tank, and the Institute of Democracy that was created, where some former employees and also others, joined the organization.

They hired foreigners to come in and do talks, and they were the ones promoting the idea of democracy and how to do election work in Russia. And democracy.ru carries on to this day, in spite of everything happening in Russia now, is still active. And, initially, they got funding from the U.S. government, from the Canadians, from the European Union, and to, really have a light of democracy and try to be a think tank on election law, both at the national level and a little bit also at the regional level.

Russia, when I say regional, to give a sense of scale, listen carefully. It is longer to take a plane from Moscow to Vladivostok than it is from Moscow to New York. So, just in terms of scale, size matters, and trying to achieve change and have a meaningful impact across a country of that size is extremely hard for anybody. And that was something that was, and the diversity of the country, geography, and all of this was quite unique. It was an experience to live in Russia and trying to get anything done that would be… standard.

To give you a few ideas of what life was like in Russia, you have… I'll just give you a few examples. The initial office in Russia was on Staria Arbat, or the old downtown area, in an apartment building. The apartment building was itself a turn-of-the-century, beautiful old house, where the common areas were absolutely horrific, because nobody maintained common areas. Some neighbors would actually let their animals go out to defecate in the staircase. But then when you went in the apartment, when in the office, you had a functioning, modern office.

When we tried to move the office and find something that was not a residential building, but a formal building, I was really hell-bent on respecting the law and giving the best example, and I had the office manager, her name was N., I'll leave her last name out of it for her sake, but she went out, and she came back to me with what was deemed to be the most legitimate offices possible. So, for example, that meant renting office space from a sports association. And doing a cooperation agreement formally between IFES, an American Foundation, and a sports association to have access to their offices. That meant renting a dental office, including dental equipment, to establish a space for an office of 15, 18 people that are all professionals, people who do IT, who are lawyers, who are research professionals, media folks in a dental office, where we would have to pay in cash every other day such an amount per person. And I just described this because the level of corruption problems you have in Russia was… constant flow, issues,

challenges, and…and having…there's such a…culture of deceit, that…makes it both very challenging, but also very intriguing as you try to pursue and bring transparency and democracy in that environment, and try places that might be fertile for bringing something that will stick. And just take the small thing of the office rental and multiply that times everything.

You also had to deal with the different issues that you have in regards to…there were inspectors of every kind coming to you from different government agencies, including, we had one time a City of Moscow toilet paper inspector who came and who said, “I'm here to count how many rolls of toilet paper in relation to employees,” and I thought that was a complete lie. This was a person who was just off the street. But sure enough, we verified this, spent money on hiring a lawyer to figure out if this is real or not, and we got a penalty of maybe $5 to not having the right amount of toilet paper in the office, and these were real things that happened on a regular basis.

So again, this is the nitty-gritty of trying to deal with democracy in Russia, as you have these grand ideas of campaign transparency, media transparency, improving the election system, or Y2K challenges, and all this. But the logistics and dealing with the local culture were a big… very, not easy to do at all.

And the other part of it is the government. If you work in Russia as an American, no matter what you do or say, everybody thinks that you're part of the CIA. And working with the Russians is very much of a power play and a chess game all the time. And no matter how many times of what I would do, or how transparent I could be with them, including I was invited to spend time in some of the Election Commission members, private dachas, which is their summer cottage, if you want, and they went in saunas with them, went drinking with their family or something, for them to get to know me and get to know my family, and to build trust, they still thought I was CIA, but they also still thought that I…we could bring, as an organization, something to them for democracy, because they were all hopeful that democracy would bring about different times in Russia that really they had never fully experienced.

To go back to the government side, Russia was unique. I worked in maybe 20 countries or so, and the dangers that you have in Peru or Haiti are partly because you work in elections, somebody might want to hurt you, but also, just random car accidents. Driving at night, coming back from a polling station at 11 o'clock at night from the mountains of Peru is dangerous. You have rain, you have bad roads, and you have accidents.

In Russia, nothing happened by accident. In Russia, you were under surveillance pretty much all the time. What that means is, for example, your keys to your apartment come with a device, which is the same kind of device that was used to put in the ear of cows, to track cows in a field.

And the keys are given to you, and somehow that device is there, and you know that you have to keep that device with you, because otherwise you cause problems, and you don't want to find out what the problems are.

It happened several times over my 4 years there that you go home and bed sheets appear on your bed that were not there when you left in the morning, or dishes. They don't clean your dishes, but they certainly just take dishes out of the cupboard and put them on the table, just as a way to know that we were there and we have access to your apartment.

We would have conversations on the phone, and every 33 minutes, calling home, the phone would cut off. It was consistent. And we also, the Election Commission, the way it worked, you had to coordinate everything you did, every meeting we had, had to be coordinated with the International Relations Department of the Election Commission. Very professional, very nice people to collaborate with, but we all understood that they were part of a system, and if you could not ignore them, because you had to work with them.

One way they make you work with them is by renewing your visa every 3 or 4 months. And the government would give me, and I had at the time, a family, a wife and a son.

And we were renewed every 3 or 4 months, so we had to leave the country every so often without really knowing for sure if we're gonna make it back or not, every 3 or 4 months for 3 years. So that's a way to keep tabs on people, at least to make sure it's a tight leash. Sometimes I had extensions, but many times I had to leave and go back in and out.

The International Department of the Election Commission is just an office with 4 or 5 people working there who are there to accompany dignitaries or guests or people that visit that were foreigners. And they all spoke great English and French or other languages. One of them his name was V. , even had a sign on his desk that said, I never forgot, “my work is so secret, even I don't know what I'm doing,” which was very ironic.

The person that was assigned to me, I had essentially two. I had one that was more or less internal to the commission; her name was O.. O. would always accompany [me], was very nice. We went out for lunch together, went out for dinner during events in the regions, sometimes. And she would ensure that… I'm sure she did her own reporting on whatever was discussed with whoever was meeting at the time. The only time I was not accompanied by a KGB person was when I went to the State Duma in Parliament. I'm sure they had other ways to listen in.

If I had to travel or go outside of Moscow, there would usually be somebody from the local election commission who would attend to me, and very often I had a gentleman, his name was L. who would be there with me, and who would essentially be around me in a polite manner. It's all very polite, very professional, but very clear that… what their role is. And sometimes, I remember one morning when we had a big meeting with a lot of VIPs in Moscow with the Election Commission, and I get a call at 7:45 in the morning from L. to my house saying, Christian, are you going to be there today? And I said, L. of course I'll be there, because it's an important meeting. And he's like, I had a big day last night, I had a big shindig, and I'm, I was drunk, but I'll be there. And my answer to him is, L., you know I'm boring. I'll… I said, I'll do the report for you. I said, tell me what… you know, I'll tell you who I met, who I saw, what we talked about, I'll do the report for you, you can go back and sleep.

And his answer was, laughing, says, no, no, Christian, for these kinds of events, I don't do a full report, I just need to be there, and I'll see you later. And he hung up; I hung up, and it was just par for the course, a little bit surprising. But when I showed up at the conference, he was there, and it's as if we had never talked about anything. How are you, Christian? How are the kids? And et cetera, et cetera. And that's the way it rolled, and you just learn to roll with it all the time.

L. [The commission representative] also came to my own house, before the State Duma elections, to let me know that basically, if I found out anything that [I] was not supposed to have found out, that the, I would get, quote, a warning about me having issues with the government of Russia for some reason.

And he came over to my house around 8 or 9 o'clock at night on a weekday, uninvited, to say, “Christian, I'm just here to deliver a message that nothing will happen to you, and we'll give you a warning.”

And my response was, “I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about.”

And he said, “you know what I'm talking about.”

And I said, “well, why tell me now that you would give me a warning?”

And, I said, and he explained, says, “oh, now that you're a father,” because my son was born while I was in Russia, after 6 months being in Russia, he said, “now that you're a father, we want to make sure your son doesn't grow without a father. Have a good night,” and off [he] went.

But it was very clear, the level of scrutiny that I was under in the office, and that I am convinced to this day that some people who were in the office were also there and reporting on what we were doing, which was nothing nefarious. We were really there just to help the country have better elections, to the extent possible. But there was always this interaction

The worst scare I got, probably, while in Russia was before the presidential election. And presidential elections were in May or June 2000 or so, and in the spring of 2000, at some point, a dynamite stick appeared in my home. And it was right over the vacuum cleaner, and out of nowhere, you go home and you check your cupboard, and there's a dynamite stick on your vacuum cleaner.

And at the time, I called the RSO, the Regional Security Office of the U.S. Embassy. And because when you're working for a U.S. government contractor, you're not part of the government system, even though you're very close to it, but you're not in the government system, the RSO said, “I can’t help you have a good day.”

And I was a young man and rather brash, and I was so upset, so upset about this that I kept the stick, slept at home, and the next morning, I took the dynamite stick and drove it to the office, and

dropped the stick on the conference table, and said, we're gonna do a staff meeting, and we were about 14 or so people there.

And I say, “whoever here can give a message to the government, tell them I got the message, I don't have anything special to say that you don't already know, and if this is a warning, please let me know so I get the hell out of here.”

And then the reaction of a person who was my right hand, A. , who's the one who started Democracy.ru, was to say “Christian, I was in Afghanistan for a few years as a soldier, and TNT gets old and unstable. So how about I take the dynamite stick that is old and unstable, and take it the hell out of here right away?”

And that was the last time I saw this stick, and I was told there was no warning. This was just a trick to let me know again, the same way they play with your dishes or the bed sheets, that they know what you're doing.

So, that's the kind of environment that you have to operate in. And, frankly, when you have a… a one-year-old with you, and you have this thing, you have to be somewhat foolish and also very believing in your mission to continue to carry on with this environment.

Part of the function, I would say, also in Russia was to explain to dignitaries and foreigners the intricacies of election law. Anytime you have an election, you have a lot of people interested in that specific point in time because it's like a, the crucial moment that people all look for, where… and… and it was a… a part of the role at that point during especially the presidential election, became explaining to the diplomatic community the intricacies of election law, what to look for, and things like that.

Did I see bribes being paid? Yes, I actually saw bribes being paid, cash being laid out, and things like this, in small amounts, here and there through Russia.

Nothing systematic, at all, that was there. And everything was documented and put in reports that were given to the Russian government, and some of it's probably going to be on the website of Georgetown.

Considering this, and considering the environment, we gave it our best shot to help the Russians have the best election possible they would have within their system.

Was there massive fraud in Russia? The report says, and I agree with the report, that there was no massive fraud.

Were there things that were off the charts that would have helped to sway the election? Yes. In the State Duma election in particular, you had, out of nowhere, this party that was created with Putin galvanized around, happened maybe 4 months before the election, 5 months before the election, galvanized a huge amount of voters, and that party was led by Putin in Parliament.

And at the same time, in September ‘99 or so, four months before the election, you had apartments being bombed in Moscow. And when I say being bombed, I mean being flattened, completely flattened, where three times in the space of two or three weeks, you had, more or less, basements filled with dynamite, and the apartment blown up while people were sleeping.

And the rubble will be swept away within 2 days. The rubble will still be fuming, basically, with everything in there. It would be cordoned off, and everything would be bulldozed, so there's no evidence left whatsoever. At the same time that happened, the government blamed terrorists, and specifically Chechen terrorists, for this process. And in Russia, hating Chechens is a sport, and if you give a reason for them to say they're blowing up apartments in Moscow, a lot of people at the time rallied, and Putin at the time said, oh, “I am the candidate who will go and essentially take over Chechnya and teach them a lesson,” which he did as soon as he had power, and that made him extremely popular overnight.

Did people vote for him? Most certainly, yes, they did. But [was] there the level of transparency? I can go on like this about things that we saw in the media in terms of how things were portrayed. Anybody who was not in line with the main party during parliamentary or presidential elections would be assaulted in the media and demonized, and you'd have fraud. I found that anytime you print, or you put in TV, that somebody is an idiot, it takes you 2 seconds to say, he's an idiot, he's corrupt, and here's a picture of a villa in Switzerland with little girls around it, and this person is a horrific, corrupt person.

That takes a few seconds to do, and the image stays in your mind. And the person who's been called an idiot, who's been called a corrupt thief, has them to defend themselves and explain why he's not an idiot, and that takes a long time, and nobody listens to that, plus they don't get media time, and the effectiveness at which the system was able to transform people who were not in line with the interests of the people in power was fascinating to see, because they were able to essentially win an election in a way that was clean, but with interference in the media, in the way things were presented, or manipulation with the apartment bombings, and that's never been resolved. But the coincidence is extremely strong that you have one happening, and then the other one happening right after.

If you look at the Oklahoma bombing in Dave McVeigh in Oklahoma, this horrific event that killed so many young children and hundreds of, or maybe a hundred, I don't remember, but a lot of federal workers in Oklahoma City, the U.S. government kept that site open for over a year to investigate every detail, take out the bodies and identify bodies, and take the time to investigate. So, you had rubble in a building that was defaced for over a year.

In Russia, I know for a fact, because a friend of mine was a reporter who went to see the sites that were blown up, and within two days, the bulldozers would appear and tear apart everything, so there was no chance to see anything.

Russia and power is extreme.

There's other cultural aspects I want to say before I end this conversation about the…Russia is fascinating as a country. The people of Russia have a love of their country that's nearly physical, like you love a mother. And when you talk about mother Russia, you don't talk about Mother Gambia, or Mother America, or Mother Canada from where I come from. But talking about Mother Russia shows a deep, deep, physical, emotional attachment to the land of Russia, *Rusland*. And that goes to the core of the Russian identity.

It is a country that has extreme culture, that has extreme scientific achievements, extremely educated. I've met people that spoke 7 languages. And it was 7, 8 languages, and Finnish, and French, and God knows what else. It was incredible.

When you… it was very hard to make Russian friends, true friends, but when you have a Russian friend, it can be a friend for a very long time, and that would help you, and it was so enjoyable to be there.

There's a lot of drinking to do, and you cannot have confidence [in] the people you work with unless you start drinking with them and share moments with them. It's part of the culture. When I was in Moscow in the late 90s, the average life expectancy of a of a man was 56 or 57. I would be already at the end of my life if I was still in Russia today, because of the amount of drinking involved.

And when I say drinking, you figure if you have a dinner party, the regular amounts of alcohol you have, plus 1 bottle of vodka per two people, minimum, for the evening.

And if it's a longer event, like a shashlik or a barbecue, then you up the dose as well.

And if you meet people, including people, let's say, Large accounting firms or bankers, Americans working there, they would all have in their offices vodka bottles, and you start cracking vodka in a meeting as early as 11:30, 12 o'clock, with the Russians, and that's just part of the culture and how things are made there. Which, again, makes it a very challenging environment, because there's only so much you can do and drink at the same time, but it's also a cultural aspect. And one way out of that was to say that you're driving, because if you're driving, the tolerance is zero. You cannot have any alcohol in your blood when you're driving in Russia, otherwise go to jail right away.

So… I hope that was helpful for whoever is listening to this tape.

Democracy is a great idea. It helps countries prosper and develop. I think it's, there's lots of reasons why democracy is a great thing, and… but the nitty-gritty of making something happen and finding a fertile ground for making democracy stick, or whichever format it is, is very challenging.

I am very honored I had the chance to work with IFES, with the Russian Election Commission, with Russian nonprofits, with all the people I met there, and we basically gave it our best shot.

So…that's my story about Russia. I left there, and I love the country, would love to go back one day, but I'm sure I would not be welcome nowadays to be in Russia.

But that was there and then, and hopefully things will come back to a place where we can all be in a better and more peaceful environment.

And thank you again, Jeff [Fischer] and Georgetown University, for putting this together, International IDEA, and I look forward to seeing this, and if you have any questions, you can always reach out.

And hopefully that's helpful to future people working on democracy in elections, and how you integrate the ideals that you have, and the principles, and the nitty-gritty of managing elections.

Have a great day.