

THREE FORKS IN THE ROAD OF GORBACHEV'S PERESTROIKA

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1. For a comprehensive discussion of a phenomenon of the scale of Gorbachev's perestroika, the distance of twenty years is short indeed. To begin with, let us ask a simple question of how much time history gave perestroika. There is reason to believe that the process known as perestroika was in essence much shorter in duration than the period of Gorbachev's time in office.

Perestroika in the proper sense may be said to have begun during the preparation and holding of the Central Committee Plenum in January 1987. The eighteen months that preceded it, from March 1985, may be regarded as a period of "pre-perestroika."

Similarly, the dramatic finale of perestroika did not come in December or even in August 1991. The real watershed, after which it is difficult to speak of the continuation of the processes of perestroika, was the election of Boris Yeltsin as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and the adoption by the Russian parliament of the Declaration of State Sovereignty during the first half of 1990, ushering in a situation of "two centers" in the USSR, followed by a "two governments" situation. It appears that perestroika in the exact sense of the word continued for about three and a half years, which is an extremely short time for the profound transformation of such a complex and fragile organism as was the Soviet Union. The shortness of time multiplied the price of mistakes and miscalculations.

2. Much in the evaluation of perestroika depends on the meaning attributed to this term. Its initiators conceived perestroika as renewal of socialism, giving it a democratic and humane character. Twenty years after, this unique undertaking may be characterized as a search for a Soviet (Russian) way of out of the totalitarian system that called itself "real socialism." This movement away from the dead ends and labyrinths of "state socialism" meant a great deal - from recreating a market economy to instituting political pluralism - but it essentially consisted in the transition from a party-and-police dictatorship to modern representative institutions based on the rule of law.

3. To understand the nature, progress and results of the processes of perestroika in the USSR, it is extremely important to define the point of departure. What kind of country was the USSR in 1985, when a new leader appeared in the eastern superpower?

In characterizing the political system of late-period USSR, the debate has focused mostly on whether it was authoritarian or totalitarian. Both characterizations are not quite convincing. In trying to overcome this contradiction one might, following some writers, define the Soviet system as statism, which over seven decades underwent a complex evolution and which was not a totally spent force by the time perestroika began.

If so understood, perestroika - regardless of the subjective wishes and intentions of its architects - meant a change of socio-political system, a farewell to statism and a movement in the direction of liberal democracy. From the point of view of mass psychology, of consciousness and behavior, perestroika amounted to three great transitions: 1) from rigid state regulation of the distribution of goods and services, which

nominally guaranteed to everyone a certain subsistence minimum, to market relations, with rapid stratification of a rather uniform Soviet society; 2) from a token, purely decorative participation in politics to conscious choice and a real ability to influence government; 3) from an imposed ideological conformism to individual self-determination as to values and ideology. For the "Soviet person," perestroika meant a leap to a different kind of world, previously seen, often in a distorted way, only in films and magazines.

The dramatic finale of perestroika was in large part predetermined by the inability, or impossibility, to divide the "super task" into several units, to avoid "running ahead of the events" and trying to solve everything at once, since the overload resulting from a simultaneous movement on all fronts resulted in a degree of risk that went beyond the acceptable.

4. In retrospect, the actual sequence of steps taken by the Gorbachev leadership went like this: revolution in consciousness followed by political reform followed by economic transformations. This had a logic of its own, since the existing statist system of administrative command and control was an integral, rigidly set entity that rejected attempts at partial reform. Add to this the explosion of ethnic conflict in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith a multi-civilizational environment, rapidly emerging conservative and radical opposition that would stop at nothing in the struggle for power, the quick collapse of the protective crust of the "European socialist system" and the influence of outside forces that aimed to liquidate the "Soviet empire," and it would appear that the Gorbachev leadership had little chance of surviving and seeing its project through to success.

5. Even in the relatively uniform Soviet society, the exit from a statist system was bound to take the form of an intense battle between different ideological and political projects, which involved various forces, including some from the outside. The leading part in this battle was played by the various elements of the late-Soviet elite, such as the party and state nomenklatura, economic managers, prominent members of the intelligentsia, public and political figures of the "new wave," shadow businessmen, and even crime bosses.

Each segment of the Soviet "upper echelons" tried to direct the ongoing transformations of a previously stagnant society along the lines advantageous to them, everyone wanted to lay down markers for the future, and many were trying to push through a social project of their own. They also had a minimal common denominator, seeking to convert their Soviet status into power and property in a post-socialist society.

6. What was done during the first eighteen months of Gorbachev's time in office? The "pre-perestroika" period from spring 1985 to autumn 1986 was a desperate attempt to breath new life into an ossified Soviet system.

Strictly speaking, "pre-perestroika" started in November 1982 with the arrival, not of Mikhail Gorbachev, but of his patron Yuri Andropov, who saw Gorbachev as his heir and successor. The briefness of Andropov's rule - just one year - makes it impossible to speak with any certainty about the scope of the innovations that he was planning. Nevertheless, we know their logic and internal limits. Back in the mid-1960s, Andropov, then Central Committee Secretary, said in a candid discussion with one of his advisers: "<...> What I am quite certain of is that we shouldn't even touch the state before we really move forward the economy." Anyway, Andropov's program of political innovations ("touching the state") was modest and limited, with steps such as expanding the rights of the Soviets and elections of economic managers.

His interlocutor - the person who recorded the conversation - Georgi Shakhnazarov did not share his superior's key thesis, believing that without a political reform no serious change could happen in the economy; the entrenched Soviet nomenklatura would nip everything in the bud.

The implicit debate between two members of the Soviet elite, who went on to

high party positions (in the late 1980s, Shakhnazarov became member of the inner circle of Mikhail Gorbachev's trusted advisers) reflected the main issue that was at the heart of the strategy of perestroika and became all-important two decades afterwards: Could Soviet society be reformed step by step, in a more or less orderly way according to the Chinese pattern, or must it of necessity be an all-embracing process, with everything being done at once?

A simplistic comparison of the reforms of Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping would, of course, be inappropriate. It would be equally wrong to lump together the two countries' fundamentally different economic and social realities and cultural traditions. Yet, the problem of the choice of the strategy of reform remains. In fact, this choice was the starting point of perestroika as an accelerated process, a leap to freedom.

7. During the first eighteen months, Gorbachev's leadership was just approaching the first fork in the road while for the most part implementing the its predecessor's program. The logic in 1985-1986 was still defined mostly by Andropov's precepts.

The main goals were to assure the stability of the system and "opening up the creative potential of socialism," reflected in the slogan of "accelerating the country's socio-economic development." This is not even an economic reform but rather a technocratic adjustment of the existing mechanism, which had become unhinged during the period of increasing stagnation and paralysis of authority. Gorbachev's team was destined both to attempt to revive "state socialism" and to dismantle it. This clearly conflicting set of historic tasks was bound to make the route of perestroika tortuous.

At the start of Gorbachev's period of reforms, the anti-alcohol campaign, launched in May 1985, stands out for its scope and importance. Though it is often criticized in a less than fair manner, it is true that there was a big gap between the depth and scale of the problem on the one hand and the approaches to its resolution on the other. Where a long, well planned siege was needed, a bold cavalier attack was launched, with little chance of success. The same was true of another economic experiment that turned sour, the so-called state certification, extending to civilian factories the system of quality control that existed in the defense industry.

8. After the Brezhnev stagnation, the reformers were doing their utmost to make up for the lost time, hence the "acceleration." They also felt the need to make the process of reforms irreversible and to prevent the conservatives from turning back the clock. Another factor that was making them hurry was the harsh logic of the bi-polar confrontation with the United States and the capitalist world. The final factor was the archetypal sin of the Russian intelligentsia - impatience, often pushing it to run ahead of the events.

9. Quickly passing the "Andropov stage," in mid-1986 the reformers reached the first fork in the road. By the second half of 1986, two approaches had emerged in the "top echelons" toward the further reforming of Soviet society - the "economic-technological" and the "political" approach. Whereas the first approach called for economic reforms while keeping intact the political system, the second one called for a rapid and decisive democratization of society. Despite the clear risks associated with the rapid transformation of the political system, particularly as economic problems were considerable and mounting, the second approach was chosen.

At the same time, the key concepts of Gorbachev's reforms - perestroika and glasnost - were being rethought. The General Secretary, sensing increasing opposition to his course, started increasingly to emphasize the revolutionary nature of the events. Launched as a change in style, perestroika went on to become a break with the totalitarian past and a profound democratization of society. Similarly, glasnost, conceived as a channel for feedback, both "top down" and "from below," became a powerful tool of democratization and a unique method of re-energizing the masses' social and political activity.

Let us look back to again ask the "devil's advocate's question" of whether a more down-to-earth strategy of consistent economic reforms of a "market socialism" kind, that had been fairly successful in the former European countries of "people's democracy" as well as in China and Vietnam, promised better chances of success.

There are many serious arguments in favor of the choice made by the Gorbachev team in the eve of 1987. The entrenched system, shaped over seventy years and three generations, rejected economic innovation; everyone remembered the failed initiatives such as Kosygin's reforms. A rollback could bury not only the economic reforms but the reformers themselves - Khrushchev's example was very much on everyone's mind.

To these substantial arguments, another consideration might be added. It concerns the "picture of the world" that existed in the minds of men and women who were ideological precursors of perestroika, which was dominated by the West, particularly the United States, as the reference point and the example to be emulated. The Western experience of the development of society, focused on the free individual, overshadowed all the rest. In particular, the experience of a rather successful authoritarian modernization in eastern countries such as South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, went largely unnoticed, even though typologically it was more valid for Soviet society than the tempting western models.

It is well known that the 1987 economic reform produced limited and contradictory results. The reasons were many: the loss of enterprising spirit in Soviet society, stubborn sabotage of reform by the powerful economic bureaucracy, inconsistency of the reformers, particularly on the prices issue, and the errors and miscalculations inevitable in a new and complex undertaking. Gorbachev himself later said: "Economic changes lagged behind the political transformations." As a result, valuable time was lost, letting pass the most favorable moment to start the painful adjustment of the people to new economic conditions. Uncontrolled expansion of the monetary mass and the increasing shortages of goods were destroying the consumer market.

Subsequently, this "strategic miscalculation" had a most negative impact on the outcome of perestroika. The new economic entities engendered by perestroika would sooner or later demand political representation of their interests; from hereon, they would be factors not only in the economic but also in the political process. And, they would not be in favor of the "socialist choice."

10. In terms of timing, the second fork in the road of Gorbachev's perestroika is quite near the first one. Having exhausted the possibilities of "Andropov-style perestroika" Gorbachev came increasingly to believe that what's needed is not a renovation or even an overhaul of the System but its replacement. Since it's a full replacement, from the roof to the foundation, plans for profound transformations in all areas were conceived almost at the same time, clashing and competing with one another. The political reform, which, as we saw, had been given higher priority than the economic changes, could be understood and implemented in different ways. The January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee chose the radical option, aimed at accelerated democratization of society.

The political reform was at the heart of Gorbachev's reform process, since the party state was the very essence of the Soviet system. The more precise term would be party-state - the Siamese twins, merged inseparably during the seventy years after the October revolution. In the party-state link, the party was indeed the "leading and guiding" force. Its ability to reform itself and to find its place in a post-Soviet society is still a subject of heated debate.

The millions of rank-and-file party members were pushing perestroika forward rather than backward. As to the attitude of the nomenklatura to the changes initiated by Gorbachev, it is a lot more difficult to define. Holding a position of privilege in Soviet

society, it was instinctively wary of change. By the meager standards of the "socialist camp," it was living fairly well, and it had something to lose.

Of decisive importance to the outcome of perestroika, however, was not the attitude of the several million-strong nomenklatura as a whole but of its uppermost tier, "the bosses." As the transformations went deeper, their attitude became increasingly negative.

11. Authoritarian modernization, the route that Gorbachev's perestroika resolutely abandoned at the end of 1986, requires a political agent. This could be the state apparatus, the army, or the party. In any case, it has to be a substantial part of the nation's elite, ready to accept the risks associated with profound socio-economic transformations. Was there such a segment in the late-Soviet elite?

A better way of formulating this problem is perhaps this: Could Gorbachev pull to his side the key strata of the Soviet elite without excessive concessions or retreats from the goals he had set? Were they ready, having passed the "Andropov stage," to continue moving ahead along the lines of perestroika? It is unlikely that anyone today could answer this question with certainty.

Anticipating the events, one could say that the inherent ambivalence of the position of members of the Soviet elite pre-ordained their rather cynically indifferent farewell to the System. It goes without saying that in order to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards perestroika, they needed to see an appropriate place for themselves in the new scheme of things. There was a real possibility of that, given that this group included almost all the dynamic elements of Soviet society, which lacked a counter-elite.

Guided by their new status, they quickly blindsided perestroika, pushing it far beyond the "socialist choice." Within the party, Soviet and economic nomenklatura, a group was inevitably emerging that had a stake in legitimizing their new position and hence, in radicalizing the reforms. It is not an accident that in the post-Soviet Russia many former members of the "old nomenklatura" have been able to preserve and solidify their position in society.

12. Ignoring the advice of some of his closest associates, Gorbachev continued until the very end to hold the reins of the party apparatus. Despite all the costs of such a close association - and, willy-nilly, identification - with those "sworn friends," he explained that he saw no other choice: the die-hard apparatchiks, left to themselves, could do a lot of harm. Later another, equally important consideration was added: fears that "federalization" of the party could become a prelude to the breakup of the Soviet state. As the subsequent course of events demonstrated, those fears were more than justified. A biographer of Gorbachev noted that "while the party link existed, it protected the state from disintegration." There was another motivation - the hope, which the General Secretary maintained until the end, that the CPSU could reform itself and become a modern political force, a powerful tool for the democratic renewal of Soviet society.

As the processes of perestroika went deeper and became more radical, the paths of Gorbachev and of the most influential stratum of party bosses were parting more and more. It is well known that the party apparatus became the center of resistance to the country's reformist leadership; its informal leader Yegor Ligachev symbolized militant conservatism. Even in the party's supreme bodies - the Politburo and the Secretariat - the architect of perestroika was in a minority.

Yet, the party apparatus never dared to go for an open break with its nominal leader. The difficult XIX Party Conference in June 1988, and the much more difficult XXVIII Party Congress in July 1990 ended in a clear victory for Gorbachev over party conservatives, who had to bow to his leadership. The August coup in 1991 was organized by the top echelons of the state apparatus, rather than by the party bosses, who adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

It appears that the threat from the right, i.e. from the orthodox communists, was not as great as it seemed during the years of perestroika – in the end, the death blow was dealt by a coalition of anti-communist radicals and nationalists. It is possible that the “danger from the right” had been somewhat overestimated while underestimating the danger from the left - the radical democrats.

13. There is no doubt that the political reform initially strengthened the positions of the democratic leadership. The sessions of the Congress of People’s Deputies, immediately becoming the most popular “TV series,” did much for the political education of the people. The final lap of the Communist regime saw the emergence of something like modern representative institutions and the nascent revival of the Russian parliamentary tradition. The administrative command-and-control system was dealt a deadly blow from which it never recovered.

Soon, however, serious flaws in the proposed structure became evident. The party lost the levers of control, and the bodies of government lost the backbone that gave stability to the ship of state. The processes launched by the political reform rapidly went out of control. The process was underway, but it was often moving in directions not desired by the leaders of perestroika.

It became clear that in a revolutionary situation the energized masses are a double-edged sword, which could work both ways. The worsening socio-economic situation in the country eroded the mass base of support for perestroika and was grist to the mill of nationalists and right and left-wing radicals.

14. Unlike the first two forks in the road, Gorbachev reached the third one against his will, pushed there by mighty and rapidly rising wave of the perestroika. He sensed the first symptoms of the gathering crisis of the USSR as a state as early as mid-1987, when in the atmosphere of glasnost and democratization the movement of Crimean Tartars surged rapidly and turmoil began in the weakest link of the Union – the Baltics. Six months later, Karabakh exploded.

The Karabakh crisis, which quickly came to the forefront of the country’s politics, reflected a tight web of problems of the multiethnic, multi-faith and multi-civilizational Soviet Union. As it was rapidly letting loose its huge destructive potential, the nationalities problem, from 1989 on, jeopardized the very existence of the Soviet state – federal in form and unitary in fact.

In contrast to the economic and political reforms, this time Gorbachev had less time to think and decide and less room to maneuver. In dealing with this conundrum, the ruling Communist Party was not helping its General Secretary. Its leaders would much prefer measures “to put the house in order.” The party organs were wary and suspicious of the mushrooming ethnic movements. The apparatchiks, accustomed to administrative methods, were clearly inferior to the leaders of the “popular fronts” in their ability to appeal to the people.

As perestroika was boiling over, Gorbachev was alone in facing the nationalist elements that he had awakened. In effect, the choice he was facing amounted to this alternative: either use force or seek agreement and cooperation with the ethnic elites that had emerged in the federal “proto-states.” The outcome is well known: the centrifugal forces tore the multi-national Soviet Union apart. To what extent was this outcome pre-ordained?

The use of force to solve the nationalities problem, and in effect to save the union state, was fairly quickly seen not to work. A typically Soviet example of the use of force during perestroika happened in Alma-Ata in December 1986. After that the use of force was very rarely authorized by the Union leadership, the most graphic episode being Baku in January 1990. (As is known, Gorbachev strongly denies any involvement in the bloodshed in the Baltics in January 1991, regarding it as the work of the reactionary forces opposing the nascent democratic institutions).

In sharing the lessons of the Baku tragedy, which cost several hundred lives, Mikhail Gorbachev wrote: "Authorities cannot avoid the use of force in extreme circumstances. But such action must be justified by absolute necessity and limited to a strictly considered degree. However, a true resolution of the problem is possible only by political means."

Gorbachev's rejection of violence was dictated not only by moral imperatives but also by political considerations. Given Russia's difficult legacy, any use of force could have quickly buried perestroika, the hopes associated with it, and the dream of freedom.

Having sheathed his sword, Gorbachev could only rely on his political skill. He was hoping that under the positive impact of economic and political reforms the "nationalities issue" would become less acute. But the reforms only fueled the fire. While the economic reform pushed the national elites to the so-called "republican khozraschet" – economic autonomy, in effect dividing up the country's common economy, the political reform was whetting the appetites of the increasingly bold "national fronts," which no longer concealed their secessionist intentions. Toward the end of perestroika, in many places the nationalists swept to power, while in others they were breathing down the neck of communist party leaders, forcing them to adopt their slogans and demands.

Under such circumstances it was not possible to preserve the Union in its previous form. Nevertheless, the nucleus of the Union – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan – could be preserved within a revamped, more flexible structure. Quite possibly, they would have been joined by a few other republics. In all, they would have accounted for the lion's share of the territory, population and resources of the USSR. In that case, the upheaval in the post-Soviet space would have been of much less magnitude.

Gorbachev, rejecting preservation of the common state through the use of force, chose the other option. While central government was getting increasingly weaker, the last but not one act of the drama was played out, known as the Novo-Ogarevo process. For the sake of saving the union state, the USSR President agreed to a division of power and federal property with the leaders of the republics who represented the interests of ethnic elites. The Novo-Ogarevo process was a project of mind-boggling complexity, an effort to harmonize multiple vital interests, finally producing a new union Treaty, which was to be signed in August 1991. The coup attempt that same month made the signing impossible and opened up the way to rampant, unchecked centrifugal forces.

15. The destruction of the Soviet Union from the inside, as a result of the August coup and of the Russian leadership's deliberate policy of breaking up the union state, led to the emergence of fifteen new states on the world's political map. With the exception of the Baltic countries, practically all formed the Commonwealth of Independent States. Conceived as a way toward an integrated group similar to the European Union, the Commonwealth, now in its fourteenth year, looks more like an administrative shell with little real substance. It would be wrong to say that its historic task has been to work out a "civilized divorce" of the post-Soviet states (so as to avoid Yugoslav-like bloodshed in a nuclear superpower) but they are certainly not drawing closer together. As of today, in the post-Soviet space, the centrifugal forces, let loose in the process of the destruction of the Union, are stronger than the centripetal forces.

The post-Soviet states are therefore continuing along diverging paths in various areas – the economy, politics, ideology, and external relations. What then is the legacy of perestroika in the vast space of the Soviet empire after its demise?

The short answer is, It depends. The processes now under way on the rubble of the former empire have much in common. This similarity stems from the existence of an important historical player – the new elites, most of whom emerged from the Soviet nomenklatura. All of them are focused on addressing the same task – to convert their

privileged position in the Soviet system into power and property in the new states. More often than not, the price paid for this is de-modernization and degradation of their societies.

Thinking back to the three great transformations of Soviet society described above, one could say that the movement from a state-dominated economy to the markets was the common path chosen in all of the republics. Even so, it was not uniform: there is a big difference between the snap transition to a liberal market model in the Baltics and the thinly veiled domination of state-owned property in the economies of Turkmenia or Belarus.

The picture is even more mixed in the sphere of ideology. The ideological pluralism in Ukraine is in stark contrast to the state control of the media in Uzbekistan. Similarly, the degree of openness to the outside world in Moldova is much greater than in Belarus.

16. To widen the analysis, let us briefly look at European former “socialist countries.” Comparisons of this kind are justified by the fact that they shed the straightjacket of “state socialism” at about the same time, at the end of the 1980s.

The theory of democratic transition points to clearly defined stages of movement from dictatorial regimes to representative government. The interim finish line is a state of unconsolidated democracy, achieved in about ten years, and complete victory - consolidated democracy - after a quarter of a century. Yet, the theory of democratic transition, drawing upon the experience of southern Europe and Latin America, does not always work when applied to post-socialist states, in which the transition to different forms of social organization is much more complicated. Nevertheless, we'll have to apply this measure in evaluating the achievements of former socialist countries in creating democratic institutions.

Having ended the “socialist experiment,” which lasted many years, almost thirty post-socialist states forged ahead in different, sometimes diametrically opposed directions: while some are gradually establishing a consolidated political democracy, others are reviving totalitarian regimes.

17. In the countries of Central Europe, with fairly well developed civil societies and relatively strong democratic traditions, the farewell to the socialist past was quick and fairly easy. This process has been much more difficult in South-Eastern Europe, where it is being complicated by inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts. Even so, there is little doubt about future consolidation of the democratic institutions there. The most graphic outward proof of the success of the “democratic experiment” in this part of the European continent is the rapid integration of these states in NATO and the European Union. Membership in these organizations solidifies the democratic transitions, making it irreversible.

The Baltic countries are moving in the same direction and, overall, just as successfully. The reasons for the relative ease of democratic transition in the three former Baltic republics of the USSR are essentially the same - a more or less well developed civil society and living democratic traditions which were not fully uprooted there during the Soviet period. Of great help was the strong and practically bloodless process of national liberation from totalitarianism and from dependence on Moscow and Russia, which took the form of the democratic movement in the years of perestroika. One dark spot, however, is the discrimination of Russian-speaking population, which is clearly inconsistent with European standards of behavior.

The Baltic countries are also similar to Central European states in terms of the type of government that they chose, i.e. parliamentary republic, in which representative institutions play a key role. This distinguishes them from other post-Soviet states, which chose presidential regimes. As is known, the shell of a presidential republic is much better suited for authoritarian and totalitarian government.

18. As for the twelve other post-Soviet states, including Russia, one cannot yet speak of successful democratic transition. It is probably for this reason that their regimes are often described in vague terms, such as “illiberal democracy,” managed democracy,” etc. Even those terms often seem overly optimistic, ignoring the clearly repressive nature of some of these regimes.

A characteristic common to all these countries is the weakness and lack of firm roots of civil and political rights and freedoms. Strange as it may seem, ordinary citizens in these countries are often less protected from arbitrary power than even during the Soviet period. The democratic facade conceals a totally ruthless behavior of the powers that be.

Yet, the authoritarian regimes in most of the post-Soviet states are intent on rapid economic reform and growth. It is no accident that the rates of economic growth in the post-Soviet space are among the highest in the world. Another fact that should not be ignored is the real difference between “soft” and “hard” authoritarianism, though the line is sometimes blurred. Unlike its “hard” version, “soft” authoritarianism leaves breathing spaces in society, in which institutions of civil society may continue to exist or take shape. This type may be best represented by the mono-centric regimes of Vladimir Putin in Russia or of Nursultan Nazrbaev in Kazakhstan.

19. There has been much debate about the change of government in Georgia and Ukraine. There, typical representatives of the Soviet nomenklatura have been replaced by new, young, Western-oriented leaders. It is still too early to pass judgment in this regard, since there is enough reason both for an optimistic and for a skeptical outlook. To point to areas that may cause apprehension, both Mikhail Saakashvili and Victor Yushchenko could hardly be called real oppositioners, since they and many people close to them emerged from corrupt post-Soviet elites. Nor can one easily call them convinced democrats; the “rose revolution” in Tbilisi and the “orange revolution” in Kiev may well be characterized as coups d’état. The two men have not shown much regard for norms of law and easily stepped over them when political expedience so demanded. On this account and others, one could, of course, still give them the benefit of the doubt – but it is time alone that will answer the question of how democratic will be the regimes they are now shaping.

20. At the end of the twentieth century, Gorbachev’s perestroika spurred a momentous global dynamic. Naturally, the Soviet Union and then the post-Soviet space were at the center of the processes it unleashed. The profound transformation of all aspects of life for hundreds of millions of inhabitants of the former “socialist camp” is continuing; their road to freedom and democracy turned out to be much longer, difficult and tortuous than expected. Even today, twenty years after the start of perestroika, given the scale of social change that it ignited, it is too soon to sum things up. It may well be that what we all need is patience.