

20 Years Without the Berlin Wall: a Breakthrough to Freedom

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The Fall of the Berlin Wall: a Time to Reflect on Why Things Are Not As They Should Be...

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I do not like anniversaries and discussions about them. But there are some dates that remind us of historic turning points and the price paid to achieve them. Such dates are worth remembering so as not to repeat past mistakes and find ourselves paying the price once again, this time for our forgetfulness.

The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall reminds us of an event that is worthy of reflection. It reminds us of the concessions Russia made, of what we were unable to do or did not want to risk doing, and of what simply turned out to be a failure. These are useful reflections, whatever the case, snapping us out of our drowsy, self-tranquilized state or “don’t-care” attitudes.

In 1989, the former Soviet satellite states tossed aside the dogmas that Moscow had forced down their throats so stubbornly for so long and turned to the West. Their return to Europe was difficult and in some cases a tortuous process. When you talk with the “new Europeans” today, they always complain, grumble and criticize, expressing all manner of dissatisfaction with their European lives. But none of them want to return to the past, much less to Russia’s embrace. They express dissatisfaction not about the principles on which their life is organized, but about how their elites implement these principles.

Russia has continued on its own road since then, but heading the opposite direction, attempting to find a new embodiment for an old matrix. I will not describe this experiment at returning to the past and the results it has produced. Russian essayists have been busy examining Russian post-communism from every possible angle for the last ten years, and few have any doubts today as to the result. President Medvedev’s periodic statements about the failures of recent years show that something approaching a consensus has emerged in Russia that we let one historical opportunity slip through our fingers and do not know if another will come our way.

There is no need to repeat the diagnosis. I suggest instead that we reflect on why Eastern Europe was able to return to European civilization, but Russia hesitated to move in that direction. My arguments are concise and repeat many well-known ideas, but the date we are marking offers a suitable occasion to try giving them a clearer logic.

Those who have already reflected on why the “new” Europe was able to make this move, while Russia could not find the corresponding resolve, usually advance three arguments. First, the “new Europeans” achieved national consensus on returning to Europe’s fold. In other words, all political forces, including the communists, supported this move. The second argument

follows from the first – nationalism in the Eastern European countries turned out to be pro-Western and made it easier for these countries to integrate into the united Europe. Paradoxically, the nationalism of the “new Europeans” made it possible for them to limit their own sovereignty in favor of supranational European organizations. As we know, Russian nationalism remains anti-Western and seeks to follow a completely different road. Finally, the third argument usually boils down to the assertion that the transformation of an empire always has its own specific nature. I agree with these arguments, but the question is, why was the “new” Europe able to achieve national consensus on its new road, while Russia failed to do so? Why were their elites able to unite around the idea of transformation, while in Russia the elite united around a completely different idea? I do not dispute the importance of empire in the transformation process, but why was it that the Russian elite were able to cast aside this notion of empire in 1991 and play a decisive part in bringing down a world power? Therefore, the empire factor, during the initial stage at least, does not play the part we usually ascribe to it in Russia. Consequently, there must have been other factors that pushed Russia in the direction along which it has been creeping these last twenty years.

Finally, what factors made the fall of the Berlin Wall a watershed for the former Soviet “younger brothers”, but not for us? I will outline a few arguments that seem significant.

There are four factors that I think had an impact on Russia’s development after the Soviet Union’s collapse: historical legacy, structural contradictions in the transformation process itself, the personal factor’s role and the West’s influence.

Let’s begin with history. Everything looks clear here. Russia was unlucky with its history and traditions. The Russian state’s long centuries of a history built on strict centralization and suppression of individual freedoms could only obstruct any moves toward liberalization. Indeed, until Gorbachev, there were no attempts to abandon the system of power concentrated in a single source. Attempts to partially liberalize the system always ended in failure. Alexander II’s experiment with constitutional monarchy in the nineteenth century fell through, and his successor, Alexander III, realizing that any liberalization of the monarchy could lead to its downfall, returned things to their familiar pattern. The Khrushchev Thaw in the 1960s likewise got reversed and strengthened the Soviet elite’s fears that any kind of thaw would undermine the state’s foundations.

Russia avoided the revolutions that shook Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the post-war period and helped create an opposition movement in those countries, as well as pragmatists within the ruling class, willing to accept political pluralism. At the decisive moment when Gorbachev opened a window on the world and the country awoke at the end of the 1980s,

there was no responsible opposition force in Russia and no responsible pragmatists, able to live in a free society.

Equally significant is that Russia missed the historical period when the spirit of constitutionalism and awareness of the importance of the supremacy of law and the state's duty to submit to it took shape in Europe. To use the late Ralf Dahrendorf's words, Russia "missed the lawyer's hour." The emergence of the "state of law" (Rechtsstaat) was one of nineteenth century Europe's greatest achievements before European society actually reached the democratization stage. That Russia never got around to accepting the principle of the supremacy of law is reflected in the fact that after the fall of communism even liberals chose to follow a line of political expediency. Russia did not adopt other liberal principles either, such as civil freedoms, independent institutions, the guaranteed immutability of private property, and the complete separation of church and state.

The tradition of the state taking precedence over the individual and society in Russia always went hand in hand with state expansionism. Originally, the need to defend the people and a weak state organization against attacks by hostile tribes dictated the drive to create a buffer zone of colonized lands to serve as protection. Then the centralized state organization, which became a blend of Byzantine autocracy (only with no limits) and the traditions of the Tatar-Mongol Golden Horde and which was given a superficial makeover by Peter the Great later down the line, could not but continue this expansionist course, bringing in new territories and peoples, which meant constant wars and, during the periods between wars, the search for the latest enemy.

The centralized state kept society suppressed, called for constant reinforcement of the state's power and maintained suspicion towards the outside world. The power thus created only served to further encourage centralization. State power remained the means for uniting society after the fall of communism. The stereotype of a state organization based on territory, military force and prestigious international status still fills the Russian elite's minds today, along with the personified power system used to achieve these goals and the search for an enemy that justifies such power. Communism fell and the Soviet Union collapsed, but a centralized state organization not based on the rule of law – principles alien to the European tradition – continues to live on in the Russian ruling class's political consciousness.

Let's turn now to the second reason for our failure to seize the historic opportunity – the difficulties that Russia clearly experienced in its transformation process in the 1990s. Russia found itself facing an unprecedented challenge after the fall of communism. Never before had an attempt been made to transform an empire and nuclear superpower with a messianic ideological tradition all at once simply because such a state had never existed before. To further complicate

matters, the task involved transforming a state that had survived by militarizing daily life. Igor Klyamkin describes in convincing detail the unique features of Russia's militarized state. I will not repeat his words.

Furthermore, the Russian elite had to work on building a new political regime all at once, coming to grips with the election mechanism that gave it legitimacy, and building a new state. State-building and democratization are hard to carry out simultaneously, and trying to fit them together often leads to tragic results, as in the collapse of Yugoslavia. Danquart Rostow and Robert Dahl, followed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, were right, it seems, in warning that successful democratization requires a consolidated state, which Russia did not have at the start of the 1990s.

But the difficulties do not end here. Yeltsin and his team had to carry out four revolutions all at once: create the market, democratize power, reform the empire, and find a new geopolitical role for a country that until recently had been a nuclear superpower. Some of these reforms ran counter to each other. For example, it was difficult to build the market and democratize the political regime at the same time. Moreover, what the rest of the world had accomplished one stage at a time (nation-building, developing capitalism, political democratization), Russia had to accomplish all at once. This was an unprecedented undertaking in history. All of the successful post-communist transitions began by building a new political system, but in Russia the transformation began with the privatization of property without having first established independent political institutions.

Upon further reflection, another factor hampering our progress came to mind. Turning now to Francis Fukuyama, and no, I am not going to talk about the "end of history", on which Fukuyama is mistaken, but he offers some more subtle observations about transformation in Southeast Asia. He came to the conclusion that traditions are not always an obstacle to political liberalization but, on the contrary, can actually speed up its progress. As Fukuyama said, "political Confucianism can be easily cast aside and replaced with new political institutions and mechanisms, and this substitution will not cause society to lose its social unity." In other words, democracy can be built not on the basis of civil and individual rights, but on the basis of a "traditional moral code" and old forms of collective life. In Russia, however, traditional forms of social unity and old moral codes were long since eradicated. Stalinism was the radical instrument used to uproot the old Russian traditions. However, it turned out that the resulting vacuum did nothing to speed up the formation of new political institutions. Attempts to build a new political system in the absence of mechanisms ensuring social unity led only to the further fragmentation of society.

Finally, there is one more factor, purely political this time, that perhaps played a decisive role at the critical moment, preventing the old matrix from falling apart. The factor in question is the emergence in Russia by the time of the Soviet collapse of two legitimate power centers: the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, inherited from the Soviet past, and the presidency. They vied for a monopoly on power, and this led to a split in the political class and society. The resulting confrontation was an insurmountable obstacle on the road to forming a new national consensus on reform.

Russia was unlucky not only with its history and the contradictions in the transformation process that complicated its transition to a liberal model, but also with the personal factor. Yeltsin came to power at a moment when society and the political class had become aware that the old system had no future, but were not yet ready to make a conscious choice to work on building a new system. The events of 1990-1992 showed that even progressive members of the political class were not ready to carry out liberal-democratic reforms. The mixture of naïveté, self-doubts and excessive self-confidence, as well as the social insensitivity that characterized Russia's elite, only hampered Russia's progress toward new values. In the 1990s even Russia's democrats understood democracy primarily as elections, which were to guarantee specifically their power, and refused to even consider that the same elections could bring their rivals to power. Not surprisingly, with this sort of mentality the elite were incapable of the compromises and pacts that formed the foundation of successful democratic transitions. The elite were unable to agree either on Russia's past or on its future, and yet they were trying to build a new Russia. The fall of communism was not perceived in Russia as a defeat of Russia's traditions, and this made it impossible to reject the old rules of the game once and for all.

It is the political elite that bear responsibility for the fact that Russian society did not make any critical reassessment of its history. Not only did the elite not try to find new principles for uniting society, but on the contrary, through their selfishness they only widened the divisions and sparked battles between clans, fighting not for their vision of Russia's future, but to grab their share of assets and power.

Thus, there was no real force able to carry out the needed transformations in Russia in the early 1990s. The intelligentsia were the source of the democratic revival during Gorbachev's perestroika years, but after Yeltsin came to power, the intelligentsia lost out and ended up reaping neither political nor economic dividends from communism's fall. On the contrary, intellectuals saw their status decline and were relegated to the margins of political life. The new people in power had no need for intellectuals. This marginalizing process was accelerated by the collapse of the budget in the sectors in which the intelligentsia worked: science, education and the arts. Those intellectuals who did find their way to power had to play by the nomenklatura's

rules, confirming the general rule that intellectuals lose their social and political role if they go into politics. Russia in the 1990s had not yet developed a middle class with an interest in liberal-democratic reform. The emerging groups that had the appearance of a middle class were those servicing the bureaucrats and oligarchs. The elite brought to the top after the Soviet Union's collapse fragmented into rival groups, each competing for a monopoly on power. Under conditions in which an alternative to the elite still had not been able to form, the experienced Soviet nomenklatura, injecting a bit of fresh blood into its ranks from other classes, managed to become the backbone of the new ruling class. Not only did this "old-new" ruling elite restore its hold on power, but it also gained control of assets and thus became even more powerful than it had been during the communist period.

During the Yeltsin years, the public could not develop civil society all on their own – they had no experience. The new rulers in the Kremlin, brought to power on the democratic tide, not only gave no consideration to how to help the emergence of civil society, but obstructed the process, turning their backs on the democratic forces that helped put them in power, above all the Democratic Russia movement. Society was forced to hand power over to one man and give him their trust, but the public gave Yeltsin this power on the condition that he would not take away the new freedoms they had won; this was the new social contract between Russia and its leader. This contract was never given any institutional embodiment, however, and thus remained fragile.

The Marxist approach taken by the technocrats who launched reforms together with Yeltsin also played a part. They thought capitalism alone could play a decisive role and ignored the need to establish new institutions, and all the more to place the state under the rule of law. As a result, Russia's example confirmed Adam Przeworski's observations on the interaction between democracy and capitalism in Latin America, namely, that there could be no liberal economy without stable liberal institutions. On the contrary, without liberal institutions, economic reforms could become a factor pushing the ruling class towards authority in a bid to protect its own interests. Russian practice confirmed this conclusion.

Russia did not have the right set of initial conditions for a successful transition. However, it is important to remember that history offers us a number of examples of successful democratic transformation when effective leadership, "political engineering" and the elite's willingness to break with the past have made up for the absence of certain conditions for democratization. The cases of India, Taiwan and South Korea show that democracy can take root in non-European, non-Christian, and even poor (in India's case) societies if they have leaders and elites that understand that democracy will better serve the national interests. Suarez, de Klerk and Havel facilitated democratization in Spain, South Africa and Czechoslovakia, even though the right conditions were lacking in these countries. The presence of a democratically oriented elite in

Poland helped to neutralize the authoritarian tendencies of its leader, Lech Walesa. As Giuseppe di Palma and Albert Hirschman showed, the absence of democratic leaders and democratic elites is also not always a critical factor, because democracy can also be built by non-democrats, i. e., pragmatists who realize that keeping the old system in place will only lead to their own and their country's doom.

It is hard to gauge the extent to which a reform-minded leadership and a responsible elite in Russia could have offset, at least in part, the absence of the conditions required for transformation. Transformation of a communist country, empire and superpower has its own specific nature that differs from transformation in Latin America or in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. However, we can assume that the existence in Russia of a leader ready to build independent institutions and aware of the importance of the supremacy of the law could still have facilitated the country's transformation into a state operating under the rule of law.

In my opinion, autumn 1991 was the decisive moment for post-communist Russia. It was specifically at that time, following the defeat of the old nomenklatura's August coup, which attempted to stop the Soviet Union's collapse, that Yeltsin won a huge amount of public confidence: around 70% of Russians were ready to support the country's movement towards liberal democracy. Many of these people did not know what democracy specifically entailed, but they saw it as an ideal and a form of existence. People in post-Soviet society sought individual freedom, Western living standards and a Western way of life. In 1917, Russian society was not yet ready to support freedom, and this cleared the way for the Bolsheviks' rise to power. But in 1991, society was no longer an obstacle in the way of breaking with the Russian system. Society gave Yeltsin its support, and he could have used this to build a new Russia. This would have entailed adopting a new constitution that introduced a system of checks and balances, and holding new presidential and parliamentary elections on the basis of the new constitution. Without a doubt, Russia would have supported these reforms in the autumn of 1991, and the Russian parliament would have legitimized them, following the example not only of its Spanish counterpart, which did the same in its time, but also the communist parliaments of Eastern Europe that legitimized their countries' transitions to political competition.

However, Yeltsin took the opposite road and set about consolidating his own power. At the same time, he retained elements of the Soviet system, such as the parliament, which, under the old constitution, was the main center of power, and this made the confrontation that went on between the legislative and executive branches in 1991-1993 inevitable. Yeltsin gave his support to economic reform, but refused to build the independent institutions without which this reform was doomed to become what it did – a chance for the old-new ruling class to privatize assets in its own interests. The only real excuse for Yeltsin is that not even the liberals and democrats

understood back then the need to abandon the parliament and constitution inherited from the Soviet period and carry out political reforms.

The liberals and democrats believed that it was enough to rely on the leader. Soon enough (in 1992) the government liberals had the chance to see whether it had been wise to place such trust in Yeltsin when he dismissed their government and formed a new government with Viktor Chernomyrdin as prime minister. The liberalism pursued by Yegor Gaidar and his team boiled down to privatization, and they carried this out in such a way that they, more likely accidentally rather than by design, laid the foundations for the authoritarian-oligarchic regime that followed. Without independent institutions and respect for the rule of law this fate was sealed.

Thus, Yeltsin and the Russian elite let the opportunity slip to lay the foundations of a system that would have guaranteed liberal freedoms in Russia. Even with all the obstacles in the way, if Russia had had a leader and a team aspiring to go beyond the old autocracy, it could have taken more decisive steps towards a new life. There is no possible answer to the question that remains as to the extent to which the leader and the elite, given their origins in the Soviet system and lack of any other experience could have behaved any differently. But Gorbachev was also a product of that same communist nomenklatura, and yet all by himself, acting on his own initiative, he began undermining the Russian tradition! True, Gorbachev started dismantling the old tradition without foreseeing the consequences. But reformers never can foresee all the consequences of their efforts to shake up the status quo. If they could all foresee the future, how many of them would even start out on the road to reform? Looking back over the Yeltsin years, we can conclude that autumn 1991 was the brief historic moment when Russia could have tried to cheat history and tradition (and geography) and bypass the Russian mentality and habits. But the fact that Yeltsin and his team didn't even try to make use of this opportunity suggests that tradition and history in Russia proved a stronger force than chance.

Yeltsin's limits as a leader were determined not only by his background and mentality as a product of the Soviet political system, but also by the way in which the Soviet Union dissolved. The Soviet Union was dissolved by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus – Boris Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich – who carried out a constitutional coup, toppling Gorbachev. But the fact of the matter was that for the majority of Soviet citizens, the Soviet Union's collapse was a tragedy. Yeltsin was aware of this, and, as one of the leaders who made the decision to dissolve the USSR, he could not allow the possibility of power falling into the hands of an opposition that would have held him responsible for the Soviet Union's collapse. The majority of Russians still feel nostalgia for the Soviet Union to this day, seeing it as a symbol of a more stable existence. Survey results show that 71% of Russian respondents regret the Soviet Union's collapse, while 22% feel no regret; 24% think the collapse was inevitable,

and 65% think it could have been avoided. Involvement in the Soviet Union's dissolution was one of the factors (but only one) that forced Yeltsin and his team to attempt to hang onto power at all costs. Events soon followed that made it impossible for Yeltsin to establish the conditions for genuine competition.

I am referring to Yeltsin's decision to shell the parliament in 1993. The Russian parliament became the focus of national-populist opposition after the Soviet collapse, but its liquidation and the accompanying bloodshed ended the hopes for a national consensus and signaled a return to force as the means of conflict resolution. Survey results show that 60% of respondents blame Yeltsin for the parliament's dissolution and think the use of force was unjustified (in 1993, only 30% held this view). Yeltsin, together with the political class (including those who supported the parliament and those who supported the president) led Russia into a trap, forcing it to choose between a return to a new version of the Soviet system on the one hand and a new model of anti-communist authoritarianism on the other. Russia found itself choosing between two forms of non-democratic power in 1993. It was then, after liquidating the parliament inherited from the Soviet past, that Russia closed the door on hopes for greater political freedom in the near future, if only because bloodshed is the most unlikely soil for producing pluralist democracy. Thus, Russia could have chosen liberal democracy only in 1991, and then for only a brief moment. Having used force to eradicate the opposition, Yeltsin was no longer ready for free elections.

The super-presidential regime that emerged in Russia after the end of the confrontation between the legislative and executive branches was cemented in the new constitution of 1993. Yeltsin went through this constitution personally and the authoritarian leanings of its provisions were partly his doing. The new regime emerged from the victory of one political force over another, and the "all or nothing" nature of this victory meant that those who had liquidated their opponents were hardly likely to feel a need for political competition. The new constitution declared the sovereignty and freedom of the people, but in practice it consolidated a super-presidential regime that undermined these same principles. According to the constitution, the president does not represent any of the branches of power but stands above them, "sets the main outlines of the country's domestic and foreign policy" and "is the guarantor of the Russian Federation's Constitution and human and civil rights and freedoms." The president's powers are on a level similar to those of the Russian monarch from 1906 to 1917. The Yeltsin constitution laid the structural foundation for a regime of personal power, and Yeltsin supporters who worked on the document admit this.

In analyzing Russia's transformations it is worth recalling Joseph Schumpeter, who gave particular importance among the five conditions for democracy to "the role of human material" in politics – the role and mood of the people who lead parties and get elected to the parliament

and appointed to the government. Schumpeter said that these should be people of “exceptionally high quality.” But in Russia, the quality of the “human material” in question – the country’s elite – precluded it from seeking greater public freedom and competition. This applies to the “quality” of Russia’s liberals and democrats, too. Finally, post-communist Russia gave rise to no new figures of the likes of Witte or Stolypin, because the system did not give modernizers the kind of independence the tsarist regime had been willing to offer.

But it is Boris Yeltsin who bears the main responsibility for letting the opportunity for democratization slip. A leader’s quality is measured by his ability to rise above society and political class and offer them a new vision. Yeltsin did not display such qualities, and his leadership was soon reduced to simply reacting to events that he could not always predict and with which he failed to keep up.

Yeltsin’s second presidential term not only turned politics into farce, but discredited the elements of liberal democracy that he himself had helped to establish in Russia. In 1995-1996, Russia faced a new dilemma: hold honest elections with the possibility that the communists would come to power, or keep the ruling group in place by “managing” the elections. The experience in Eastern Europe showed that when communist parties came to power through honest elections, it did not automatically mean a return to the past. On the contrary, the “new European” communists were forced to carry out liberal reforms. The same was seen in Moldova, where the ruling communist party proclaimed the goal of taking their country into the European Union. True, these are communist parties that have evolved towards social democracy. It is hard to say what direction Gennady Zyuganov’s Russian Communist Party would have taken if history had given him the chance to take power. But it is worth noting that the government led by Yevgeny Primakov, supported by the communists in 1999, did not abandon market and democratic principles. Yeltsin’s efforts to maintain his hold on power by giving up free elections has had obvious consequences that laid the foundations for strengthening the system based around a single center of power, this time in anti-communist packaging.

Sadly, looking back on those days, we have to recognize that Yeltsin did not become Russia’s Suarez. Russia’s liberals and democrats were likewise not ready for the role that their counterparts played in Eastern Europe in the 1980s-1990s. There were also no pragmatists ready to follow a new line of thinking in the early 1990s in Russia. As a result, the country failed to pick up the pace in the “maturation” of its civilization, but this does not mean that Russia had no basis at all for straightening out its road toward freedom.

In this context it is also worth noting the West’s role at the start of Russia’s transformations. The second and third waves of democratization in Europe showed that integrating the transitional societies into the European community framework was the most

important guarantee for the success of their democratic reforms. But Russia's integration into the European community proved impossible. Europe was having enough trouble digesting East Germany and was not ready for new sacrifices. Moreover, the Russian elite, having started to build a new state, were not able to abandon Russian sovereignty in favor of supranational structures. Such a possibility was not even considered in Moscow at that time.

However, the West did have considerable opportunities to influence Russia's development at the start of the 1990s. Russia depended on the international financial institutions and the Western community at that moment. Moreover, Yeltsin and his team sought rapprochement and partnership with the West, and this made them open to Western advice.

But what was the West's response to the new Russia? The West concentrated its efforts primarily on forcing through privatization in Russia, which Western politicians, together with Russian liberals, thought would create the conditions for developing both the market and democracy. For understandable reasons, Western political circles did not insist that Russia strengthen independent institutions; they feared that communists would return to power or that nationalists might come to the fore, and Russia's liberal-technocrats energetically supported them in these fears. The result was the emergence of oligarchic capitalism under a democratic façade and an elected monarchy that the Russian public came to associate with Western influence, which gave rise to a stubborn mistrust of liberal democracy and the West in general.

There was also a particular moment in 1993, when Western leaders had a direct impact on the development of events in Russia, though they perhaps to this day do not realize the role they played. I am referring to the moment when Boris Yeltsin tried to clinch the West's support for his battle against the parliament. Judging by the evidence, it seems either that he received Western leaders' support for his use of force to end the conflict with the opposition, or that he assumed he had their support. Without the West's support, particularly if Western leaders had warned Yeltsin that it would not be wise to use force against the opposition, Yeltsin might not have resolved to move against the parliament as he did. At that time he still listened to Western advice. He might have found himself forced to agree to the "zero option" that was being discussed in Russian political circles in 1993, namely, the adoption of a new constitution that would establish a system of checks and balances while keeping a strong presidency. But the West still considered the communist opposition in Russia a sworn enemy. By supporting radical measures against the opposition Western leaders helped to push Russia onto an authoritarian development track without even being aware of it.

Such are the thoughts that come to mind upon this anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The past cannot be changed, and so it is pointless to try to guess at "what might have been if..." However, a study of the past helps us broaden our options for the future. These kinds of

anniversaries that force us to reflect on past events and why they happened can be useful, but only if we use them to recall our past mistakes and examine our present direction.

No Institutions

Andrei Ryabov

Humankind has come a long way in the twenty years since the “velvet revolutions” in Central and Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Back then, caught up in the great changes taking place, romantic illusions about the “end of history” became popular. People thought that following the historical defeat of communism as a doctrine and political practice mankind would inevitably join forces to build a new global civilization based on liberal democracy and a free market economy. But two decades later, what we see instead are new economic, political and religious dividing lines. Russia, along with the other post-Soviet countries, played an important part in this change in direction. The countries occupying the former Soviet Union’s territory proclaimed their intention to embody the values emblazoned on the banners of the democratic and anti-communist revolutions at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, but they ended up building a new transitional and interim reality all their own. The result is an eccentric mix of various principles: the state's domination over society and the individual, inherited from the old system, and new institutions and relations such as private property, multi-party elections and division of powers. It is still not clear just how long this transitional state will continue and what might eventually emerge in place of this “hybrid” reality. However, first of all we should try to understand why it arose in the first place. Was it the result of a dramatic coming together of unfavorable factors, or was it fated from the outset, programmed by the Soviet Union’s entire history from its birth to its collapse? This article reflects on precisely these questions.

The fact that a social system of the Soviet type contains such great potential for inertia surprises no one now. This kind of inertia can be seen to a greater or lesser degree in all of the countries that “left communism behind.” It can be seen in the new elites’ obsession with monopolizing power with the help of modified hierarchical-bureaucratic structures and the more technologically sophisticated manipulation of public opinion, their arrogant disregard for society, and their endless appetite for turning assets into an inheritance right. But in Central and Eastern Europe, these post-communist symptoms are kept hidden behind the European facades of new institutions, whose role and influence increase as one goes from east to west, from the Balkans and the Baltic states to the Czech Republic and Slovenia. These lingering remnants of the past raise their heads only when the new system enters a development crisis, such the current situation. Then, as in the early 1990s, seemingly forgotten political actors make their reappearance on the stage – ultranationalists and anti-Europe activists proclaiming a new war

against even older ghosts from the past such as communism and Stalin and their ideological supporters.

In Russia, as in most of the countries of the former Soviet Union, the post-communist reality continues to dominate politics and everyday life. Moreover, the new elite in power and the propaganda services that work for them assert that these kinds of hybrid forms, dubbed “sovereign democracy” in Russia, embody the true sense of post-communist transformation, for this part of the world at least. Following this logic, although movement towards democracy (real, competitive democracy) is the ultimate goal of transformation, it is a lengthy process that under no circumstances should be hastened. As a result, a long period dominated by traditional institutions and public relations, updated a little to meet modern demands, is allegedly inevitable. Otherwise, society would face the inevitable danger of an abrupt anti-modernization turnaround. Such, they remind us, was the fate of the February 1917 revolution which, encouraged by its easy victory, tried to race too fast into building democracy. Although interest in maintaining the status quo is obvious in such reflections on the part of those in power, at the same time, their fears of an anti-modernization turnaround are far from groundless. Indeed, these fears, albeit in distorted fashion, reflect serious social realities. However, it is important to clarify here why the role and influence of post-communism varies so greatly in the different parts of the former “socialist commonwealth” – in the Central and Eastern European countries that have become part of “greater Europe” and in the countries of the former Soviet Union, in particular Russia.

Hundreds of books have been written on this subject. Summing up their content, two key conclusions are evident. First, the participants in the velvet revolutions had clear aims: a return to European civilization, which required them in their political practice to follow this civilization’s and its institutions’ particular demands and rules. Second, this conscious and voluntary choice on their part turned the European Union into a powerful player in all of the Central and European countries’ domestic politics during the years of market and democratic reforms. It was simply not possible not to take into consideration or disregard all together the European Union’s views.

In Russia, as in most countries of the former Soviet Union, neither the new elite nor the general public had a clear idea of the goals of transformation. Initially, it seemed that everyone wanted to build democracy and a society of plenty, as in the West. But with the first difficulties that the reforms brought along this fashion soon faded. An unclear situation with uncertain objectives remained. Of course, the post-Soviet elite set domestic policy and its priorities, and they were not about to let anyone else get involved in this process. Their aim was not to convert power into property, as was previously thought. Reality proved more imaginative than even the notable predictions of Leon Trotsky, who in the late 1930s painted a convincing picture of how the Stalinist nomenklatura would carry out a bourgeois counterrevolution. The new elite

organized things in such a way as to maintain the power system with all of its familiar mechanisms, and at the same time become new owners of various assets. The general public did not have the awareness needed at that time (and still does not have it, for that matter) to prevent these plans from going ahead. Unlike the citizens of the Central and Eastern European countries they were inexperienced, clumsy and naïve in political and civic terms. Democracy in their minds was associated more with having sausage, kitchen appliances and their own cars than with some particular set of values and code of behavior that you had to follow even when you didn't want to. Such a society could not act as a counterbalance to the new elite's selfish plans. It soon forgot the euphoria of the anti-communist revolution of August 1991 and busied itself trying to survive and adapt to life under the new conditions. European guidelines were not needed for such objectives. In any case, there was no particular pressure from outside to carry out democratic and market reforms. The American administration at that time had powerful levers with which to influence the government in Moscow, but its greatest fear was the restoration of the previous social system. Therefore, it closed its eyes to the new elite's shameless actions, such as predatory privatization, lawlessness, "African" levels of corruption and the emergence of an oligarchy. This combination of factors made it possible for the new Russian elite to achieve its goals with little effort. The result was the emergence of the transitional forms that continue to dominate Russian politics and public life to this day. However, Russia is not unique in this respect. A similar situation can be seen in the majority of the countries of the former Soviet Union.

This is the obvious aspect, the surface layer. Far more interesting is the issue of the institutions that are of critical importance not only for understanding the present but also for predicting the future. Russia, like all other countries of the former Soviet Union, did not develop strong and stable institutions, whether political, social, economic or judicial. However, it is impossible to build modern democracy or carry out successful market reform without these institutions. A good example in this respect is the February 1917 revolution mentioned above. The anti-modernization break-up that followed came about in large part because the freedom born out of the February events was not given a basis in institutions. The old tsarist-era institutions were swept aside, but the groups who came to power failed to establish new, democratic institutions under the crisis conditions of development. As a result, anarchy was on the rampage. In any country, groups that categorically reject the idea of competition between ideas, social and political groups, and even goods usually take successful advantage of the spread of anarchy to take power, and such was the case in Russia.

If we study a different example of post-communist transformation – the cases of China and Vietnam in the Far East – we see that institutions also play a decisive role in these countries, not

in affirming freedom, but in successfully developing the market. To meet the new objectives, market reforms have remodeled the institutions of the existing political system, the backbone of which is communist party power. The process of the transfer of power, which is a key element in transitional systems, has been strictly institutionalized and subjected to numerous rules and regulations.

Nothing of the kind has happened in Russia. Freedom and ownership rights have not been given an institutional framework, nor has there been a return to the numerous rules and procedures that the old system had for regulating the elite's recruitment and the transfer of power. For various reasons (the interests of this or that group, the balance of powers within the ruling class, etc.) political institutions in Russia can continue to be strong or hardly noticeable, active or in a dormant state. Only recently it seemed that there was one stable institution holding all of this political mixture together – the presidency. However, the election of 2008 resulted in the formation of a new power structure, dubbed the “tandemocracy”, which clearly demonstrated that a stable presidential institution is yet another illusion. Although the previous super-presidential constitution has been preserved, real power has shifted to the prime minister's office. This shows that power is not an institution but something based on relations of personal dependence. Thus, the political regime remains personalistic in nature, though it is based on two decision-making centers, which is unusual for such cases.

Private property rights, the most fundamental pillars holding up the new political and economic order, have not been given solid embodiment in Russia's new system. On the contrary, they have become relative in nature, like back in the days of classic feudalism, as one wave of redistribution followed another. You can happily own land, factories and banks, as long as you serve the state and government, but the minute you retire, you can only count on God's kindness...

It is not hard to see the causes for this institutional failure in the transition to post-communism in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union was so swift and unexpected that it was practically impossible to preserve the old institutions, but no one was ready to build new ones. There were no ideas or strategic plans to draw on. Past experience had happened long ago and had failed in any case, and so it could not offer a reliable blueprint for new construction.

However, little study has been made of why, twenty years later, the Russian political scene remains just as bereft of institutions. Modern Russian social science literature presents various methodological ideas that can be used to come up with different theories, such as identifying cycles in Russian history, that can help explain why the country's institutions are so weak. According to this theory, Russia is a country with a distributive-type economy, in which the state

during long periods of time gathers assets and then distributes them to private owners.¹ The logical conclusion is that institutions in this environment are subject to frequent change and are therefore unstable. However, this interpretation is more helpful in describing the state of affairs today than explaining it. The problem is that without a clear understanding of what makes institutions so organically weak in post-communist Russia, we cannot understand the country's development algorithm or develop a strategy suited to the Russian environment for moving the country toward new goals.

I will share a few thoughts and observations on this point. The state system in the Soviet Union was made up of a collection of bureaucratic corporations that were sector-based or territorial in nature. The Communist Party was the only institution able to coordinate the interests of these vertically integrated corporations. The political transformation process that began destroyed this institution. The forces of civil society were too weak to replace the Communist Party in creating the effective new institution needed to coordinate the various interests. In a democratic market model the parliament would serve as this institution. This left the various corporations to turn into independent actors with their own resource base.² It turned out to be more advantageous for them to leave the coordination of interests and resolution of disputes up to the national leader, and this in turn determined the stability of the personalistic political regime that characterizes Russia today. The corporations soon began to intentionally obstruct the parliament's development, seeing it as a threat to their own unlimited influence. Public opinion had no tradition of public representation of interests and thus accepted these new rules without protest, agreeing overall that "parliament is not the place for political discussion," because in this sense it is useless and is only something like a department for approving the executive branch's legislative initiatives. Therefore, the first conclusion is that institutionalizing the political system requires strong public demand for the creation of institutions – above all a national parliament – to represent interests. The current Russian parliament is not such an institution. It serves all manner of functions, but representing interests, whether political or regional, is not one of them.

Another problem in Russian politics today is the ruling elite's chronic legitimacy deficit. The elite felt this lack of legitimacy during the crisis years of the 1990s, and this feeling persisted through the "fat" years of the 2000's. The elite to this day have the feeling that everything turned out so well just through simple luck, and this explains their feverish search for legitimacy for their power, first in the ideas of the democratic February 1917 revolution, and then in the liberal reforms of Tsar Alexander II. Later, when the trend changed, they began

¹ See: O. Bessonova, *Razdatochnaya ekonomika Rossii: evolyutsiya cherez transformatsii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006).

² See: I. A. Prostakov, "Korporativizm kak ideya i realnost," *Svobodnaya mysl*, № 2 (1992).

looking for legitimacy in the conservative politics of Alexander II's successor, Alexander III, and then in late Stalinism with its great power and strong-state ideas, which they zealously attempt to separate from communist ideology. Groups and politicians that sense they might not be around for long and are not serious have no need for institutions, which only stop them from quickly resolving their private problems.

Finally, the dramatic events of the twentieth century that cost tens of millions of lives undermined the entire fabric of Russian society. The elite in power are well aware of this and have no faith in the country they rule or in its ability to resolve the fundamental problems of national development on its own. This explains why the members of the ruling class are so eager to transfer their assets abroad and send their children abroad to study, later buying them some business or other beyond Russia's borders. The talk of a country risen from its knees is all for domestic consumption and manipulating the masses. For an elite that has no faith in their own country, the complex and tiring labor of building new institutions would certainly not be appealing.

All of this leads us to conclude that alone behind high walls, opposing the globalization processes, Russia will face an extremely difficult time trying to address the tasks before it as a consequence of the weakness of its internal development resources and the lack of interest of its principal actors in building strong and stable institutions. Only by cooperating closely with the West in all areas – the economy, technology, politics and the free movement of people and ideas – will Russia reach the point when the pressure of globalization will lead to the emergence of a responsible elite and to a mass demand for strong institutions, above all representative ones.

A Society of Political Indifference

Maria Lipman

The local elections in October 2009 demonstrated Russians' deep indifference to public politics. Party representatives and journalists spoke over and over again of flagrant cases of fraud, in particular in the election to the Moscow City Duma, but Moscow voters did not seem to care. Despite the fact that Moscow is home to the most enlightened, wealthiest, best educated, most entrepreneurial and successful people in the country, they show as little interest in their own political rights as everywhere else in Russia.

People have taken to the streets in recent years, indignant that their will has been trampled, in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Iran, but in such cases in Russia people only give a cynical shrug of the shoulders and say, "what did you expect?" More than half of Muscovites thought the Moscow City Duma election results would be rigged even before the election actually took place. Only a little more than a quarter of the capital's residents hoped for an honest election.

Voting is no longer a political choice, and those who still go to the polling stations and cast their votes see it as more of a voluntary ritual than anything. The public shares a deep-rooted belief that their votes count for nothing. "We" don't decide anything, they think. "They" decide everything. This conviction is an accurate picture of Russian life, and so it is no surprise that people seem so indifferent about election fraud. In the absence of public politics as such, the whole issue of civic activeness loses all meaning. It is impossible to say what is the cause and what is the consequence: is there no public politics because society does not stand up for its political rights? Or does society see no meaning to these rights because there is no political process in which to take part?

This apathetic and fragmented society is an invaluable resource for the Russian authorities. All governments dream of being able to rule without having to share power or account for their activities to the public. This is an impossible dream in countries with functional democratic institutions, but in Russia, where the meaning of the institutions has been perverted, this dream has become reality. The ruling elite has done its best to cultivate an apathetic, dissociated and cynical public attitude, and it has been successful. In the Russian public's eyes political parties are no more than Kremlin projects, Duma deputies do not represent their voters' interests, the law is on the side of the strongest, the police threaten rather than protect ordinary people, and corruption is simply a fact of life. This is all seen as a given. You can try to adapt to it, but trying to change it is senseless, naïve and simply foolish. The idea that the people have signed a sort of "pact" with the government in which they renounce their part in decision-making and the authorities guarantee them a tolerable existence is not entirely accurate. If such a pact exists, it is

not with the masses but with the elite, who have indeed deliberately chosen to give up political representation and influence in exchange for privileges and opportunities for enrichment. The paternalist model of relations with the authorities is familiar in Russia, and the vast majority of people have no particular desire to take responsibility for the country's development.

Such was the case in Russia under the tsars, emperors and Bolsheviks. An all-powerful and almost always harsh state subjugated a powerless society. The only time the people ever had the chance to decide for themselves how to live was when the state simply ceased to exist: at the start of the twentieth century, when the Russian Empire collapsed, and at the end of the twentieth century, when communism fell apart. In the first case society was split and slid into a terrible civil war, followed by decades of bloody state terror. In the second case, Russia seemed to make an attempt to extricate itself from the paternalist rut without resorting to violence this time. There was the feeling in the late 1980s-early 1990s that Russians not only rejected Soviet power but knew what to do and what direction to take. For a time it seemed that in freeing themselves from communism and choosing democracy and the market they not only saw hope for a better life for themselves and their fellow citizens but, most importantly, were ready to put their efforts and energy into making these goals reality.

But the energy soon ran out. After discovering that political freedom and the transition to capitalism did not signal the start of a better life, people were disappointed and disoriented. The public enthusiasm of the late perestroika and early Yeltsin years soon melted away, leaving at best a feeling of uneasiness at having exhibited such a burst of earnest naïveté, and at worst the conviction of having been intentionally and maliciously deceived, forced to swallow harmful and alien values. The pendulum swung yet again and willingness to follow Western models gave way to anti-Western feelings and the conviction that foreign recipes would never work anyway, because Russia has its own special path. Western political institutions – democratic checks and balances, a multiparty system, competitive elections – were borrowed and even cemented in the constitution, but have not taken root in Russian soil. The state remained weak, but society did not become stronger.

The feeling of liberation that many Russians felt when they rejected communism in 1991 soon faded from the national memory. With Putin's rise to power, the Kremlin began steadily eroding political freedoms and restoring the traditional model of a centralized monopoly on power, but by this time the public did not perceive this as an infringement on its own rights.

Why, unlike the situation in the former Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe, did the liberation from communism in Russia not help the country set a new direction for its future development? Why did the enthusiasm for truth and freedom that so inspired Russians 20 years ago give way so swiftly and decisively to disappointment and cynicism? The difficulties of

overcoming the communist legacy alone are not enough to explain it; after all, the countries of Eastern Europe also had more than their share of problems.

One possible explanation is that Soviet citizens did not win their freedom, but received it as a gift. The fierce resistance that many Russians put up to the Bolsheviks during the Civil War is a distant memory now, and the winners in that war did all they could to ensure that all memory of the losers was eradicated, either exiling them abroad or exterminating them as a class. The dissidents fighting for rights and liberties during the Brezhnev years were very few in number and had neither the public's trust nor support. (The situation was somewhat different in the case of the nationalists in the Baltic states and Ukraine, but that already is not Russian history.) By the mid-1980s, the dissident movement had been entirely defeated.

It was Mikhail Gorbachev who began to gradually loosen the screws of state repression. The first and last president of the USSR was no freedom fighter, of course, but he saw the profound decay of the Soviet system and the approaching economic disaster and realized that the state would soon have no further means at its disposal for ensuring the population's loyalty. It was beyond his capabilities to improve the economy and the system of governance in general, but he decided to give the Soviet people freedom, and they responded, though not immediately, to his gift with mass enthusiasm and support, despite the fact that the economic situation continued its rapid decline. If this fervor proved short-lived, perhaps it was precisely because it was obtained so easily and people did not view it as the fruit of their own struggle.

To be fair, however, not all of the former socialist bloc countries experienced a resolute struggle against a repressive regime. Resistance continued practically the whole time in Poland, which witnessed what would have been for Russia an unthinkable alliance between the intelligentsia and the workers movement. Poland was unique, however, in the intensity of its struggle. In a number of countries – Bulgaria, for example – the people settled down quite peacefully to their existence under a communist regime and in the end received their freedom and independence from Gorbachev's hands. Gradually, however, all of the former “fraternal countries” came to see themselves as victims of Soviet imperialism, and this helped them unite their societies, mitigated the hardships of the post-communist period, and helped shape the consensus on where to go from there.

Herein lies another very important difference from Russia: the former Warsaw Pact allies could declare communism an evil imposed on them from the outside, but Russia could not call itself a victim and communism an outside force, and therefore it could not make liberation from communism the basis for a new national identity.

Furthermore, the Warsaw Pact countries saw the collapse of the socialist bloc and the bankruptcy of communism as a chance to restore continuity with their pre-communist European

past. In some of these countries this past is a historic fact, while in others it is a product of the imagination (some of these countries only became independent states in the last 10-15 years), but everywhere it was envisioned as a return to a “golden age”. This notion has spread even beyond the former socialist bloc and encompasses all of the countries that have recently joined the European Union or hope to do so in the foreseeable future. For example, a series of documentary films about the countries of southeast Europe recently released by an international non-governmental organization was called “Return to Europe”. The “returnees” include not only Macedonia, Bosnia and Croatia, but also Turkey, which was never part of Europe, and Greece, which seemingly never left Europe. The name of the series sounds foolish, but its sense is eminently clear: Europe is envisioned as a valuable (democratic) reference point and a desired region that other countries should make their destination.

Unlike the new and future countries of Europe, Russia does not have a common national vision of a “golden age” to which it should return. For various reasons neither Bolshevism nor the Russian Empire fit this role. The former socialist bloc countries had no trouble deciding to celebrate their newly obtained independence from Soviet communism as a national holiday and the departure point for their new statehood. Russians rejected the introduced June 12 holiday (Russia Day) and were greatly puzzled by the authorities’ proposal that they celebrate National Unity Day on November 4 in place of the old anniversary of the revolution on November 7. People still have not figured out the starting point for Russia’s current statehood. However, without knowing where we came from we don’t know what to use as a foundation for building a nation today or which way to go from here. If we reject borrowed values, then what are our own values, apart from hostility to those of others?

Such a society is easy to manipulate, not because it is gullible, but because it believes in nothing. For the ruling elite, whose primary goal is to hold onto and consolidate their own power, such a society is no less a blessing than big oil reserves. But for Russia’s development, both are curses. The lack of national consensus on Russia’s direction is as much a brake on the country’s development as is dependence on oil and gas exports. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Russia cannot follow the road taken by its former “younger brothers”: it is too big to become a part of something else.

In Russia today no one calls openly for a return to the past. On the contrary, the authorities call incessantly for modernization, but in reality there is no blueprint for the road ahead. The vacuum is inevitably filled by fragments of old models and symbols: paternalism, an anti-Western outlook, single party and single ideology projects, the Soviet national anthem, and Stalin in the Moscow metro.

“Back to the USSR” is nevertheless more of a metaphor than a reality, and the last two decades cannot be seen as having been entirely lost. Of course, the absence of public politics turns political rights into a hollow concept, and the civil liberties written into the constitution are violated at every turn, but compared to Soviet times, the space of individual freedom has become practically unlimited. The Soviet regime imposed restrictions on people at every step: it declared private property and making profit a crime; banned travel; and decided what people could and could not read, watch and listen to, and what they could and could not write, film and perform. These restrictions no longer exist, and a whole generation has grown up that cannot imagine any other kind of life. But can we hope that these personal freedoms will gradually give rise to a civic spirit that will inspire people to seek something not just for themselves but for their fellow citizens, too? Will this help to shape a national consensus, or can the acquisition of new meanings come only through new cataclysms? The answer is not clear today. However, maintaining the paternalist model threatens Russia with inevitable decline, and sooner or later the country will have to reinvent itself.

Freedom

Sam Greene

The fall of the Berlin Wall is usually considered to be the starting point for the “liberation” of first Central and Eastern Europe and then the former Soviet republics. Removal of the physical (and also the political and psychological) barriers between East and West Berlin did indeed play a huge part and in many respects made the “liberation” process irreversible. However, the process itself began not in Berlin and not with the wall’s fall.

A more accurate date from which to start the countdown to the socialist bloc’s “liberation” would be not November 9, 1989, but August 19, 1989, when what was dubbed the “European picnic” took place. A large number of East Germans, anxious to make their way at any cost to West Germany, where they were promised citizenship and a new life, found themselves at that moment in socialist but relatively liberal Hungary, from where they could hope to cross into Austria and onwards into West Germany. The Hungarian government came to their aid, opening the border with Austria first for one day, and then, on September 11 that same year (alas, history has since defiled this date!), for good. No sooner was the decision made than East Germans began streaming into Hungary and Czechoslovakia and from there to West Germany. The East Germans’ desire to seek a new life elsewhere and the Hungarian and Czechoslovak authorities’ refusal to support the East German government and send the would-be émigrés home by force made the wall dividing Berlin an absurdity, and this is what brought the wall down.

I recall these precursory events not out of a pedantic nature, but because if we want to understand subsequent events we first have to trace them back to their real causes. The Berlin Wall came down not because Berlin and Bonn (and thus Moscow and Washington) agreed to let it fall, but because it had been quite simply bypassed and deprived of its sense, thus turning it into nothing but meaningless bricks and barbed wire. But most important of all is why it was bypassed: East Germans wanted to live on *the other side*. This contradicts another of the explanations of what brought the wall down, namely the idea that it fell because East Germans wanted change in their own country.

When describing the behavior of consumers dissatisfied with this or that product, economists use a model giving consumers two options – “exit” or “voice”. The second option is simpler and requires less cost and effort, but it makes sense only when people think there is a likelihood that their voice will be heard and taken into consideration (and not only by the powers that be). If people see no chance of this, they choose the first, more radical option. Political economist Alfred Hirschman applied this model to the situation in East Germany. I will not go

into all the reasons why East Germans chose the “exit” rather than the “voice” option, but will only note that this choice was quite clear and unambiguous.

East Germany was not the only country that saw many of its citizens leave during the totalitarian regime’s rule and after its collapse. Even today, people are still emigrating from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Most of them head for the West in pursuit of money, education, safety and new opportunities. Of course, people also emigrate from third world countries and from one developed country to another, either more developed or simply offering something different. I say this just to note that there is no reason to reproach East Germans for what was an understandable choice and standard sort of response on their part.

However, at the same time, their choice is noteworthy in that it reflects the essence of the post-communist period, and not just in Germany (less so in Germany, in fact, since East Germany had an advantage that none of the other countries had – it was subsequently absorbed by the Federal Republic of Germany). Flight from one country to another was and still is in many cases not so much about the search for freedom as the search for a better life. If East Germans sought freedom, it was freedom “from” (oppression, poverty, a drab existence, lack of hope), which is certainly all very important, but it is a very different thing from freedom «to» (express one’s views, exercise political and civil self-government and help set one’s own country’s policies). Liberal theorists assert that this is all one and the same thing, but the experience of the last 20 years suggests otherwise.

Two decades after the Berlin Wall fell many speak of a new wall dividing Europe. This new wall is a lot farther east than the old iron curtain. It is far easier to penetrate, but causes much harm even so. It divides the countries that have joined the European Union from those that can hope to join only many years down the line, if at all. Analysts note that only the former socialist bloc countries to the west of this new wall have made a successful transition to democracy and a market economy. Some see historical and cultural differences as the explanation, suggesting that some countries are capable of making this transition, while others are not. But experience shows that a different link between cause and effect is in play, and that the European Union was the deciding factor in those countries that made successful transitions.

Whatever the causes and effects involved, the new curtain dividing Europe is largely illusory. It is only as real as people’s (and politicians’) imaginations make it. It does, however, make it hard to see the real similarities between the countries and societies on either side, and for all their seeming differences, these countries do share indisputable similarities.

There is no doubt that the new EU members have a more solid institutional foundation than their eastern neighbors. This is thanks to the EU itself and its *acquis communautaire*, which the Central and Eastern European governments have brought into force over the last almost 20 years.

This has created what transition specialists Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan call the “usable state”. The commitment of these countries’ elites to democratic values and procedures is largely a product of their need to prove themselves part of the European family of peoples and countries. In the years before their countries gained EU membership, almost all of the region’s politicians tried to win over voters during election campaigns by asserting that only they, and not their opponents, would take the country faster into the EU.

However, it is one thing to create a usable state and another to establish just to what extent society is ready to “use” it. This concerns not only society in general, but politicians, political parties, the media, civil society and all other “non-structural” elements making up the democratic system. A state, after all, is not some formal set of constitutionally enshrined institutions, but a system of relations between society and what we call the authorities, as well as relations within society itself. Determining the changes that have taken place since 1989 requires us to look at what has happened to this system of relations between society and the state.

One very important change has taken place: the state is no longer the decisive factor in people’s success and prospects. This change has taken place in all of the former socialist bloc countries (with perhaps the partial exception of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). These two countries aside, totalitarianism is dead throughout the region, meaning that ideology plays almost no part today overall. These two changes combined have resulted in fundamental shifts in the relations between society and the state, although not always in favor of freedom, as we will see a little later.

The state no longer tells its citizens where to live, work, study and rest, what to read, what to wear, and how to interpret the events taking place around them. Even in countries where democracy is weak or altogether absent, basic human rights are observed, and the main difference today between private life for people in Eurasia and in Western Europe is the level of prosperity they enjoy. There are more noticeable differences when it comes to civil and political freedoms. Only in the new EU members do people have rights (electoral rights, the freedom to demonstrate, freedom of the media, etc.) comparable to those of people in the “old” Europe.

What does this difference in civil and political freedoms mean? According to surveys conducted by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), around 40% of people in Central and Eastern Europe think that the economic situation in their countries is better now than in 1989. This response was given by the same number of people in the CIS countries, despite these countries’ obvious economic backwardness. The political picture is even more paradoxical: around 45% of people in the CIS said that the political situation in their country has improved since 1989, while this view was shared by slightly more than 30% in Central and Eastern Europe.

Of course, public opinion surveys have to be taken with a grain of salt. Any attempt today to assess the state of affairs 20 years ago will inevitably be subjective. In addition, the degree of political and economic collapse in the Central European countries differed (mostly for the better) from that in the Soviet Union. This dubious “sociology” could be dismissed altogether were it not for other statistical evidence to back it up. According to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the number of people leaving the former socialist countries has been growing steadily over the last 10 years. From 1998 through 2007, the number of people who left Hungary for the OECD countries (wealthy, mostly Western countries) rose by 92% and came to 34,900 people in 2007. The figure rose by 137% in Poland over the same period (reaching 221,900 people a year). A total of 115,400 people left Ukraine in 2007 – an increase of 238% compared to 1998. The only country that stands out is Russia, with 70,300 departures in 2007 – just 4% more than in 1998.

Democracy is not the Berlin Wall. It has no barbed wire and no armed guards doing their rounds. It does not hold anyone back. But if you bypass it and run from it in search of a better life, it becomes just as absurd as the Berlin Wall did 20 years ago, and just like the Berlin Wall, it will also fall if it loses its meaning.

You could object, of course, saying that people are running not from democracy, but from one democratic country to another. You could ask where democracy fits into all this anyway, when what we were talking about was freedom. Besides, what kind of freedom is this, if it doesn't include the possibility of leaving? This is certainly the case, but it does not change the essence of the matter. As before, people are still primarily concerned with their personal well being (in all its forms, not just the material aspect) and their children's future. Politics is a means for achieving these goals. People saw the Berlin Wall as an obstacle mainly for these reasons, rather than for political ones. The new “democracy” is not an obstacle in people's way, perhaps, but it evidently fails to help them achieve their objectives to the extent they would like, and thus, like the wall, it too can vanish.

It is worth taking a look back at what happened after the wall came down. Gorbachev sent the signal that the Soviet Union would not protect the socialist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe from their own people, who did not want to live under socialism. In this situation, the “voice” option suddenly became a real possibility, and people swiftly showed the communist leaders to the “exit”. Some of these leaders stepped aside voluntarily, some not so willingly, and some did not leave at all, but there remain no more communist countries in the region. The new leaders (some of whom were simply the old ones in new guise) learned to play by new rules. There were two rules. First, leaders were chosen by the people in free elections, if only because

this system guaranteed that the losers could stay in the game and not end up in prison. Second, the aspiration to join the European Union became the sole basis for legitimacy.

The Central and Eastern European countries wandered the desert for 14 years until some of them were finally allowed to join the EU. Over these years they had functioning democratic institutions, held elections, changed parties and governments, developed an independent media and built a market economy. But there was no public politics as such. Former communists (now social democrats) competed against former anti-communists (now center-right) in proving who was more of a technocrat and less of a demagogue. However, they failed to develop party organizations able to bring together and mobilize diverse public interests. If asked where their country's future lay, right and left both chorused "in Europe". All fine and good, but this is not enough. There is no democracy without differences.

Differences in opinion existed, of course, but they were not discussed in the political arena. The politicians and the public probably share the blame for this situation, afraid, no doubt, that if they aired their dirty laundry in public it would lessen their chances of EU membership. Meanwhile, widespread reform began in the education, health and housing sectors, the social and economic stratification of society became more pronounced, and the number of homeless and unemployed grew. Furthermore, some countries simply ceased to exist and new countries emerged in their place. This was a huge test for society in general, as well as for every individual. The EU countries also lived through this whole process and to a certain extent are still dealing with the consequences today. Different societies chose different solutions, and so the German state differs greatly from, say, Britain or Italy.

Now that they have become "European", the people of Central and Eastern Europe have to decide just what kind of Europeans they want to be and what kind of state to build. The seemingly democratic institutions that served them well enough along the path toward EU membership have turned out to be not so well suited for further maneuvers. There are no politicians willing to incorporate into a constructive program the widespread discontent revealed by the EBRD surveys and emigration statistics. Instead, the disenfranchised and confused population is caught up in the embrace of radicals and nationalists with their simple answers. Filled with a sense of having been unjustly cheated, the public follows the aggressive slogans and turns its anger against "outsiders". Gypsies have been frequent targets of this frustration, and here and there across the "new" Europe synagogues have been set ablaze. People in these countries are trying to speak up, but in the corridors of power it seems that no one is listening, and the threat is growing anew of a mass movement towards the "exit".

With the exception of the three Baltic countries, people in the former Soviet Union have not become citizens of the united Europe and will not do so in the foreseeable future. Thus,

Russian and Ukrainian politicians, ignoring the call of public politics, cannot, like their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe, justify themselves by saying that by engaging into politics they can postpone accession to the European Union. By and large no such call has come anyway. The Central European countries wandered for 14 years through the desert of formal democracy, but at least they picked up some useful habits over this time. The leaders of their neighbors to the east, however, have led their people into somewhat different deserts, where they picked up somewhat different habits, or rather their habits remained pretty much the same as they were before being banished from the Soviet “paradise”. The rules the Central and Eastern European leaders played by do not apply here. There are no rules here at all.

It is noteworthy that the problems on either side of the new curtain are nevertheless almost the same. For all their formal success, the Central and Eastern European countries have not yet sufficiently developed the substance of relations between the state and society, including parliaments, parties and the press. This means that government is still not accountable to the public, and this is what causes people to head for the “exit”, some emigrating, others moving to the outskirts of the political arena, and still others withdrawing into themselves (with or without the help of alcohol and drugs).

During the Soviet period people also chose the “exit” option. Emigration was difficult, but possible for some groups. Others, who could not emigrate but did not want to live within the limits set by the state, chose what outwardly resembled the “voice” option but in reality differed little from the “exit”. The dissident movement harbored no illusions about the possibility of changing the political regime. Those who did not want to resign themselves to the system, but could not live beyond its physical borders could at least live beyond its moral borders. This was what they meant by “living a life without lies.” Toward this goal, they would get together and speak the truth, write the truth in their samizdat publications, share the truth with Western journalists, and for a brief moment in Red Square even shout the truth to the stones, fir trees and dead leaders, and to the waiting KGB officers.

Times have changed now. Information travels freely from computer to mobile phone and on around the entire globe. It can easily bypass any wall and penetrate any curtain. The few regimes that keep their people in fear and darkness are doomed. Sooner or later the absurdity of this closed-off life will become too obvious and the walls will tumble down. The peoples of North Korea, Burma and the other handful of totalitarian states will sooner or later gain their freedom, but it will be freedom “from” rather than freedom “to”.

When Hirschman wrote about the political choice between “voice” and “exit”, he assumed that in a free environment, with all other things being equal, people would choose “voice” rather than “exit”. This is because “exit” involves greater costs; after all, the person doing the exiting

leaves behind all that is close and familiar and has to adapt to a new way of life. What happens, however, if the “exit” turns out to be closer? What happens if all one has to do to “exit” is to buy a package tour, open the right book or turn on a computer? The result is probably what we see now. “Exit” has become a cheaper and simpler option than “voice”. A dreary and difficult existence becomes more bearable. In theory, people reject the “voice” option only if it is senseless or dangerous. But in the new paradigm, when it is enough to press a button to “exit”, the theory no longer works. In the modern world people renounce the “voice” option just because they are too lazy to become actively involved.

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, with rare and sad exceptions, have obtained freedom “from”. They are now full-fledged citizens of a new globalized world, from which they obtain many benefits. But they are not full-fledged citizens of their own countries and they receive only negligible benefits from being citizens of their countries. Obtaining freedom “to” and public sovereignty over their own country, rather than personal sovereignty beyond its physical or moral borders, is a worthy objective for the next twenty years.

“Religious Expansion” and Foreign Policy

Alexey Malashenko

Our program’s very name symbolizes the strange and contradictory nature of the processes taking place in the world. The West was stunned by the sudden awakening of Islam at the end of the last century. At the start of the new century religion (not only Islam, but also Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism) has become a legitimate factor in political activity, thus reminding us that it is more than simply another component of the landscape of civilization on which history has taken place.

Religion has become a part of worldly affairs more than ever today, recalling the Middle Ages. The secular approach is no longer seen as the one and only road to follow. Stable channels of communication have taken shape between religion and political and public events. Religion intervenes in foreign policy. “Faith-based diplomacy can be a useful tool of foreign policy,” former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright said. “The resurgence of religious feeling will continue to influence world events.”³ Religion is present in civil society, and practically every country declares its loyalty to religion. Whether in the Muslim east or the Russian Federation, it plays an important part in ensuring stability and also in giving the authorities their legitimacy. The Russian Orthodox Church is an unofficial but influential player on the Russian and broader Eurasian political stage. From time to time the Russian Orthodox Church performs specific tasks for the secular authorities (although the church officials would never admit this).

Over the last two decades, mankind has been undergoing the “test of globalization”, which many see as a threat for individual ethnic cultural and religious identities. Cultural differences have become blurred and the information tidal wave and computerization have contributed to mutual cultural penetration. Globalization implies the development of a universal system of values and views.

It appears at first glance as though all religions would take a wholly negative view of globalization with its universalist thinking that is the antithesis of individual religious tradition. The one exception is Protestantism (or rather its American variant), which encourages globalization. However, in reality the situation is more complex. Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism all have their own mechanisms for joining and cautiously mingling with the globalization current. These religions are not unambiguously negative in their response to the universalist challenge. Such is not the case of Islam and Orthodoxy, which intrinsically reject globalization, seeing it above all as political and cultural expansion by the West, which they

³ M. Albright, “Faith and Diplomacy,” *The Rev. of Faith & Intern. Affairs* 4, № 2 (Fall 2006): P. 9.

think pursues the strategic aim of subjugating the Muslim world and Russia and therefore needs to first distort and then destroy their religious identities.

Muslim ideologues have responded with their own globalization vision based on Islamic tradition, which in their view will sooner or later become global as all the peoples of the world come to embrace Islam, in accordance with Islamic teaching.

The challenges of globalization and the responses offered by the different religions are becoming an axis of humanity's political and cultural existence. Elements of the notorious "conflict of civilizations" are evident here, but more than anything else what has emerged is the complex and contradictory interaction of traditions, in which each individual religion is forced to adapt to globalization, while at the same time adapting globalization to its own vision.

Protection of human rights is one of the pillars of globalization, which is inconceivable without the priority of the individual. The Muslim world, confronted with this issue, too, responded by coming up with its own Islam-based solution, proclaimed in 1990 in Cairo. Orthodox ideologues are also looking for their own version of human rights.

Religion often becomes a means for expressing social and political protest. This takes its most acute and consistent form in the Muslim world. In practically every Muslim country or region where Muslims live there is a religious opposition covering the whole spectrum from moderate to extremist. Political Islam offers an alternative for organizing the state and society and engages millions of Muslims in its fight. This alternative has various national and regional variations, but they all share the ultimate goal of establishing a system based on the principles of the Koran and Sharia law.

Political Islam is primarily radical and its followers are always ready to enter into conflict with the governments in power, which in their eyes have betrayed the tenets of Islam. Islam has become one of the most powerful and effective tools for social mobilization, as we have seen in numerous cases over the last 30 years, from Iran to the Russian North Caucasus and from China's Xinjiang province to Europe, where the number of Muslims now approaches 30 million.

Relations between Muslims and the West have become more complicated. Muslims' relations with Russia and China are also far from simple. At the epicenter of the contradictions are the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. A tense situation has prevailed in the North Caucasus for almost 20 years now, and the situation in Central Asia is also complex. Zbigniew Brzezinski drew a "crescent of instability" on the geopolitical map of the world in his time. Today's pattern of instability has long since spread beyond the crescent and taken on a much larger form. Understanding the complexities of these various crisis situations is impossible without an adequate dialectical understanding of the religious factor.

Of course, the confrontations taking place in and around the Muslim world do not arise from religion alone. The conflicts in Southern Asia, the Middle East and the countries of the former Soviet Union all have their own causes, but religion is an important tool for the different political forces involved, and its use inevitably spreads these conflicts further and makes them more serious.

There are various interpretations of the ongoing conflicts in the Muslim world. Many Muslims place the blame for *all* conflicts and tension in their lands on the West, the Soviet Union, and then Russia (for provoking the war in Chechnya). In reality, however, the causes of these various conflicts go much deeper and are rooted not just in external intervention, but also in internal factors – the political and socio-economic situations in Muslim countries and societies.

The internal crisis in Islam became much more acute at the turn of the century. Rival interpretations of Islam and the struggles between the various Islamic ideologues have aggravated the situation in the Muslim community. These debates are taking place everywhere. In Russia, they are extremely acute and painful in the North Caucasus. The internal crisis in Islam cannot be dissociated from Islam's relations with the West: supporters of modernization are labeled hypocrites – *munafiq* – (an accusation that has been around since the times of the Prophet Mohammed) and are condemned for deforming “true Islam” and abandoning the faith's dogmas.

Each conflict has its own specific nature, but we can ascertain the existence of a single conflict-related field, which can be compared to a system of connecting vessels. The internal conflict in Afghanistan, for example, is one of the links in a long chain. The conflict in Afghanistan in turn creates tension in the southern region of Central Asia. The Taliban movement is now threatening Pakistan. The rise of radical Islam in Pakistan worsens that country's relations with India. The crisis over Iran heightens tension in the Middle East, and the situation in Iraq has a negative impact on relations between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Those are only some of the examples.

It is not possible to come up with a single strategy to resolve all of these different conflicts, but it is possible to formulate a general strategic vision of the situation in the Muslim world and, in particular, to understand the nature of Islamic radicalism, which is the ferment actively flowing through the connecting vessels, in order to determine the extent to which it is an objectively inevitable phenomenon, and to identify the circumstances in which it is being used as a tool.

Understanding Islamic radicalism is the key to understanding the nature of terrorism and finding effective solutions that will *prevent* it. I deliberately italicize this word because the fight against terrorism as such can only have limited success.

Despite the widespread belief, September 11, 2001, did not fundamentally change the situation in the world. The main thing the terrorist attack did was to suddenly wake people up to the fact that world had changed. However, the world began changing long before tragedy struck New York. Its historic and cultural roots go back a long way. The seeds of imminent transformation were sown in the 1970s, when, one after another, Muslim countries faced the failure of economic reforms drawn up by foreign consultants and advisers, and it became clear that simply imitating foreign models was not going to work. The changes could be said to have begun with the Islamic revolution in 1978-1979 in Iran. Many at that time saw the fall of the seemingly stable and successful regime led by the Iranian shah and the rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeini as a break with the established pattern of African and Asian countries' development. The same goes for the Islamicization of the Palestinian resistance movement, which culminated in the election victory in 2005. The Hamas Islamic freedom movement, periodic flare-ups of activity by Hezbollah in Lebanon, the 1990-1991 civil war in Algeria and the Taliban victory in Afghanistan in 1996 – all were accompanied by the excesses of terrorism, which gradually became a familiar weapon in the political struggle.

Comparisons of today's terrorism with past examples – Irish or Basque terrorists, or the terrorism of Russian revolutionaries in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries – are possible but inaccurate. Today's international terrorism is a new phenomenon. This terrorism pursues geopolitical goals, and its ideology is built on the most radical interpretations of religion. International terrorist organizations have taken shape, and there is a "terrorist environment" united by a common international religion, which some specialists think now embraces hundreds of thousands or even millions of people. Terrorists – the ideologues and the executors – see themselves beyond the framework of politics, the laws of war, and morals, because they are convinced that they are responsible before God alone, who authorizes them to carry out even the cruelest acts. This feeling of sacred responsibility gives them a special status in their own eyes, but it also demands their readiness to sacrifice themselves, and this in turn produces the phenomenon of suicide terrorists. Those who try to depict these people solely as "thugs and drug addicts" fail to understand the real problem of terrorism and are therefore unable to develop efficient strategies for fighting it.

Is this terrorism a temporary and transitory phenomenon, or will it soon become a familiar, "routine" form of political action? This is a critically important question. Given the protracted and seemingly endless nature of the conflicts and crises connected to the situation in the Muslim

world and the rapid increase of Muslim penetration into the non-Muslim environment, we can suppose that, unfortunately, terrorism still has considerable reserves on which to draw. Fears are growing that terrorists could use weapons of mass destruction. This is all the more dangerous as “countries had not been able to adapt quickly to the new challenges that were being brought about due to the accelerating pace of globalization, such as rapidly developing cross-border trade and the availability of nuclear materials, technology, information, and expertise, as well as the increasing prominence of non-governmental entities, including corrupt groups, organized crime, and terrorist organizations.”⁴ One of these entities is international terrorism, which today is at the very least already able to threaten the use of weapons of mass destruction and tomorrow might turn words into action.

We could describe what we are witnessing today as a sort of an “asymmetrical response” by Muslims to their failures in the economic and political competition with America, Europe and to some extent Russia. Islamic radicalism offers compensation for the Muslim community’s disadvantages in world affairs. Finally, it is becoming a means of self-affirmation for the Muslim immigrants who are penetrating ever deeper into Europe.⁵ It is not by chance that some radical Islamic ideologues think that the new Islamic inspiration, the “Islamic call”, will reach the Muslim world from Europe.

A greater religious awareness and a growing level of political activity under religious slogans manifest themselves in crisis situations. Some Eurasian countries, including the countries of the former Soviet Union, are going through a process of the de-modernization of society, the economy and the education system. Relations in society are increasingly regulated by traditions, both ethno-cultural and religious. This is the case in the Central Asian countries and in the Russian North Caucasus. Religion offers people a way out of their difficulties. It is noteworthy that secular governments are also turning now to religion and trying to use it for their own purposes. In Russia and the CIS this is most noticeable in Tajikistan and Chechnya. Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov both display elements of religious charisma in their behavior.

Along Russia’s southern borders a new Muslim enclave is gradually forming, in which social relations are increasingly shaped by traditional ethno-religious norms. The clergy, loyal to the authorities, and the Islamic opposition both support the same goal of establishing Sharia law in society and do so increasingly openly. Some prominent secular politicians speak up in favor of

⁴ A. Arbatov and V. Dvorkin, eds., Carnegie Moscow Center *At the Nuclear Threshold* (Moscow, 2007), P. 69.

⁵ See.: M. Emerson, ed., *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe: Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe’s Muslim Communities* (Brussels: CEPS, 2009).

the observance of Islamic laws and codes of behavior. The topic most often discussed in this respect is polygamy, which is a widespread practice among well-off Muslims.

The current crisis is likely to lead to a strengthening of the Russian Orthodox Church's influence in Russia. The public trusts the church as an institution far more than they trust the State Duma or the ruling United Russia party. The Orthodox Church makes no secret of its desire to influence society and the state, proposing its own blueprint for the country's organization and defending the idea that Russia has its own path (reminiscent of the "Islamic alternative"). Clearly, if social tension increases, which the authorities have reason to fear, the church could absorb the discontent and act as a mediator between the ruling establishment and society.

Furthermore, the state authorities can benefit from interaction with the Russian Orthodox Church, unofficially gaining additional legitimacy from it. However, at the same time, such closeness is unlikely to increase respect for the church, which could come to be seen as the ally of the very administrators and bureaucrats in whom the public have lost faith.

In this context, one cannot help but notice the level of activity of Patriarch Kirill, who, following the example of President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, spends much time travelling around the country and abroad, speaking with various groups of the population, senior government officials and military bosses, effectively breaking down the barrier between social and political activity and religious service. The patriarch is becoming the symbol of the church's politicization, though he publicly denies this.

The Russian Orthodox Church's close relations with the state cause hidden (and sometimes open) irritation among Russia's Muslims, who think that the country is not observing the principles of separation of church and state and equality of the different religions.

At the turn of the century, people became increasingly aware of their ties to particular religious traditions and cultures. Islam sparked this return to religion, to a large extent triggering the religious revivals underway in Europe and America. The West had lost much of its religious identity, but when faced with the threat of a different religious force, that of Islam, it responded to the challenge by attempting in an almost instinctive way to revive its own religious identity. It is curious in this respect that many Muslims do not see the conflict with Europeans and Americans as a conflict of civilizations, but consider it a conflict between Islam and the "Godless" West, or between Islam and *kufir* (non-belief). They have made well-known calls for Europeans to return to their own religion.

The religious revival in the countries of the former Soviet Union was a response to Soviet atheism. It was very active at first, but by the start of this decade had lost some of its energy. However, the last few years have seen religion once again growing stronger, but now this is not

so much a religious revival as a “religious expansion” – religion’s encroachment into all areas of life, and this is a process that could go significantly farther.

Russia's own Imperial Road

Alexei Arbatov

Each of the great empires has its own unique and inimitable emergence, zenith, decline and collapse, but they all have one thing in common. From the time of fifth-sixth century Roman historian and philosopher Anicius Boethius, all who witnessed an empire's fall considered it a natural development, but always made an exception for their own country. As they saw it, their own country's collapse, unlike that of all others, was not simply history taking its logical course, but arose because of particular combinations of circumstances, incompetent rulers, or malicious intent fermented at home and/or abroad. The collapse of one's own empire was always seen as an unprecedented disaster, while the end of any other empire was simply one link in a long chain of similar, explainable and logical historic events.

These same views prevail in today's Russia. Speaking several years ago, former President Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet Union the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century, and most of the public and the political elite backed him up on this opinion. But paradoxical though it may seem, this attitude is yet further proof that for all its specific features, the Soviet empire found itself subject to the same universal laws of socio-economic, military-political and moral-psychological cycles that took the Soviet Union, like all of its numerous predecessors, through the stages of rise, zenith, decline and collapse.

The Soviet Empire: Similarities to and Differences from Other Empires

It seems unquestionable that in several important respects tsarist Russia and its successor, the Soviet Union, stood out among the great empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Britain and France, Spain and Portugal, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Germany all built their prosperity on colonial exploitation and drew a strict dividing line between Europeans and indigenous peoples. Russia, however, had always been an empire, not in the economic sense, but in the political and military sense, acquiring colonies in order to expand its security perimeter and multiply its might, prestige and role in the surrounding world.

The Russian (Soviet) ruling elite was open to nobles from the colonial provinces, thus giving rise to a genuinely multiethnic nomenklatura, working together to exploit and oppress all of their subjects and use them as cheap labor (albeit with a low level of productivity) and cannon fodder with the goal of maintaining their own power, wealth and grandeur. The empire's core people – the ethnic Russians – were not infrequently given even harsher treatment than the other peoples. However, Russia, and later the Soviet Union, were nonetheless empires in the full sense of the term. They had much in common with continental military and political empires of the

past – the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, and especially the Byzantine empire, from which Moscow borrowed most of all in terms of imperial ideology (Moscow as the “third Rome”), state-building, rules and traditions governing relations within the hierarchy and the political process in general.

Soviet-style communist ideology was built not so much on Marxism-Leninism as such, as on a super-statist, anti-democratic (totalitarian) and messianic vision of state and public organization. Russian autocracy had a similar ideological base, though in a milder version. This was the only kind of ideology able to cement into a unified monolith a whole host of peoples scattered across a vast territory and living at different stages of social development – from an industrial economy to nomadic cattle herding. This is one of the differences between Russia and the main European empires, where (except in authoritarian Portugal) varying levels of democracy in the mother country existed in parallel to authoritarian colonial oppression in the dependent territories. For this reason these empires’ political regimes survived the loss of their colonies.

The Russian empire, and even more so the Soviet empire, was built on four pillars holding up the system.

The first was an iron-disciplined authoritarian or totalitarian corporate political regime based on all-pervasive political surveillance and suppression of dissident thinking.

The second was colossal military power far in excess of the country’s economic resources, built up at the expense of the state’s other functions and the people’s prosperity.

The third was a centralized economy under state command (directly in the Soviet Union and indirectly in tsarist Russia), designed above all to consolidate the bureaucratic establishment’s power and build up military might.

The fourth was a messianic ideology that served to legitimize the three pillars of imperial power mentioned above, use grand ideas to justify the subjects’ poverty and lack of rights, and provide the grounds for constant outward expansion.

The obsession with security, secrecy and the never-ending fight against plots and threats from both within and without was an integral part of this ideology. It was partly rooted in the harsh lessons of history, but over time became a self-perpetuating condition of the regime’s existence. The need to maintain and legitimize the status quo, coupled with the messianic vision, required the constant expansion of the borders. This exhausted economic and human resources, sparked discontent at home and aroused neighboring peoples’ fear and hostility.

The result was that the obsession with external and internal threats turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The vision of potential enemy plots at home and abroad produced a saber-

rattling foreign and domestic policy that did indeed create resistance inside the empire and confrontation beyond its borders.

Soviet foreign policy had its own particular approach to the rule of law and the need to observe moral norms of some sort or other on the international stage. The Soviet Union made a show of observing these rules only insofar as they corresponded to its geopolitical, military or ideological aims or could be used to justify its actions. The disregard for the law and reliance on force that it practiced at home defined its behavior in the world at large, too.

Of course, Western leaders were far from being the angels that many ideologues abroad tend to sing the praises of now. Mass use of military force, secret sabotage operations and violations of international laws and moral standards were frequent in Western politics during the cold war. But for the West, this was the cost of global rivalry rather than a natural extrapolation of its domestic situation to events abroad.

The Western democracies therefore had a relatively painless time digesting the end of global confrontation. However, these changes on the international stage represented a glaring contradiction challenging the Soviet empire's existence. This is the main reason why the West's economic and political systems and military and political alliances were able to survive the end of this confrontation, while the Soviet Union's system, empire and ideology could not. This interdependence between the regime's nature at home and its projection abroad explains why those trying now to rehabilitate Stalinism and appeal for a return to this or that form of authoritarian regime always link it to a revival of some form of the Russian (or Soviet) empire and permanent confrontation with the West.

The irony is that once it lost such a strong and cunning adversary, the United States made a bid for the status of sole superpower and leader of a single polar world. Acting in this spirit, in its foreign policy Washington started making increasing use of the worst cold war-era practices and borrowed many of the Soviet Union's shameful principles and methods, such as exporting its political and ideological system by force, changing inconvenient regimes, using force arbitrarily abroad, committing mass human rights violations, conducting disinformation campaigns and so on. This eventually led the U.S. into the biggest domestic and foreign policy crisis in its recent history. "History teaches us nothing but only punishes us for not learning our lessons" Russian historian Vasily Klyuchevsky wrote.

Under the Banner of a Grand Mission

Messianic vision is an important element of all empires. The British, French and other empires all suffered from megalomania and used the idea of a civilizing mission to justify their expansionist ventures. Hitler's Germany proclaimed the "thousand-year Reich" of the superior

Nordic race. Under Benito Mussolini Italy set out to restore the great Roman empire, and under the emperor Japan used its military might to spread its beneficial rule and create “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” The Soviet Union supported the “triumphant march” of socialism and national liberation movements around the world.

The idea of a particular “Russian mission” has long been an inherent part of the Russian imperial design. Some of its features are more or less typical of any colonial ideology, especially the conviction that the center spreads its civilization to peoples at a lower stage of socio-economic and technological development. But the Russian idea/mission has its historical roots in internal Russian issues: it was in many respects necessary as a psychological defense and support for the nation over centuries of bitter struggle for survival.

This ideology served as a source of comfort and a sort of compensation for the relatively low living standards and absence of many of the basic practical conveniences available to people in the West. It was essential to provide a psychological justification for the difficulties created by a centralized and militarized economy and an ineffective bureaucracy. Above all, an inspiring idea was needed to reconcile in Russians’ minds the contradiction between their lives filled with hardship and humiliation and their country’s vast territory, its boundless natural resources and the talents of its great people. Finally, spiritual quests and metaphysical values provided an outlet for the nation’s intellectual potential in an environment where a reactionary ruling regime strictly limited freedom to engage in political or economic activity.

Be that as it may, authoritarian traditions, militarism, a centralized command economy, messianic ideology, expansionism and constant confrontation with the West are not an inherent part of the Russian mentality or national character. These are all the results of particular circumstances of historical development and therefore can and should change as Russia’s domestic situation and external environment change.

At the same time, these traditions could gain new life and receive public support in response to failed transformation policies, lost opportunities to make progress along the mainstream road of European civilization and an increasingly painful process of adapting Russia’s everyday life to the changes taking place. These moods could flare up in reaction to unfair and disrespectful treatment of Russia by other countries and attempts to exploit its weakness and force it to accept a dependent and humiliated position. Such moods are explainable and understandable, but they should not be allowed to become a self-perpetuating force that defines policy and would lead the country once more along the long dead-end road of self-isolation, messianic ideology, militarized authoritarianism, internal stagnation and external hostility.

Who defeated the USSR?

Like all other empires, the Soviet Union had its advantages and its moments of glory. Aside from the grim years of Stalin's secret police terror and mass repressions, the Soviet state, like other empires at their high points, guaranteed its subjects a high degree of stability, security and predictability within the strict rules established by the government. Along with colossal military and industrial might it also developed a modest but universal level of healthcare, education, social protection and housing that its many different peoples all benefited from on an equal basis (along with a system of strictly regulated privileges for the bosses). Moreover, no one can deny the Soviet Union's truly world-class cultural, scientific and technological achievements.

Unlike most other empires, including tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union was not defeated or fatally wounded in a major war and did not disintegrate as a result of exhausting small colonial conflicts, despite the quagmire of the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989) and the troubles in the USSR's constituent republics (1989-1991). It is particularly significant that despite the common view the Soviet Union was not defeated in the cold war. Many people share this misconception because the Soviet collapse coincided in time with the end of global military and ideological confrontation, but in history "happened after" is not always the same thing as "happened as a result of".

The Soviet empire was created and built for the arms race, confrontation, and, if necessary, for waging war against external enemies. The arms race was not in itself a factor that undermined the economy or caused the empire's collapse. It was the engine driving the entire planned economy and the nucleus of the overall economic and technological system. However, as a result of its own internal dynamic this system completely lost its effectiveness and attractiveness for the mass consumer by the end of the 1980s, as did the whole edifice of political and ideological dogmas, myths and claims on which the state regime and the nomenklatura's monopoly on power were built.

Subsequent experience showed that a tenfold decrease in defense spending in the 1990s did not lead to economic growth but only made matters worse, sending all of the economic sectors directly connected to the defense industry into collapse. The militarized Soviet economy's systemic nature prevented any real free movement of capital, labor and goods into civilian sectors. The system started to fall apart but was not subjected to any deep-reaching reform after 1992.

The Reagan-era acceleration of the arms race, including the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) program, did not deal the final blow to the Soviet economy. Taking into account the time needed to go through all of the usual cycles involved in big military programs – research,

development, production and deployment – the Soviet “adequate and asymmetrical response” to Reagan’s military and technological challenge at the start of the 1980s would have gotten into high gear (and demanded greatest funding) only by the late 1990s at the earliest. Gorbachev’s détente began 15 years earlier, and the defense programs underway during the Soviet Union’s final years were based on decisions made back in the 1970s or early 1980s.

Technologically and economically speaking, the Soviet Union could have continued under the growing burden of its military expenses, but the state had been weakened to its very core by internal corrosion. The gap between real life and all of the official ideological dogmas, without exception, had become too glaring. Most of the population fell into apathy and lost all faith in the regime, thus depriving it of social backing and support. As for the ruling nomenklatura, with few exceptions, the system of “natural” selection that had taken shape had filled its ranks with careerist, money-grubbing cynics.

The defeat was hastened by the scientific, technological and information revolution that brought about unprecedented expansion in the Soviet Union’s contacts with the outside world in the 1980s. By the end of the 1980s, the Soviet Union had more than 30,000 nuclear warheads, 5,000 ballistic missiles, 60,000 tanks and 300 submarines, but as Grigory Yavlinsky noted, it could not produce a single laptop computer. Speaking figuratively, the new era of the universal computerization of human existence determined the outcome of the historical struggle between “real socialism” and capitalism. The Soviet empire was designed as a monolithic bastion built to withstand constant siege, but it had no immunity against broad-ranging contact with the outside environment and thus collapsed as soon as the siege (or perceived siege) was lifted.

It was not the United States, NATO or Reagan that brought down the Soviet Union as a political regime and an empire. The Soviet Union did not collapse under pressure from outside, but was toppled by a relaxation of internal tension and inconsistent attempts at internal reform. Mikhail Gorbachev freed Eastern Europe in order to maintain political cooperation with the West, and Boris Yeltsin and the Russian democrats freed the other Soviet republics in order to end the rule of Gorbachev and the Soviet communist party. Democratic Russia was the main victor in the cold war, not the U.S. and its allies, which provided only episodic and half-hearted moral support in achieving this victory.

The collapse of the Soviet economic and political system and its associated ideology preceded the empire’s downfall rather than the other way around. This makes the Soviet case different from that of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Portuguese empires or the Kaiser’s Germany. The Soviet case also differs from the disintegration of the British, French, Dutch and Belgian empires, in which collapse of the empire did not lead to serious change in the mother country’s economic and political system.

The communist system in its economic, political and ideological dimensions was the cement holding the empire together. This is why Russian communists' calls to restore the Soviet Union and all types of nationalist yearnings for a return to the tsarist empire inevitably involve a return to an authoritarian or totalitarian regime and are incompatible with democracy and the market economy.

The Price of Collapse

Russians have yet to fully wake up to the fact that they live in a country radically different from the Soviet Union, owing its existence not to historical coincidence, domestic or foreign plots or miscalculations by its rulers, but to the objective course of events. Gorbachev's ascent to power, Yeltsin's emergence on center stage and the failed coup of August 1991 were just subjective catalysts for deep-seated changes long since waiting to happen. They shaped the form but not the substance of events.

No matter how inevitable it was, the Soviet Union's fall was a disaster for millions of people, for whom it meant the collapse of the state, the loss of national identity and separation from friends and family in neighboring countries. In some of the former Soviet republics millions of people suddenly became second-class residents with no rights or protection. The militant and at times unashamed nationalism that replaced the internationalist ideology, which, as a rule, had been the natural foundation for everyday relations between the ordinary people of the USSR's many ethnic groups, came as a shock.

This was all aggravated by the fact that during the Soviet period many of the borders between the different republics had been drawn and redrawn in an absolutely arbitrary fashion, ignoring historic events and ethnic or economic ties. Stalin often deliberately redrew borders in such a way as to sow the seeds of interethnic conflict in order to "divide and conquer". These lines suddenly became state borders and turned into the focus for tension, territorial claims, nationalist speculation and trans-border crime.

Negative attitudes towards this turn of events were heightened by the fact that many people had no clear understanding of what had caused the Soviet Union's demise, as it was a different case from that of past empires. Furthermore, the various Soviet republics differed too in their views of the USSR's collapse.

The events that followed: economic decline (in Russia above all as a result of failed economic reforms), social contradictions, the breakdown of traditional ties and communication, instability and bloody conflicts in the former Soviet republics and in Russia itself all added to people's disappointment and confusion. Added to this were the loss of modest but reliable benefits, the rather unworthy behavior of leaders suddenly catapulted into power, the sense of

national humiliation due to loss of influence in the world, and a whole chain of foreign policy retreats and defeats.

This created fertile soil for restoring Russian nationalism, building artificial structures based on national identity or unifying ideas, and attempting to revive traditional and archaic concepts and values in new conditions. Alongside everything else, the recent retreat that has occurred in Russia on many democratic norms and institutions is entirely in line with the emergence of a monolithic state with a development model based on the export of raw materials. In keeping with the historical tradition that dominates the political elite's mood today, neo-imperial motives are sounding ever clearer.

Meanwhile, the country needs to carry out vast and complex social and political modernization tasks, make the transition to an innovative economic model and spread European-style living standards beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg to the country's regions. By some socio-economic and scientific-technical criteria Russia is an advanced country, while by other elementary criteria, even aside from per-capita GDP, average wages, pensions, and the subsistence minimum it is still incredibly backward. The housing situation is still a serious problem (and is still, as Mikhail Bulgakov said, "spoiling people"). The country has the world's biggest gas reserves, but more than half of its territory is still not connected to centralized gas supply networks. Russia has the world's largest fresh water reserves, but many of its small towns, not to mention villages, do not have modern sewage systems. Russia has always been proud of its huge territory (a seventh of the world's land surface), but its network of quality roads is shorter than that of tiny Belgium or Switzerland. In terms of life expectancy, child mortality, and level of corruption, Russia ranks among the developing countries and even then is a long way from the top of the list.

Those in Russia sounding the call for a new imperial campaign (including many former liberals – Russia's neocons),⁶ as a rule already have gas, sewage systems, country houses, flashy foreign cars for trips to their dachas along an excellent highway, and also property and big bank accounts abroad. It seems this has all become too mundane and boring for them, and so they want something more thrilling: the restoration of an empire, a big geopolitical game on the international stage, building anti-Western coalitions spanning continents and oceans, a return to global superpower status...

⁶ An analogy with the American "neocons", who formed a large part of the George W. Bush administration and led the U.S. into unprecedented crisis. Their current Russian counterparts include former liberals from the Gorbachev and Yeltsin periods from political, journalistic and scientific circles, who are now seeking to "rehabilitate" themselves for their democratic past or follow the "general line" set by the bosses, or who are genuinely disillusioned with their former ideals and thus become zealous conservatives and neo-imperialists instead.

Sewage systems, gas and decent roads for ordinary people are too prosaic, troublesome and time-consuming. They seem to realize subconsciously that they would not succeed in delivering these things anyway, at least not as long as they work within the framework of the current political and economic system that gives them their prosperity and share of power. There is more appeal in rousing the people to new feats for the sake of Russia's "greatness", all the more so as this would distract people for a long time to come from questioning the inconveniences and difficulties of life in this same Russia. Why waste time and energy on cancer treatment centers for children? Give us aircraft carriers and military bases abroad!

The real matter of historical and modern political importance is whether a militaristic authoritarian empire is Russia's natural and only possible form of existence, as many supporters of conservative and nationalist views assert today, or whether this model has outlived itself and should be replaced by a new paradigm.

It seems that one of the "enigmatic Russian soul's" biggest secrets is the tendency to step on the same rake over and over, never learning from its own mistakes, and thinking up various metaphysical notions to explain this going round in circles. Unable to offer the conditions for sustained growth of national prosperity (and fearing for their privileges and power), the ruling elite mobilized the people for geopolitical expansion and drew them into exhausting military campaigns that sapped the country's resources and finally toppled the political regime and the state itself. In Europe (and probably in the entire world) you would be hard pressed to find another country that three times repeated the same cycle again and again. Unable to provide a decent life for its own people, it turned to the search for unifying national ideas and grand imperial projects, unwilling to understand the mechanisms of past disasters and heaping the blame for them on individual "villains" (whether Boris Godunov and Shuisky, Rasputin, Lenin and Trotsky, or Gorbachev with Alexander Yakovlev and Eduard Shevardnadze).

The state collapse and Time of Troubles in the late sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries were not only and or even particularly due to the end of the Rurik dynastic following Ivan the Terrible's murder of his son and the mysterious death of Tsarevich Dmitry. A century of imperial expansion followed Russia's liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke and the passing of the Orthodox baton from Byzantium to Russia in the fifteenth century. The military campaigns against Kazan and Astrakhan and the endless Livonian War bled the country dry. The flourishing centers of Novgorod and Pskov (we would call them "economic growth zones" today), which had avoided destruction by the Mongols, were destroyed in the interests of mobilization and consolidation. The boyars – the nobles who formed the political elite – and their economic base were destroyed by the oprichniki – Ivan the Terrible's personal henchmen – whom the tsar then exterminated, too, leaving nothing in their place. The result, as could be expected, was that the

nation, economy and state simply fell apart. The disputes between surviving princes and squabbles over the throne, the peasant uprisings, the emergence of several false Dmitrys and the Poles establishing themselves in the Kremlin were not the causes of the Time of Troubles but were the consequences of the unjustified imperial ambitions and senseless internal massacres unleashed during the reign of Ivan IV (who, incidentally, during his lifetime was nicknamed not the “Terrible” but the “Torturer”).

With various alterations and adjustments as the times changed, this cycle repeated itself and again led to the empire’s downfall in 1917, and then a third time in 1991.

The author has no doubt that the military-imperial road is a dead end option that would only lead to yet another disastrous collapse of the Russian state.

Historical experience shows that all empires are built (or rebuilt) on the basis of the center’s decisive military supremacy, its attractiveness as a more advanced economic and socio-political development model, ideological appeal, or a combination of these three factors. All of them played some part in “gathering” the Russian lands and backward frontier regions following the troubles of the early seventeenth century, and in establishing the USSR after the tsarist empire’s collapse in 1917.

However, none of these factors would be of use in rebuilding an empire based on today’s Russia. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova depend on Russian oil and gas and supply Russia with cheap labor, but they do not see Russia as an attractive political and economic model. The irredentist mood is strong only in Crimea in Ukraine and in Moldova’s Transdnistria region, above all as a result of short-sighted policies of cultural and political oppression on the part of Kiev today and Chisinau in the 1990s. Most Ukrainians seek close relations with Russia and do not want to join NATO, but at the same time they do not want to return to the Kremlin’s embrace. Alexander Lukashenko’s current personal power regime in Belarus rejects the idea of reunification with Russia as a “poor relative”, but great power Moscow rejects the idea of an equal union. In the future, a more democratic leadership in Belarus would probably set its course on rapprochement with the European Union, like Ukraine and Moldova, which see in the EU, rather than in Russia, a social and economic model to follow.

Not one of the three South Caucasus countries sees Russia’s ideology and social and political system as more progressive and an attractive model to follow. Georgia is hostile toward Russia following the 2008 conflict and is openly and unanimously trying to throw itself into NATO’s embrace. Armenia is quietly moving in the same direction, and Azerbaijan is busy reproducing the authoritarian oil-state model of the Middle Eastern countries (including hereditary supreme power for life).

To various degrees the authoritarian or dictatorial regimes of Central Asia are not looking northwards for models to follow, but to the south and east. Any attempt to export the current Russian ideology and political system to these countries using force would provoke an explosion of Islamic radicalism and bitter resistance (as in Iraq and Afghanistan).

From a purely military point of view Russia could hypothetically restore its control over Belarus, Crimea and Ukraine's eastern regions, absorb Abkhazia and South Ossetia, annex northwestern Kazakhstan, and, under certain conditions, seize Transdniestria and northern Azerbaijan (populated by Lezgins).

However, without an economic and political system attractive for the neighboring peoples, or the kind of ideological superiority previously offered first by Christianity and then by communism, military annexation alone would not in any way equate to actual restoration of the tsarist empire or the USSR in a broader sense. To gain control over these hypothetically named and insignificant geopolitical acquisitions (compared to the rest of its territory), Russia would have to pay a tremendous price in its soldiers' lives, economic resources, political isolation and the creation of a hostile surrounding environment. Neighboring countries would join forces with more distant foes in an attempt to exploit any of Russia's weak points and work from all directions to undermine its territorial integrity.

The only way forward with a future for Russia is the road of developing a civilized market economy and European-style democracy. At the same time, Russia should not and cannot just trail along behind the European countries, simply copying their historical evolution. Russia has to take its own historical road to the universal values of European civilization, if only because, unlike the rest of Europe, it is not progressing towards these high standards of public organization from an agrarian-feudal society to the emergence of manufacturing and trading capital and then on to the industrial revolution. Russia's road takes it from a centralized state economy built on heavy industry and the defense sector and onward via today's economy, based on the export of raw materials, and corrupt state-monopolistic capitalism.

Russia's huge territory and its raw material resources in the Arctic and Siberia cannot serve forever as the economy's foundation, as the current economic crisis has convincingly demonstrated, leaving Russia particularly hard-hit by the fall in global energy prices. Abundant natural wealth is simply a resource for diversifying and modernizing the economy and raising the long-term Russian and foreign investment needed for high-technology development. Gradual rapprochement and eventual integration with Greater Europe is the highway of Russia's post-industrial development and the road able to lead it out of the unenviable role of a backward and dependent, raw-materials appendage of the twenty-first century's economic giants, despite all its nuclear weapons.

Russia, which has the means to reliably defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, should spread its contacts and influence across the countries of the former Soviet Union and further into Europe and Asia, not by force with its weapons, but through economic and financial growth, an attractive social and political development model, and its scientific, technical and cultural achievements.

This is not about carving out “spheres of influence” and “regions of privileged interests” or about seizing geopolitical bases or natural resources – these are all relics of past centuries. Global influence in the twenty-first century is defined by a country’s economic potential measured by the size of its real economy and its participation in global trade, especially in innovative sectors, the amount of foreign investment it receives, and its role in international economic and financial institutions. Only under these conditions can military power make a contribution to the country’s place in the world (and then only if it is also based on advanced technology and a high level of professionalism). With time, countries’ achievements in Internet technology, energy conservation, developing alternative energy sources, environmentally friendly technology, medicine, global telecommunications networks offering personal access, monitoring and command, and the convergence of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science will play the biggest role.⁷

Foreign Policy as a Mirror of Domestic Policy

There is no doubt in the author’s mind that the policies of the U.S. and its allies over the last almost 20 years were the main factor that ultimately brought Russia and the West into conflict (the blame lies in varying degrees with both U.S. administrations from 1993-2008). But Russia also bears a significant share of responsibility for the worsening relations with the West and the failure of many of the hopes and projects of the early 1990s.

For a start, there is the historic phenomenon. In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet system, state and empire took place, fortunately without a destructive civil war or revolution. However, this very fact was also what made the subsequent long and contradictory road towards forming a new state and society inevitable. The ideological confrontation of the cold war era moved inside Russia itself. Western policies of the last 20 years have had a big impact on internal political struggles within Russia over choosing the country’s own economic, social and political development path and defining its allies and adversaries abroad.

One position is based on the idea that Russia, for all the specific aspects of its history, belongs to European civilization and its cultural heritage, which are seen as an enduring value,

⁷ S. Leskov, “Akademik Alexander Dynkin: Neft, brilliandy i mozgy — glavnaya tsennost po vsemu miru,” *Finansoviye Izvestia* (March 13, 2004).

unlike changing economic and political systems. In order to break out of the vicious circle of successive cycles of oppression and chaos, Russia needs to adopt the main European value, namely that the state is not sacred, but is a more or less functioning organization of civil servants and elected officials hired to serve society and each individual citizen. This forms the foundation for giving priority to domestic development, the transition from a raw-materials export model to a high-technology innovative economic model resting on the democratization of the political system, guaranteed inviolability of private property, both material and intellectual, and attracting domestic and foreign innovation and investment. This road sets a strategic orientation towards developing multifaceted cooperation above all with the European Union, the U.S. and Japan.

This course does not exclude but, on the contrary, implies that efforts will also be made to build equal and respectful ties with Russia's post-Soviet neighbors and develop mutually advantageous relations with China, India and other non-European countries (incidentally, the West, which is unambiguous about defining its place in the world, is much more successful at this than Russia.) This strategy's cornerstone is cooperation with the West, China and other countries and international organizations on strengthening global and regional security, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and carrying out gradual nuclear disarmament, resolving climate change and environmental issues, and fighting international terrorism and other 21st century threats. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said in this respect: "...The end of the cold war destroyed the justification for bloc politics. The principle of 'either with us or against us' no longer works... In today's globalizing world when we face transnational threats and challenges there is no objective justification for this approach. We have overcome the ideological division. If we face a choice today, it is between cooperation in the common interest, or its absence."⁸

A completely different approach is that based on Russia's potential rejection of European values. Instead of European values, the cornerstone here is a philosophy that makes a fetish of the state, giving it total control over society, and implies maximum state control over the economy and public life and a priority role for security and law enforcement agencies (hence the need for constant external and internal security threats). The main guarantee of the state's prosperity is a wise ("truly national") leader who stops bureaucrats from stealing and forces them to work for the good of the people.

This vision of Russia's path is based on the existence of irreconcilable ideological and political differences between Russia and the West and sees confrontation with the U.S. and its allies and isolation of Russia's people from their influence (associated with globalization) as the

⁸ S. Lavrov, "Krizis v otnosheniyakh s Zapadom: kakoy krizis?," *Itogi*, № 21 (675) (2009): PP. 16-18.

only means of preserving Russia's "identity as a civilization". Essentially, if we strip this "special road" notion of all the philosophical wrapping it has accumulated over time, thanks to the Lyubomudry philosophers ("the particularists"), it boils down to no more than continuing to keep the people as a cheap (even if unproductive) labor force and cannon fodder for ensuring the wealth, power and expansionist ambitions of the ruling elite.

Supporters of this path see their priority task as the restoration of Russia's exclusive economic and military-political supremacy over the countries of the former Soviet Union in one neo-imperial form or another. They view this area as a "buffer zone" protecting them from Western influence, a guarantee against these countries looking towards the West as a partner for cooperation, and an attribute of Russia's status as a global player, despite Russia's minor role in the global economy, trade, finances and innovation.

The current global economic crisis and devaluation of oil and gas exports as Russia's main lever of influence in the outside world (thus burying the "energy superpower" daydream) mean that flirting with all of the anti-American regimes and movements, no matter how irresponsible and provocative their policies, is becoming the principle means of reanimating the Soviet foreign policy model. This explains the attempts to give an anti-Western bloc dimension to the Eurasian Economic Community, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRIC Group (although this is far from welcomed by China, India, Brazil and most of the CSTO countries). This also explains the knee-jerk hostile reaction to any initiatives for arms reduction and disarmament (especially nuclear) and strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime, and clarifies the reasoning behind attempts to divide terrorists into "good" and "bad" (or anti-Western and anti-Russian). It is telling that there are no substantial differences here between the various strains of communists and nationalists – they differ only in their ideological wrapping.

Having lost their supporting pillar in the form of 70 years of Marxist-Leninist scholasticism, supporters of this line fill the resulting intellectual vacuum with newly discovered "truths" from a previous century, such as studies of geopolitics, the balance of power, spheres of influence and the struggle between the maritime and continental powers (sometimes with a thin coating of religious and ethnic myths on the differing political traditions of the Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine and Slavic worlds). In the era of globalization, the information revolution and the "common trans-border threats and challenges" that Lavrov spoke of, these archaisms are ridiculous as theories. As a blueprint for practical politics they are fatal for Russia's interests and in some cases could threaten international security in general.

Even more shameful and regretful is that having failed to obtain a suitable status in the outside world and order at home, a large part of the new elite has turned to rehabilitating

Stalinism as the incarnation of Russia's grandeur and great power status. Mass propaganda along these lines over recent years has influenced public thinking, and this in turn encourages politicians to make use of these moods (post-Weimar and post-Versailles syndrome) to bolster their own positions. Led astray by cunning historical falsifications and frustrated by external and internal problems, Russians have been taken in by this great-power chauvinistic campaign. In particular, in surveys for the Name of Russia project in 2008, people, to their disgrace, chose Stalin (and also Ivan the Terrible) as Russia's most outstanding historic figure.

As for international politics, a very telling example in this area is the rhetorical storm whipped up in Russia's parliament (with lukewarm support from the executive branch) over the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly declaration adopted in Vilnius in the summer of 2009. Its preamble states that "in the twentieth century European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist, which brought about genocide, violations of human rights and freedoms, war crimes, and crimes against humanity."⁹ Russia was mainly outraged because the Soviet Union was tarred with the same brush as Hitler's Germany, despite its decisive contribution to the victory over fascism in World War II.

It is entirely possible that the declaration did set out to cast a shadow over today's Russia and its foreign policy, playing on the associations between the Russian Federation and the Soviet Union, although it says nothing of this sort directly, nor does it say anything about the Soviet Union's role in the war. But the stormy reaction by politicians in Moscow, who practically branded their own foreheads with the mark of Stalinism, played right into the hands of those behind such an approach. Both in the West and in Russia, however, this is really all clever juggling of the political and historical notions of "Stalinism" and "the USSR's victory in the war" – things that in reality are not on one and the same plane.

Stalinism is a complete dictatorship built around a single leader and based on mass repression, a mobilization and distributive economy, ideological fanaticism, absence of rights, and ruthless exploitation of the workers, including slave labor by prisoners. From a scientific social and political point of view, one can identify quite a few economic, ideological and other differences between German fascism and Soviet Stalinism. But in their methods and in the disastrous results they brought for their countries these regimes are very similar. This is above all true of the mass repressions that in Germany and the countries it occupied were carried out on an ethnic basis, while in the Soviet Union repression was carried out at first on the basis of social and political criteria (Trotskyites, left and right deviationists. and so on) and then without any

⁹ OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution on Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century*. Vilnius Declaration of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Resolution Adopted at the Eighteenth Annual Session: Vilnius, June 29-July 3, 2009 (Vilnius, 2009), P.48.

criteria at all, but simply under the gathering inertia of the mass purges needed to bolster Stalin's personal grip on power through the use of universal fear, suspicion and terror.

In the resulting number of victims, fascist repression and Stalinist repression are entirely comparable, though the numbers have been calculated fairly accurately in fascism's case, while even today we have only approximate figures for the victims of Stalinist repression. It is known that 12-14 million people went through the Gulag in the Soviet Union during 1934-1944, and an additional 10-13 million did so in 1945-1954. Around 1 million people were shot (700,000 in 1937-1938 alone).¹⁰ But even today no one knows for sure how many millions died in the camps from overwork and illness or were killed by guards or common criminals. The famine unleashed by campaigns against the "rich peasant" kulaks and forced collectivization, and the exile of peasants to Kazakhstan and Siberia took several million more lives. Stalinism destroyed the cream of the Soviet, above all Russian, intelligentsia, scientists and artists, clergy, peasantry and officer corps.

The similarities between Stalinism and fascism are demonstrated in curious fashion today by the various publications of the most reactionary end of the spectrum of what passes for political science in Russia. Freed from the tight reins of Soviet censorship, various newly-hatched pseudo-experts have enthusiastically set about whitewashing Stalin and his executioners and doing the same for Hitler, his ideology and political regime. By way of illustration, here is a quote from one of the most odious authors in this vein, who considers Stalin a genius and Beria, his secret police chief, a great state organizer: "...The intelligent Russian has a duty to read 'Mein Kampf', but should do so intelligently," he exhorts. "After all, Hitler examined many social issues in 'Mein Kampf', sometimes in memorable and original fashion."¹¹ That is as far as the ideology is concerned, and as for the practice: "Even the Nazis' rise to power did not exclude the possibility of strong and comprehensive joint Russian-German influence on the fate of world civilization, which would have led in the short term to lasting peace in Europe and in the long term perhaps to world peace."¹²

Nothing could be clearer: Stalinism and fascism could have ruled the world as brothers given that they shared such similar values and interests. The author noted in passing that Hitler was wrong to attack the USSR, but was otherwise an entirely acceptable long-term ally for Stalin. The author and others like him are not in the least bit bothered by the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and the mattresses filled with human hair (nor by the labor camps of

¹⁰ *Preodolenie stalinizma* (Moscow: RODP YABLOKO, 2009), P. 104.

¹¹ See: S. Kremlev, "Beria — upushchenny shans strany," *Nats. oborona*, № 4 (April 2009): PP. 100-103.

¹² S. T. Brezkun, "Rossiya i Germaniya: stravit!" in *Ot Versalya Vilgelma k Versalyu Vilsona: Novy vzglyad na staruyu voynu* (Moscow: AST, 2003), PP. 10, 15.

Kolyma and Vorkuta, or the mass graves in which those shot by the NKVD were buried). Here we have a crystal clear illustration of Stalinism's package of moral and ideological values: the leader, state and people are a single whole, and the greatness of the state is everything, while human life and dignity are nothing. The ends justify any means and sacrifices. The Stalinists themselves put Stalin and Hitler on the same plane (and more clearly than the authors of the Vilnius Declaration), only they do so not with condemnation but with approval. Today, these views are shared by some in political circles and the media, and by people working in the security and law enforcement sectors and the defense industry (with which the author of the cited pearls of wisdom has a direct relationship).

One senior Russian parliamentarian known for his blunt and spontaneous statements (to put it mildly) recently said that "the sins of Stalinism were redeemed by victory in the Great Patriotic War." In other words, Stalin can be forgiven for everything because he led the people to victory in 1945.

There is indeed a link between Stalinism and the war. If the Comintern had not been so obsessed with carrying out Stalin's orders to concentrate on fighting the social democrats (whom he called "social fascists"), the real fascists with Hitler at their head would have probably not come to power in Germany in 1933. If not for Stalin's mass purges of the army in 1937-38 (which killed 50,000 officers) and the incompetent military development program he and his cavalry officer favorites implemented, the country would have been better prepared for war. If not for Stalin's blind trust in Hitler and the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact, the Wehrmacht's sudden invasion would not have caught the Soviet Union unawares. If not for Stalin's arbitrary decisions and fatal strategic mistakes in commanding the military operations, victory would not have cost the Soviet people the tremendous price in human lives, which to this day is estimated anywhere between 27-37 million dead on the front lines and in the rear.¹³ Stalinism brought the country to the brink of disaster in 1941 and 1942 and then forced the people at the cost of unthinkable sacrifice to redeem the guilt of Stalin and his flunkies on the long road to victory. Yes, people often fought and died with Stalin's name on their lips, but in their minds this name stood for their homeland and not for the Stalinist regime with its tortures in secret police prisons, flood of executions and sea of camps.

We could ask the above-mentioned parliamentarian what then redeemed the new waves of purges after the war, the millions of former prisoners of war and interned people sent to the Gulag, the campaigns against the "cosmopolitans" and the "doctors' plot", and the repressions carried out

¹³ No one other than Marshal Yazov announced the figures for losses: 9 million on the frontlines and 27-28 million in the rear. See: V. Tatyanchikov, "Poteri podschitany," *Ofitersky splav*, № 4 (33) (May 15, 2009).

against entire peoples on the basis of their ethnicity? We are still suffering the consequences of these actions to this day in the North Caucasus. If these aspects of Stalinism are not “genocide, violations of human rights and freedoms, war crimes and crimes against humanity,” as cited in the Vilnius Declaration, then what is?

Unlike those trying to whitewash Stalinism today, most of whom have seen war only in the movies, Academician Georgy Arbatov, who was only just out of school, departed immediately for the front in June 1941. At the age of 19, he commanded an artillery battery on the front line, fought on the Kalinin front and in the battle of Kursk, took part in liberating the left bank of Ukraine and twice forced his way across the Dnieper, was wounded and decorated, was discharged after he contracted tuberculosis, and miraculously survived in army medical units and hospitals. This is what he wrote about his experience: “...Aside from the officer corps’ destruction in the repressions just before the war, troop deployment along the new unprepared western borders, and Stalin’s demobilizing orders in May-June 1941 to ‘not fall for provocation,’ despite all the reports that the Germans were preparing to attack, there was much more besides after the war began.”

For example, during the first disastrous days of the war when the western front collapsed and the Germans advanced 40-50 km a day, the “great leader”, in a state of shock, retreated to his dacha, did not answer the telephone and did not receive any visitors, fearing that his acolytes would arrest him and hold him responsible for the defeat. Then there is the example of how millions of our people, who had been prisoners of war, were deliberately declared “traitors of the Motherland”, which incited many to join the ranks of the Vlasov army. Tribunals and punishment detachments executed hundreds of thousands of soldiers and officers abandoned to their fate on the front lines by their commanders and forced to retreat.

Stalin in his stubbornness refused to allow the troops to retreat in time and entire armies thus found themselves encircled at Kiev, Vyazma and Kharkov... Stalin’s excessive self-confidence led to a strategic miscalculation of the enemy’s plans in 1942, and the Germans seized Odessa, Sevastopol and the North Caucasus and reached the Volga near Stalingrad. Stalin’s obsession with political effect forced the troops to simply keep plowing ahead despite huge unnecessary casualties, carrying out missions by particular dates, starting with the taking of Kiev in 1943 and ending with the head-on storming of Berlin in 1945.

Stalinism’s crimes included the repression of entire peoples: the Crimean Tatars, Chechens and Karachais, punished because some traitors in their midst cooperated with the enemy. I personally knew several good officers arrested right on the front line and sent off to the camps. The same goes for the repression against freed prisoners of war and the people interned through no fault of their own in the occupied territories. Tens of millions of people lost their rights after the war and

for decades to follow these shameful black marks stayed in their official records, making them second class citizens.”¹⁴

Coming back to our own time, the Russian parliament and executive authorities should have responded to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s declaration not by taking offense for Stalin’s sake and confusing Stalinism and the Soviet people’s heroic fight in the war, but by firmly and unambiguously distancing themselves from Stalinism and decisively rejecting any attempts to cast the shadow of his terrible crimes on modern Russia and its policies.

The two above-mentioned policy outlooks characterizing Russia’s political elite have constantly, with varying success, exerted their influence on Russia’s foreign policy, giving it the attributes of the “pushmi-pullyu” character from the children’s story. The need for social and economic modernization and the real emergence of new threats and challenges in the twenty-first century are pushing Russia towards the first road. Historic traditions, the interests of a large part of the new ruling elite, internal and external failures and the disappointments of the last 20 years are pulling it towards the second road. This leaves its mark on the so-called “multi-vector” nature of Russia’s foreign policy, which often exhibits a lack of clear priorities and a logical fit between strategy and tactics, objectives and resources.

The struggle flared up anew following Dmitry Medvedev’s election as president. Of course, supporters of the imperial road realize that the new president won the 2008 election with the backing of Vladimir Putin, with whom he has close political and personal relations. However, they know (or feel) Russian history quite well and remember the numerous examples of leaders coming into their own and gaining their independence from former colleagues (Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Putin himself are all recent examples of this type.) The traditionalists, seeing in Medvedev a new type of leader with modern and completely democratic views, therefore took preventive action and launched their own offensive, influencing a number of domestic and foreign policy decisions including, it seems, events surrounding the Caucasus conflict in August 2008.

Second, the lack of an effective and clear decision-making mechanism also contributes to the fragmentary nature of Russia’s foreign policy. Parliament’s inability to act as a counterweight to the executive branch and the lack of any real control over the executive authorities turn foreign policy into a forum for representing and lobbying ministerial and private corporate interests. Predominance of informal relations over official powers in the upper echelons of the state hierarchy break down order in the process of coordinating various approaches and setting a unified policy course even within the executive power framework.

¹⁴ G. A. Arbatov, *Zhizn, sobytiya, lyudi: avtobiografiya na fone istoricheskikh peremen* (Moscow: Lyubimaya Rossiya, 2008), PP. 34-35.

Only the Foreign Ministry seems to try to pursue constructive and balanced diplomacy, and the Russian Security Council attempts to give foreign policy a strategic perspective. However, the practice that took shape under Yeltsin and was consolidated under Putin informally gives numerous other influential collective and individual actors access to this sphere, and President Medvedev has not yet succeeded in improving this system (or rather the lack of it).

Various pressure groups often succeed in getting official approval for their own projects, which they then carry out themselves. Gazprom, the oil monopolies, Rostekhnologiya, Rosoboronexport and other arms exporters, Rosatom and those selling rocket and missile technology, armed forces agencies and defense industry companies, not to mention numerous politicians, all act of their own accord on behalf of the state. To blame them for their active participation would be foolish, given that this very active quality is their reason for existence and means of getting money. The blame lies with the chaotic decision-making system that enables the lobbyists to “short circuit” state policy. The new “bicentric” executive power system further expands group interests’ room to maneuver.

Third, the increased military activity and surrounding fuss, especially after the Caucasus conflict in August 2008, are also largely explained by internal causes.

The military balance is indeed changing noticeably to Russia’s disadvantage. But the paradox is that this is happening without any headlong attempts by the U.S. and NATO, which Moscow now officially perceives as its main security threats, to build up their military capability. Along with its politically deeply mistaken policy of eastward expansion, NATO is making significant cutbacks to its overall armed forces. In Europe the 28 current NATO members now have 40% fewer servicemen overall, 35% fewer ground forces, 30% fewer naval forces, and 40% less military aviation than the 16 member countries had at the start of the 1990s. The number of American troops in Europe has decreased three-fold over this same period.¹⁵ NATO would hardly undertake these cutbacks if it were preparing to attack Russia.

The U.S. has made a close to three-fold reduction in its strategic nuclear forces over the last 20 years. It has carried out practically no modernization of these forces, which are 20-30% lower than the ceilings set by the START-1 Treaty (depending on the counting method used), and it has made a six to seven-fold cutback of tactical nuclear forces. It is not making cutbacks to its conventional forces, but it is reorganizing them and arming them to conduct anti-guerilla operations.

¹⁵ Overall, NATO forces are 42% lower in terms of numbers of servicemen than the ceilings set by the original Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, 25% lower in terms of armored vehicles and artillery, and 45% lower in terms of aircraft.

Objectively, making use of its huge economic and military-technical superiority compared to Russia, the U.S. is increasing its lead by developing new precision-guided conventional weapons systems, missile defense systems and information and command systems. But there are no grounds for accusing the U.S. of being on a deliberate track to build up military capability, and its military developments are in any case aimed more at other likely adversaries, though their technical characteristics often raise doubts and fears in Moscow.

The perception of a growing military threat in Russia owes more to the failure of attempts to carry out military reform while at the same time dealing with a huge drop in defense spending in the 1990s, and also to serious mistakes in military policy in this decade (with a five-fold increase in defense spending). This situation is the primary explanation for the continuing disintegration of the country's conventional forces, the slow pace of modernizing the strategic nuclear forces, the collapse of the defense industry, the increasing lag in modern military technology, and the increasingly frequent complaints from foreign buyers of Russian arms.

It is easy to get the impression that Russia's military commanders often lead the political leadership and public astray by spreading two myths: the "growing military threat" from abroad and the "steady increase in the country's defense capability." This includes the numerous recent military PR stunts at home and abroad, such as bomber flights and visits by naval ships to Venezuela, test launches of missiles, grandiose parades and equally grandiose statements, etc. These stunts aim perhaps at diverting attention from the stagnation of Russia's military reform and the state program to upgrade weapons, along with the corruption, crime and hazing practices in the armed forces, especially in light of the huge amounts of money spent on defense during the fat years before the crisis began.

Despite cheerful defense reports on successful reform and pronouncements of victory, an analysis of the Caucasus conflict of August 2008 reveals the various problems that still exist. The persistent shortcomings in troops' combat training and technical equipment and in the command and coordination of the different forces, as well as problems in information support, communications, and radio and electronic warfare, have still not been resolved since the two Chechen campaigns in the 1990's. The losses to Russia's ground forces and aviation in a five-day conflict in a tiny territory were greater than NATO's losses in active military operations against Yugoslavia (1999), and also in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) before it installed occupation regimes in those countries.

For 20 years Russia has not been able to resolve the chronic problems of providing housing for officers, organizing contract service in the armed forces, re-equipping troops, improving the command and information support systems, raising the level of combat preparedness, organizing

military needs according to a justified and clear set of criteria, optimizing the level, structure and composition of the armed forces, and drafting a suitable military doctrine and strategy.

A young and liberal Russian president (and the same goes for his American counterpart) could be more easily influenced by the generals and defense corporations, especially at first. Big stars on epaulettes and modern military technology make a big emotional impression on civilians, and generals and admirals are consummate masters at putting on impressive displays of firepower. Many decisions are made under the influence of emotions and under pressure from agencies and lobbyists, rather than based on objective analysis of the military issues. This was noticeable in a number of the decisions on military action and programs after August 2008.

The problematic state of affairs and future uncertainty dictate the military and defense industry's negative attitude towards disarmament talks and the deliberately unrealistic conditions proposed by them, despite Russia's worsening position in the global balance of military power. The economic crisis has seriously exacerbated all of these problems.

There is a growing mood among the American political elite that the time is coming to "put Russia in its place." In particular, there are already calls for the U.S. to use its great military and economic clout to confirm its indisputable nuclear missile superiority, develop its strategic missile defense program based on sea-based systems, station attack aircraft in the Baltic countries, push for NATO membership for Ukraine, establish a big U.S. base in Georgia, and provide big loans to the Baltic countries and Georgia for purchasing arms similar to what Russia is delivering to Venezuela and Iran (fighter planes, tanks, helicopters, anti-aircraft systems).

Only a minority in American military and political circles share these views for now, but support for them could grow. The liberal young black U.S. President Obama will come under pressure principally from supporters of a hard-line foreign policy and real arms race. If the situation were to arise putting Russian and American strength to the test against each other, Obama would be forced to show a much greater degree of "firmness and patriotism" than his predecessor (as Kennedy found himself having to do during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962). In this situation, relations between the two countries could run into much bigger difficulties and even dangers than during the years of stagnation between the peak in relations following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the low point following the Caucasus conflict of August 2008.