

**POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION:  
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

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## **Introduction**

In June 1996, H.E. Professor Ivan I. Antonovich, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, was a Visiting Fellow of this Institute, and delivered the following unscripted address to an audience which can only be described as 'riveted to the spot'. The perspective given of recent Soviet and Russian history, together with reflections about possible developments, harmonised perfectly with the Institute's global project 'Costing Values', which began in 1993. That project has three goals:

1. to identify and analyse fundamental ideas on which everyday decisions rest, throughout the world, but which rarely receive such attention;
2. to bring together from different walks of life the very people who make the daily decisions and need to reflect on such ideas - leaders from industry, commerce, politics, the diplomatic world, as well as from specialised professions and research institutes;
3. to challenge and transcend the boundaries of current thinking by insisting on perspectives from different cultures.

All participants in the seminars and conversations associated with the project consider three questions:

- what values are upheld in our particular communities?
- what resources are needed to implement them?
- what sacrifices must be made to pursue such priorities?

**Peter Jones**

*Director*

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The falling apart of Communism at the end of the Century and the peaceful anti-Communist revolution that took place in Russia in 1991 are really events of geopolitical importance. They changed the European world; they had a profound impact on the evolution of the world in general, and many of their consequences cannot be yet foreseen. The positive results of this post-Communist transition are far from being certain. There are many pitfalls, there are many dangers, but there is no direct danger of a restoration of a totalitarian and imperial Soviet Union of the form that was familiar to the world for much of the 20th Century. There are probable remissions of the negative (r)evolution.

I would like to begin with the beginning of the 20th Century because I for one agree with Denis de Rougemont that the 20th Century cannot be said to be a unique century in human history; wars and revolutions, empires' births and falling part, were known in the other centuries. Of course wars have been a lot more atrocious than in the preceding centuries; of course there have been gas chambers and holocaust and gulags,

but the demographic growth was quick, the processes of technical change overwhelming, and I would be more inclined to speak of the specificity rather than the uniqueness of the 20th Century. I would define its specificity in this way: it is a century which has witnessed the social evolution from a multi-polar to a bi-polar world with no pole at all at the end of it - which once again is in itself neither salvation nor omen, but just a state of things that has to be studied very attentively.

Nobody could even remotely foresee such an end of the 20th Century at the beginning of it. In spite of the Boer War and the Russian-Japanese War, the first ten years of the 20th Century, which were the end of the *troisième belle époque*, were quite peaceful. After the peaceful resolution of those two conflicts during the first decade of the 20th Century, there was a hope for a new international order - under the supremacy of the white race, of course. Even Lenin said in 1912, at the age of 42, that perhaps he will not live to see the revolution in Russia, except, he added, if "Nikolashka" - that was a derisive name for the Emperor Nicholas II - committed the stupidity of entering into the war: such a stupidity, Lenin added, even Nikolashka would not do.

Lenin was of course wrong - as he was on many other

important occasions in the history of the 20th Century. Nicholas II "complied" with Lenin's wishes, and so did King George of Great Britain, Kaiser Wilhelm, President Poincarre, Emperor Franz-Josef II of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and many a bevy of the small world leaders.

You know the First World War; you know its major results; but somehow we concentrate on the Russian Revolution and we forget that the end of the First World War brought, first of all, the dissolution of the Empires: complete dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, complete dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the dissolution of the Prussian Empire. But not the Russian one, though all the events and facts of that dissolution were present.

The Russian Empire was saved from its final dissolution by Marxist revolution - the most bizarre and most fateful event of the 20th Century. Only think of it: a radical social liberation theory, evolved out of the analysis of social, economic and historic conditions of Western Europe, notably England, in the 19th Century, found its major testing ground in the 20th Century in the East of Europe where social economic conditions never remotely resembled that of the West, where the theory was evolved. The Revolution saved the empire, though under a

totally different guise, unheard of in the imperialist countries of that time. It destroyed Russia proper, its spiritual foundations and social economic conditions of life that have evolved through centuries. It didn't liberate anybody; rather, it enslaved everyone, including the masterminds of the revolution.

I, for one, consider that a major *coup d'etat* was not attempted in August 1991 in Russia and failed; it was attempted and succeeded in February 1917 when two Duma leaders, Messrs Gouchkov and Shulgin in a train wagon-lit near the provincial city of Mogilov, forced the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II - because with that abdication Russia lost one of its three spiritual pillars. It had fatherland, the Tsar and God. With the loss of the Tsar, the Revolution deprived Russia of God, and fatherland got a completely new meaning. Since that time we have all been the victims of the plot of the West European romantic revolutionaries of the 19th Century, who wanted to change the world, rather than explain it, but never in their wildest dreams planned to begin from Russia.

However, the Bolsheviks brought events upon Russia that froze the process of the falling apart of the Empire, which began with the First World War, and left Russia out of European politics for a long time. Some very important

achievements of the Reds cannot be discounted while analysing this process. The country went into the civil war immediately after Lenin took the Telegraph office in St. Petersburg, and declared that all the power goes to the Soviet. The surprise and ease with which the October Revolution took place was unbelievable. After St. Petersburg, it proceeded further into Russia, and the whole of the Russian Empire exploded immediately with a civil war which for four years devastated the whole of the territory, although during the First World War only the European part of the territory was devastated. It is important to note that the Reds won this powerful historic battle in an honest battle. The Whites and the Reds clashed, and the Reds won because they promised the peasants, not the industrial workers, that they would get the land free of charge from the nobility, for after the reform of 1861 the peasants were charged staggering prices for the land which they were never able to pay.

It is very interesting to notice that the industrial working class in Russia at the beginning of the Revolution formed only 0.4% of the whole population. It was all, or practically all, annihilated during the civil war. When the civil war was over, Russia was a peasant country with ruined industries, institutions of high culture and learning. It was then that Lenin realised that the dream had failed, and he started his

NEP policy before his death in 1922. You will remember it was based solely on liberalising the activities and productive potential of the peasants, and within three years there was bread in abundance in the shops of Russia. Small trade and small businesses were thriving and the country was getting out of the disaster of the civil war.

But then Lenin died, and with him the hope of creating something in between the capitalist and the socialist order in Russia Stalin came in unexpectedly, with the results you all know But I should emphasise that there is a certain oversimplified picture of Stalin himself and what he did to Russia and how he came to absolute totalitarian power. This is because there have been many faces of Stalin I would say there are probably five periods in Stalin's rule over Russia and each of them needs a separate analysis in order to understand what happened later.

First of all you may be surprised to learn there was a period of democratic rule of Stalin. This was in 1924 after Lenin's death until 1929 by which date he had beaten Trotsky would say that Trotsky and probably Lenin - Lenin in his deathbed letter grossly under-estimated Stalin and probably even Stalin himself did not know his powers and potential.

Trotsky labelled Stalin "the most outstanding mediocrity of the Party". Trotsky knew how to put labels; he did not know how to fight outstanding mediocrities. In 1924 all those peasants who had won the civil war had come back to the cities, thinking that now they deserved a better life - but there was no good life in the cities. There was hunger, disruption of services and hopelessness - all those people, poorly-educated romantics believing that the world revolution would be imminent, had to choose between Trotsky and Stalin. A patrician Trotsky who loved the good life, good clothes, beautiful women, who, when present at a spectacle in a theatre, would interrupt it when it was announced that he was in the theatre, would come up to the stage and harangue the audience for an hour and a half about the world revolution, would go down into the stalls again and listen to the continuation. Can you imagine the debate in the Party? Trotsky, a very handsome man, a very powerful demagogue, a demagogue of genius; a man with a vision of the world revolution in a white tunic, an aristocrat, a patrician, would come to the rostrum and harangue those hungry, wounded conquerors of the civil war, about the prospects of the world revolution and world socialism. They were hungry, they listened to him but they did not believe people so excellently clad, self-assured and educated. And Stalin, a small guy - people said he was stinking with tobacco and other things, with

unkempt hair and yellow nails from non-stop smoking. I have seen his archive - on many of the pages there are still preserved greasy spots from his fingers. He would come to the rostrum very much like everyone else, with the boots that he even slept in sometimes, and he would tell them: "There must be bread tomorrow; there must be light tomorrow, and I will do it for you". Everyone chose Stalin for Trotsky: in a perfectly democratic fight, in a lumpenised Communist Party with numbers swollen not with romantic revolutionaries - many of them died out in the war - but with the peasants who came to get the rewards for their exploits. These rewards, so lavishly promised, never came because of Stalin's complete victory over Trotsky in 1929. He expelled Trotsky from the country and shipped him away to Turkey on a ship named "Lenin". This Trotsky commemorated in a cable back to Stalin, saying that there would be a time when he would be shipped to the grave by the errors he had made. Stalin went to his grave with full honours; nobody spoke of errors. Trotsky went to the grave once again on Stalin's orders.

The battle between Trotsky and Stalin after that proved nothing fateful for Stalin. Stalin started building the socialist country. First of all he dismantled the New Economic Policy. Immediately after defeating Trotsky the policy was forcefully

dismantled because the increased productivity of the peasants was undermining the roots of the system, pushing it towards reform, towards something that existed before the Revolution. Stalin would not tolerate it and he replaced it with a forceful collectivisation. About 8 million peasants were uprooted in the beginning of the '30s and sent to Siberia and other places. It was once again a rough, wild and ruthless period: he needed cheap labour, so he pushed millions and millions of peasants into forests, into taiga, into industrial construction places, and all that.

But events took, once again, an unexpected course. There was famine, there were peasant revolts, and there was grumbling in the Party. By the beginning of the 1930s Stalin's position was quite vulnerable. That was when Stalin started his purges. The first purges started in 1936. Once again he attracted the attention of the lumpenised party mass to the "enemies of the state" who were doing everything contrary to his plans. People started to realise that this was a new system of repression. But it was too late. By 1937 the whole guillotine was working on a massive scale. There was no way to be saved from it. This was the fourth period of Stalin - Stalin the criminal. If the preceding chapters of his history could be ascribed to the revolutionary experiment - revolutionaries never

know what their next step will be after taking power - here was the criminal's desire to preserve his own power at the expense of the other people.

With the coming of Beria in 1938, contrary to what is very often described in your history books, the massive guillotine, the massacres in the Soviet Union were stopped, because the machine of repression had been tested. It did not have to work on a full scale; it sufficed to switch it on and off, in different periods, to keep the whole country in terror. It was a terror state; a clear-cut autocratic regime. But then history presented Stalin with a gift - a unique and precious one. Once again, at the expense of the lives of millions of people, the Second World War was a chance for Stalin, if not to seek forgiveness of the people whom he ruled, at least to merit their recognition.

It's a long story and I have no time to dwell upon it here in detail - how the War began. You know many of the details - the Ribbentrop/Molotov pact and other things; you know also the tepid negotiations that were being conducted between the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom - it was Great Britain at the time - and France and it was not exactly serious on your side. You didn't know you were playing with the devil - nobody knew, even

Stalin himself didn't know he was a devil: and then two devils (Hitler and Stalin) came together in a friendly embrace. It is no reason to put the blame on anyone - it was a fact of life. In 1941 we say, and we tend to believe, that the war was unexpected for Stalin because he killed the people who brought him bad news. I don't think so. From what I know, Stalin knew that the war was imminent: he was playing for time. He wanted to get two or three more years to put his own industrial process completely on a war schedule.

He didn't have those two years; they were not given to him. Whatever you say, the military machine of the Hitler Germany that overwhelmed the European part of the Soviet Union was many times stronger than the machine that Stalin had at his disposal. Stalin had the soldiers; the Germans had both the soldiers and the modern industrial warfare logistics. So the first defeats of the Second World War were easily explained. But it was only Stalin who could stop the retreating armies by putting the machine-guns behind their backs. Stalin was the only one who could do it, and that was the only means to stop the panic. When every fighting man had to decide which kind of death to choose - the bullet in the back or the bullet in the forehead - they went forward. It was a miracle of cruelty, of patriotism. Of course, Stalin exploited this situation with the

strategy of a genius. He implanted the hope - a feeble one, but still there was hope - of giving the possibility of private farming to peasants; he invited back the Church and restored part of its material resources; he accepted the guerilla movements in the rear of the enemy which at first he disbelieved; and displayed a clear-sightedness and strategy which was on a par with the other Allies - Roosevelt, Hitler and Churchill. And in your history books - just for the exploits of the Second World War - Stalin is painted as a lot more sympathetic figure than he is in our history books.

I won't take much of your time in trying to understand what was going on in the soul of the tyrant during the war, and after the war. I have had a conversation with an eye-witness as Stalin was going to the Potsdam Conference. He made a stop-over in Minsk where the First Secretary of the Party (it was a certain Pomerenko - a rather well-known figure in the '40s) - witnessed that Stalin was absolutely devastated by what he saw while travelling in the train from Moscow: the extent of desolation and defeat which had been brought upon the economy and the life of the people in 1945. There are some reasons to believe that Stalin was opting for the creation of a system of European security that would be somewhat like, at least in minor details, the detente practices which we arrived at for a

short time at the end of the '70s. There are some documents witnessing to it.

Then came the Fulton speech of Churchill and "the long cable" of George Kennan from Moscow which were, I would say, the two major flagpoles of the ideology of the Cold War. I guess I am saying a not exactly usual thing for you because you think we have started it. (I still call ourselves "we" very often meaning I was a citizen of the Soviet Union, though in fact, I was born in Poland in 1938 which ceased to exist in 1939; then I became a citizen of the Soviet Union; now I am a citizen of Belarussia and I hope that is my last citizenship. I have been a citizen of three countries and that is not my fault and not the fault of the countries). I wanted to say that the Soviet Union at that time had neither resources nor means to start any major war, although everybody in the Soviet Union thought that the Western powers wanted the war. I'll leave it to posterity to decide, because such issues are normally decided in a more or less final way when all the participants of the dramas are gone, when the archives are opened and when the documents are studied by people who are impartial. However, when many of the archives of the Politburo were opened after 1991, you might be surprised but there has never been a single time in the post-war history of the Politburo of the Communist Party when they

considered a world war. There were never any plans for such a world attack. Of course, I am quite certain that in the general headquarters of the Soviet army - as probably in the headquarters of the armies of any Western country - there were scenarios for many wars of many different kinds. But war has never been planned - the Third World War - as a world strategy of the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War.

More than that, and you will be surprised to hear it, but I will witness to you, that we never in our souls believed that the United States or Great Britain or France would attack us. I carry in my childhood memory postcards sent away in 1945/46 in the Soviet Union with the slogan - we love slogans - "Long live American, British, Franco Soviet friendship". And even in the fateful year of 1962 with the Cuban missile crisis we never believed there would be war. Why? Because we had been listening to your Radio Free Europe, and you were telling us that we were planning the war. We knew it was a stupidity, because we were wise enough to understand that we were a lot weaker economically and otherwise than the West. When Khrushchev was bluffing we knew not one of us has ever seen rockets around. We knew he might have a couple of them but not more We knew he would retreat - nobody was surprised. We knew our Nikita much better than you did. More than that,

as a part of our Soviet culture, there was a certain over-critical attitude to our leaders. It was always very refreshing for me to take an American or English or French or German newspaper and to read the respectful analysis of the behaviour of our leaders. It was only then that I realised how many alternatives they were to consider before adopting a decision. Later on, when I was an adult and I was present at many of the sessions of the Politburo I laughed, without showing anyone that I was laughing, because I have seen the most fateful decisions taken in five minutes without any discussion. A draft paper would be produced that would be adopted: and that's it. So while you were analysing proceedings - "Brezhnev said this, Brezhnev said that" - I have seen Brezhnev, not on frequent occasions but I have seen him over his last four years, hardly knowing where he was. An alternative approach to politics and to the analysis of the world scene, which was being explored over here, did not occur with us. I don't say that we were developing strategies entirely without analysis, but it was undertaken by the bureaucracy rather than by the leaders, and this meant the system was developing on the auto-pilot. We started losing. However strange it might seem to you, this was after 1956, the moment so boldly declared by Khrushchev when he said that we will overcome America in meat production. Everybody in Russia calculated that to achieve this every cow would have to produce

at least four calves every year: so we knew it's just humbug, nonsense. Still, in the Khrushchev years, there was an optimistic spurt in the public mentality of the Soviet Union. There was even a public debate about who is more important: physicists or lyricists, because there was poetry, and there was some freedom of speech.

Khrushchev was dismissed, of course, in 1964 and then we had an era of stability for 18 years under Brezhnev's rule. The Soviet Union lost, under Stalin, as a result of two major geopolitical errors committed in 1945-48. Firstly, Stalin didn't accept the Marshall Plan for the Soviet Union. The Americans were suggesting one but, as I see from their writings, hoped that Stalin would refuse. Stalin obliged. They read Stalin's personality much better than we did back at home. If Stalin had not said "no", along with Molotov, to the Marshall Plan, there would have been some 20-25 billion dollars long-time loan which would have saved Russia. Stalin refused it, knowing it would be enslavement - guessing correctly that the price would be the liberalisation of the system, which the system couldn't bear. So the post-war restoration, which was a miracle in itself, was done by means of a second suffocation, bleeding white of Soviet agriculture. The strategy of Stalin was ruthless but very exact. Deprive the peasants of bread, and they will eat potatoes;

deprive them of potatoes, and they will eat grass; they won't die from hunger. When you deprive the worker of all this, he will eat only the stones of the cities. The post-war restoration came about but Russian agriculture never recovered from this second blow, because everyone who was able-bodied and able-minded left the countryside. No matter how strict the rules, no matter that passports were not given, people cheated and ran away to save themselves.

The second geopolitical error of Stalin was that he imposed the kind of socialism that he practised in the Soviet Union on all the Eastern European countries. Stalin knew of no other socialism, but to all the Eastern European countries it was a totally alien system. They never agreed to it, and at the first opportunity they would just try to escape from it. This introduced (1) economic uncertainty and (2) political turmoil in the system.

Then came the arms race of the '50s, '60s and '70s, imposed by the Cold War. Any resources that the country had, had to be put into the war machinery. Here I point out the two historic differences between capitalism and socialism. It's a very simplified version, but I would put it that capitalism in the second part of the 20th Century has suffered from the over-

abundance of productive capacity, while we suffered from under-accumulation, from under-production. The bureaucratic system, demanding more and more on behalf of the working population, got less and less, because we were locked in the industrial stage. In the mid-'70s every fourth researcher of the world worked in the Soviet Union, and we were importing everything from seeds to ties. The consumer goods coming from the West produced a revolution, by creating an exaggerated impression of paradise here in the West. Of course, with the consumer goods there came a powerful and effective political agitation. We were prudes: we would put a Soviet banner only above our heads; the United States would put their banner on the hind part of the jeans we were importing into the Soviet Union. The message was unmistakable; and it was taken up not by intellectual analysis, but by the psychology of the people. No matter how life improved, people thought the best things were here in the West. More than that, there was a lumpen consciousness being created, to get rid of the system, in order to live like you in the West.

The end of Brezhnev's rule occurred in 1982: everybody waited for his death. He was tolerated, and anecdotes were told, but he was not hated. Everybody somehow thought that change would be for the better, including 18 million *apparatchiks* all

over the country.

Then came Andropov who started the Stalinist type of reform which is now being practised by the Chinese. They have taken up where Andropov left off because he was in power for only 8 months; many people consider that if Andropov had stayed we would be very much like, or even stronger than, China.

In 1985, when Gorbachev came to power through very complex manoeuvring in the Politburo, it was clear to everybody that we could not live on like this any more. Nobody knew how we could live. Gorbachev started reform without knowing what to do, whilst knowing that reform must take place. About one third of the *apparatchiks* went with Gorbachev - I was among those people. At that time, in order to succeed, you had to be a Party member. There was a very tiny fraction of diehards in the Party structure - like M. Suslov - who really believed that communism would come from this system within the foreseeable future. Everybody else knew that they lived in a country of which they were citizens, that they occupied rather prominent positions, that they wanted this country to live on, and that they wanted to keep their position. But to achieve this they wanted to change. It was, you may say, cynical: I would

call it a practical attitude to life - and everybody, at least one third of the *apparatchiks*, started out with Gorbachev for reform. Then many saw that the reform would be achieved without them because Gorbachev has done a great many very brave things - getting rid of the senile people in the Politburo and further down the hierarchical ladder. Therefore 1986-87 was accepted by the population as a time of change - at least the people were changed, but the system wouldn't change. Nothing was changed in the system. Production levels were falling, scientific technological advance was not progressing, and once again strange things were happening. The external debt of the Soviet Union for the five years 1985-90 was doubled, but the productivity was halved. The gold reserves of the Soviet Union, which were quite large, were cast to the wind but production and living standards were not improving at all.

Gorbachev realised what many realised before but didn't want to say aloud, that the system was beyond reform. I think this realisation came to him in 1989. I could see it. I was a researcher and I was serving as an adviser at that time. One evening all of a sudden we were called into his office, 20 people all in all, and he asked us: "What would you think if I instituted the post of President?" Before this he had instituted a People's Congress of the Soviets, when 3000 people came up to the

Kremlin and started discussing problems. The meeting became unruly within three days. Gorbachev then suffered a minor stroke. Nobody expected this. Everybody thought people would come to co-operate and we would move on. Instead people came in to express their woes and display themselves on TV just to get seen.

Gorbachev claimed that his major motive for instituting the presidency was to deal with the foreign leaders more effectively. He insisted he lacked official protocol (as a Secretary General of the Party and the Chairman of the Praesidium of the Soviet Union, he was an absolute ruler of the country; he had absolute power) and now we heard from him that his major problem was not an over-abundance of power at his disposal, but rather "lack of protocol". It was a rather strange argument for instituting a presidency into the country. Some jurists - I was a sociologist - reminded him that this is a parliamentary republic, Lenin was against a presidency, and so on. Gorbachev said: "OK, you Comrade Frolov (who was then the chief of Pravda), you work with them and within two weeks you get me a solution". All of us understood that the solution was already in his mind - to become the President. That is exactly what happened. One week later, I and the Rector of my Academy were invited to his office and were given a very secret

assignment - "try sociological sampling". If elections for the president took place and Gorbachev proposed himself, what would be the results? We did a hell of a good job - we had first rate sociologists. We sampled 45 regions in the Soviet Union; we got the result that 56.3% would vote for Gorbachev - which would be a landslide according to any Western standard. I brought the document with the survey results to his office, to the secretary; the next morning, at 8.30, we were called back to him - he took us, the Rector of the Academy and me as Deputy Rector in charge of research, and kept us standing for two hours, saying: "you are all idiots there, I'll dismantle the Academy, I'll sack all the academics that are doing nothing". And all because we produced a wrong picture. He didn't risk election by popular vote. He pushed himself to election through the People's Congress. He got 53.1% of the vote and he lost legitimacy.

Immediately after that there were 15 more presidents of the Soviet Union because every republican boss, as First Secretary of the local party organisation, chose himself as president. Within three weeks the socialist camp had probably twice as many presidents as the rest of Europe, but things were not moving any more. That was Gorbachev's valiant effort to get beyond the system that was beyond reform, not forgetting the chance to get some benefits for himself on the way.

Somewhere in March 1991 I understood that the country could not be saved because the centre was no longer operating over the rest of the country and every region was seeking salvation for itself. All the issues that were brought to life in 1917, when the end of the Empire occurred, and were frozen through Lenin's and Stalin's rule, were un-frozen under Gorbachev's *perestroika*. I took the Duma records of 1907-16 and went through them. I was absolutely shocked to see the similarity of the situation. The analysis, the speeches were more or less the same. I tried to point it out once to Gorbachev, but he wouldn't tolerate any such thing. He would love to invite intellectuals to give him advice but he would never listen to them. He would collect us and say: "OK, let's just very briefly analyse the situation". Then he would speak for four hours, and then we were dismissed. But he had an enormous psychological skill, which I noticed, in critical moments he had the power to get attention for one minute, impose a decision. And then you relaxed. He knew how to operate that bureaucratic power machine.

What killed the Soviet Union, however, was not his presidency but the fight of the two provincial leaders, himself and Yeltsin. They were both provincial: Yeltsin coming from Sverdlovsk, in the Urals; Gorbachev coming from Stavropol, in

the Caucasus, where most of the senile octogenarians were recuperating twice a year during their tenure in office. Unfortunately I have to say this because Gorbachev was a lot more refined and suave than Yeltsin was; but Yeltsin was just a normal Russian bear, who felt with the Russian people, was one of them, and the people immediately felt this habit of his. So it was a tragic error of Gorbachev, who had poor knowledge of people, to try to turn Yeltsin into an enemy instead of a friend. When Yeltsin was elected the President of the Russian Republic, we were brought in once again to Gorbachev's office for an analysis. I was given the floor and I said that now we might expect the dismantling of the Soviet Union, of socialism all over the Soviet Union. I was of course rushed away from the rostrum but not imprisoned, because nobody imprisoned anybody at that time. Unfortunately that is exactly what happened. Because as soon as the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation adopted a law which gave the laws of the Russian Federation precedence over the laws of the Soviet Union, that was the end of it. It happened at the end of June.

August 1991 was the desire and the wish on the part of the diehards to save the Soviet Union, but in an idiotic fashion. Because when you want to make a *coup d'etat* you have to act swiftly for one hour, and you don't have to invite tanks into the

centre of Moscow. Tanks wouldn't do anything. On the 19th that *coup d'etat* was a complete novelty for me. Late in the evening while I was driving home through the streets of Moscow, I met five tanks with their lids open. There were soldiers sitting on them and Muscovite girls standing chatting and drinking imported beer. I came home and telephoned one of my friends, knowing the telephone would be intercepted: "That's an operetta. Such a *coup* can never succeed". By the middle of the next day it was all clear.

Why did I mention the imported beer? At that time the shelves in the Moscow stores had been completely empty. To drink imported beer, the girls and the soldiers must have got it some other way. I mention it to you because one of the easiest explanations given by the hard-core Communists of why the Soviet Union fell apart, is that it died because of a judeo-masonic plot. I take full responsibility in telling you, no. It didn't die of a judeo-masonic plot; it died from its inner contradictions and weaknesses generated by the system itself, which it was not able to overcome and which was not able to reform itself or be reformed even by Gorbachev. But the system died a very peaceful death, and for this we must be thankful. The system, with all its weapons in its hands, didn't use a single one. The fight which ensued between soldiers and young people

where three young men died was not the result of an attack; it was just the result of a drunken brawl.

For such a peaceful death, Gorbachev is to be thanked. He knew what was happening; he knew that the system was beyond reform. He wanted to jump out of it to save himself, thinking that then he would do something good to the Soviet Union. He didn't know that the Soviet Union would fall apart. Nobody did. In November 1991 I had a group of experts from the Rand Corporation with whom we were friendly. I asked them what they thought about the situation. They told me: "Gorbachev is very firmly in the saddle and things will straighten out". I told them: "Remember, by the end of the year Gorbachev will be out". Two weeks after they left there was the Belavezh Forest agreement and one week after that, one evening Gorbachev left the office, having declared his retirement already. He didn't know that that evening his secretaries, including the female secretaries, were sought by the security people of Yeltsin. The next day he arrived in his office to clear up his papers and there's Yeltsin, broadly smiling, sitting at his desk, saying: "Look, Mischa, I have brought your papers to the adjoining room because I have some business to do; go and look at them". Of course, he didn't find what he was looking for because his safe was open and the major documents had been taken away. It

was a ruthless exchange of positions. Nobody could expect such a turn of events, least of all those people in the West who called themselves Kremlinologists - none of them expected the system to fall apart that quickly, and some of them were very disappointed about it because they had to earn their living in ways other than analysing the Soviet Empire. There are many people wanting to justify their past mistakes in the West regarding the Soviet Union's future. I think some of them would now be inclined to give a rosier picture of what is happening in the former Soviet Union.

The problem is that none of the 15 republics have gone democratic. Of course there have been elections in the Baltic Republics; of course the Baltic Republics have separated and probably have better chances to recover. But in all the CIS countries the presidential posts are taken up by the former First Secretaries of the Party or those high up in the Communist hierarchy. You embrace them, you call them "democrats" but I know many of them and I know the kind of democrats they are. One of them, Mr. Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, highly regarded as a "democrat" in the West has already extended his rule beyond the year 2000 by a people's referendum. And I don't think you need a lecture on how the referendums are made in that part of the world. I would say that the Central Asian republics will

never become democratic within the foreseeable future. Yes, the old system has been destroyed, but the new system of production has not yet come into place. The Russian grain harvest last year was the smallest since 1945. The country lives off its natural resources; the economy is a shambles. There are some positive signs because these democratic elections in Russia now are surprisingly decent. But too many things remain to be done to get out of the crises.

Of course, I would like very much to see Yeltsin re-elected; not because he is a democrat - he is not. But Yeltsin paid his debt to the country as much as Gorbachev; Gorbachev, as I said before, seeing that the system was beyond reform, agreed to the dismantling of it. Yeltsin, after the system had been dismantled, saved Russia from civil war and he somehow made himself acceptable to the West - which was very difficult at first because the comparison with Gorbachev was not in his favour. He is quite sincere - I have seen him and talked with him on some occasions - in saying that he wants Russia to integrate with the common European structure of interdependence. But, being from that part of the world, I have to admit that no country of the CIS union will ever be able to be compatible economically and socially with the least developed country of Western Europe within the coming quarter of a

century. The time needed to fully escape from Communism - and here Zbigniew Brzezinski is dead right - will be as long as it took my part of the world to get into it. Lots of patience on the part of Western countries must be entertained to help us get through - but not by giving us assistance, which will be squandered by the crooks. Russia has gone further than any republic in democratisation and in economic reform: but the Russian economy is more than any other country's economy in the hands of the criminals too. There's a hidden revolution to take place. If Yeltsin stays in, within a year or two he will be replaced because he is in failing health, by a competent technocrat who will do the reforms. For these last five years there has been an elite ready to do it, although they are not given the chance: because everyone expected in the Soviet Union that if only the system falls apart, things will straighten out by themselves.

This lumpenised state of mind of the labour force, beginning with the intellectuals down to the menial workers, makes them unable to survive in a society where you have to be entrepreneurial for yourself. Everybody expects that the government will bail them out. Huge industrial plants which are absolutely uncompetitive expect the government to subsidise them. We in the universities and the government ask for more

pay - that's normal, we are budget workers - and no-one is enterprising. We see no medium business enterprises; we see no sphere of services developing. I was told that about 90% of the foodstuffs in Moscow are imported. Of course the shops are well supplied and sometimes even look very much like the provincial shops in the cities of Western Europe - only the prices are much higher while the salaries are many times lower. The quality of the goods is of the lowest acceptable level; and the prices are the highest. There has been enormous impoverishment of the population, and there is a lot of grumbling. And of course there is a chance that Zyuganov will come to power. Zyuganov is a social democrat - I know the man personally and as recently as 8th March we spent three hours together conversing. But his party is not democratic and there might be serious and disruptive upheavals. The party could push the state back to a chaos which Yeltsin rather skilfully avoided. I remember very well when Bangladesh was formed - I am sorry to use this analogy - and for some years its leaders going out to the West would shout: "Save Bangladesh in the name of humanity". I would say: "In the name of European peace and stability, save Russia by integrating it in the European system: at least by making plans for it", not by humanitarian assistance and long-term loans. I don't think that the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union can ever be integrated into the European

system. That's another danger because, in order to survive, the former party bosses turned democrats on the spur of the moment are now dangerously, even for themselves, playing with orthodox Muslim religion. I would speak for Belarussia, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova and the Baltic Republics. Within 20-25 years, if peace is preserved, and even this shaky and fragile democracy is there, these countries would be able to claim seriously for European membership; because if we are not integrated with Europe, Russia will go elsewhere and it is possible that it will embrace China. There are hints of it already. That would change the geopolitical situation beyond recognition.

After the demise of Communism in Europe, the world has not become any wiser - I am sorry to say this, I am just being honest with you. The geopolitical behaviour of the United States is particularly striking from this point of view. They are behaving just as a superpower, thinking they could survive in a one-pole, not bi-polar world. They made some errors in this, you remember, and even suffered some military defeats, such as their intervention in Somalia. Now they need a second pole as an antagonist. They are pushing China into this position - have you noticed that? It is clear they need something like this to justify their big military expenditure and other world scale politics before the voters. China is not the Soviet Union. The

Soviet Union was ashamed when it was said all over the world that we had a poor human rights record. We wanted to show we are better than everyone else, not the worst ones. China is not ashamed. It just doesn't pay attention to it. It won't let itself be pushed into that corner of the bi-polar world.

China knows it will overcome the 21st Century by sheer numbers if it preserves its own development and tempo. Of course with the New Economic Policy, as I said, they have the same problem. The peasant productivity is at the root of the system: Tiannanmen was the first sign. They have frozen it. Whenever reform develops they will have the same problem even more aggravated. But they might have it within 200 or 300 years from now. So when China goes to Russia that could be a dangerous thing. Don't forget the whole modernisation of China after 1949 was done through Soviet technology, Soviet education, and most of the ruling elite of China has gone through the Soviet universities. They all speak Russian - they didn't dare show it before the death of Mao Tse Tung. Jiang Zemin, the Chairman, speaks Russian better than English. Should that dangerous thing happen there could be once again a bi-polar world with Russia giving an extra weight to one of the poles, this time in Asia. So let it give an extra weight to the European world and the United States and the Atlantic world - because

that is where Russia belongs, no matter what happened in her history. When Russia comes to Europe, we can augment Europe, not by technological know-how - you have been stronger in this and you will remain so - but Russia has her own cultural traditions and Russia has mineral wealth which could last the whole of Europe for a long time to come. Then we could have a better chance for a more peaceful and stable world in the 21st Century, and probably we will have more chance to deal with the setbacks which are undoubtedly in store for all of us in the 21st Century.

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