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**Structural and Conjunctural Factors of  
Gorbachev's Concessionary Policies  
vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the  
Baltic Republics**

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Concessionary Policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe  
and the Baltic Republics

Doctoral dissertation

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## INTRODUCTION

Gorbachev's domestic and foreign policy is an issue that still raises contradictory responses from scholars and politicians. The democratization of the USSR and the liberalization of Soviet foreign policy became a double-edged sword for the Soviet Union. It catalyzed secessionist movements' (re)activation; on the other hand, inter-ethnic conflicts in the USSR further destabilized the eroding national economy and inflamed Gorbachev's domestic foes in the Kremlin and elsewhere. Although Brown notes that the collapse of communism and the "disintegration of the [Soviet] state was the ultimate unintended consequence of [Gorbachev's] actions," many seem not convinced (Brown, 2009, p. 53).

The reason why the contradictory interpretations of the motives and intentions of Gorbachev's policies exist is the fact that Gorbachev's strategy failed. In the conditions of the factual inexistence of the ends Gorbachev's team hoped to achieve, the debate over Gorbachev's policies is somewhat similar to anticipating, where the second endpoint of the line segment could have been when we can only tell where the first one is. One more reason for this misunderstanding is the relative newness of the 1985-1991 period. Accurate historical analysis needs a distance, a particular gap between a researcher and developments under investigation. If this gap becomes too distant, the lively interconnection between a historian and a period under investigation vanishes. Namely, historical analysis, as every process of philosophical cognition, requires the golden middle way, the distance that allows a researcher to contemplate complete scales of a historical phenomenon and preserve the lively interconnection between him/her and the historical period under investigation.

Almost thirty years have passed since the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union. We think that now is when a researcher has an opportunity to catch the golden ratio between him/her and the 1985-1991 period. Newly available archival sources are released in Russia and worldwide, and besides, a number of direct eyewitnesses and officials personally involved in shaping international politics between 1985-1991 is luckily alive. A historian cannot even think of a better time to investigate the developments of the Gorbachev era – this excellent opportunity became our central stimulus while deciding the topic for our study.

We are particularly interested in Gorbachev's policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics, namely, the Kremlin's gradual retreat and systematic loosening of Soviet control over these regions. We would like to understand the basis of institutional transformations in the Kremlin by reconstructing the historical reality in which the respected policies were developed and implemented. What factors influenced the decision-makers in Moscow? Why did they decide to avert the USSR's domestic and foreign orienteers radically and chose to follow the path that seemed like ideological and procedural heresy for the Kremlin? What was the strategy that Gorbachev's team followed? These are the questions we have been puzzled by. We think that providing answers to them will satisfy our curiosity and help a reader reconstruct the historical period with paramount importance for world history. Besides, the multi-factor investigation of the end of the Soviet Union period is not merely significant for the specific field of historical study. It has its policy relevance for the ongoing developments in Eastern Europe. We think it will foster communication between the world of ideas and the world of public affairs.

Gorbachev's policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics appeared to be the opening of the Kremlin's knot in Eastern Europe – the process still keeps on going as NATO enlarges in former communist space. After German reunification and the former GDR's subsequent integration into NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization enlarged five times. North Macedonia became NATO's newest member in March 2020. Besides, Bosnia and Herzegovina got the Membership Action Plan in 2018. On the other hand, we see Moscow's reaction, which was demonstrated by the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the ongoing war in Ukraine. President Putin's leadership wants to make it clear for everyone that further entrance of NATO into the former Soviet space will end up in a tremendous conflict.

In contrast, we see Secretary General Stoltenberg's declarations that Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members one day. As it seems, George Kennan's sharp prognosis in 1998, about the risks of proliferation of a new Cold War after the Senate ratified NATO's fourth enlargement, turned out to be true (Friedman, T., 1998). In several spots of its eastern neighborhood, the European continent experiences the inexistence of the post-Cold War *modus vivendi*, which turns the states into a bone of contention between the West and Russia (Tchanturia, 2019b, pp. 96-97). The post-Cold War *status quo*, which was inscribed



in the spirit of East-West negotiations during 1989-1991, has been disturbed since the 1999 NATO enlargement. Therefore, we think that sometime in the future, the current East-West relationship in the region will require a signature of an international treaty, which will formally fix the new balance of power. When this happens, the emphasis of these negotiations will be *inter alia* on East-West relations during the Gorbachev era.

## **Methodological approach**

The methodological approach of our study is based on a historical institutionalist theoretical tradition. After reviewing several prospective methodological frameworks for our study, we were convinced that the theoretical tradition of historical institutionalism most perfectly suits the objectives of our study and how we understand the historical process in general.

Fioretos notes that “the most distinguishing mark of historical institutionalism is the primacy it accords to temporality” (Fioretos, 2011, p. 370). According to this theoretical tradition, timing and sequence play a decisive role in shaping decision-making. Due to the influence of unpredictability, inflexibility (it becomes harder to reverse a course as time passes), non-ergodicity (accidental occasions may have a long-term effect), and inefficiencies (for passed alternatives might have been more useful) on the process of decision making, a researcher, while explaining the process of institutional transformation, should take into consideration the phenomenon of path dependence and contingency. Since the calculations of decision-makers and indigenous or exogenous constraints under which they craft and implement their policies may change over time, the most efficient approach to reconstruct the historical reality that surrounds an institutional change is based on considering the intricate interplay of multiple factors and the way they influence the process of decision making. Namely, the historical institutionalist approach efficiently captures “when and how historical processes shape political outcomes” (Fioretos, 2011, p. 369). The pieces by Pierson (2004), Streeck and Thelen (eds.) (2005), Mahoney and Thelen (2009), Thelen (1999), and Sanders (2006) are especially crucial for understanding the historical institutionalist theoretical tradition.

Our methodological approach considers the general idea of path dependence as an essential tool for explaining the decision-making process during institutional change. The concept of

path dependence is based on the assumption that the decisions made during an earlier period determine future choices of decision-makers. As Ebbinghaus notes, “actors are rarely in a situation in which they can ignore the past and decide *de novo*; their decisions are bound by past and current institutions” (Ebbinghaus, 2005, p. 14). He has identified the following three path dependence scenarios of institutional transformation: 1. path stabilization, 2. path departure, and 3. path cessation.

Path stabilization refers to “marginal adaptation to environmental changes, without changing core principles.” In contrast, path departure is demonstrated by “gradual adaptation through a partial renewal of institutional arrangements and limited redirection of core principles.” Path cessation stands for an “intervention that ends the self-reinforcement of an established institution and may give way to a new institution in its place” (Ebbinghaus, 2005, p. 17). i.e., Gorbachev’s decision-making during the early stages of his leadership displayed a path departure character. However, in the coming years, the tempo of reforms was accelerated and ultimately switched to a path cessation scenario. After late 1990 in many ways, Gorbachev’s leadership attempted to avert the new path and demonstrated apparent leniency to the traditional Soviet law enforcement measures.

Our research question is: what factors influenced Gorbachev’s decision to give up the Kremlin’s control on East Central Europe and the Baltic republics? Our primary assumption is that Gorbachev’s decision to give up the Kremlin’s control on East Central Europe and the Baltic republics was influenced by a complex and sometimes unexpected interplay of structural and conjunctural factors that ultimately determined the timing and sequence of Gorbachev’s policies.

The particular methodological approach which inspired our study is portrayed in Dragoş Petrescu’s *Entangled Revolutions: The Breakdown of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe* (Petrescu, 2014). The author provides a comparative analysis of the 1989 regime changes in East-Central Europe from the perspective of transnational history and comparative politics. Petrescu elaborated his framework based on Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson’s 1984 pioneering work *Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism*. The two authors explained the birth of Polish Solidarity in the scope of social and cultural factors (Nørgaard and Sampson, 1984).

Nørgaard and Sampson argue that structural, conjunctural, and nation-specific factors influenced Poland's crisis and catalyzed Solidarity's emergence. According to them, structural factors refer to "the relations between society's economic and political organization on the one hand, and the expectations and demands of key social groups on the other." Conjunctural factors in world politics, economy, or climatic conditions, explain why the structural crisis appears at a certain point. In contrast, the nation-specific factors help us explain why structural contradictions are demonstrated differently from one country to another (Nørgaard and Sampson, 1984, pp. 773–774).

Petrescu has further refined Nørgaard and Sampson's methodological approach in his study and divided structural factors into the two sub-groups of *economic failure* and *ideological decay*. In economic failure, Petrescu supposes "the perceived failure of state socialism to offer a living standard similar to that of the more advanced Western societies." Ideological decay refers to "overall erosion of the revolutionary ideology [and] fading away of the utopian goal of building a radically new, classless society" (Petrescu, 2014, pp. 30-34). According to Petrescu, conjunctural factors also have two main dimensions – internal and external. Whereas *internal conjunctural factors* refer to natural catastrophes and disasters inside the state, *external conjunctural factors* stand for conjunctural influences from outside of borders, realized among other things by the foreign policy instruments of foreign states or institutions (Petrescu, 2014, p. 36). While identifying the conceptual framework for capturing nation-specific factors, Petrescu approached the topic from the prism of the regime and social interaction, considering cultural values, attitudinal patterns, and behavioral propensities (Petrescu, 2014, p. 39). The author employed the concept of political culture, elaborated based on definitions provided by Almond and Verba (1989), Almond and Powell (1992), Brown and Gray (eds.) (1977), Jowitt (1992), etc. Petrescu adopted the categorization of political culture by Jowitt. He categorizes it as "the set of informal, adaptative postures – behavioral and attitudinal – that emerge in response to and interact with the set of formal definitions – ideological, policy, and institutional – that characterize a given level of society" (Jowitt, 1992, p. 55). Petrescu argues that the political cultures of regime and community should be considered while explaining the communist collapse in East Central Europe. Accordingly, he identified two sub-groups under nation-specific factors: regime political culture and political culture of resistance against that regime (Petrescu, 2014, p. 43).

We adopted Petrescu's methodological framework and made some modifications to make it suitable for our study. Instead of the original three-factor dimension, we decided to allocate all components in two main groups: *structural* and *conjunctural factors*. We omitted the general category of nation-specific factors and integrated its components into the framework of structural and conjunctural factors. The main reason for this kind of modification is that the general category of nation-specific factors is helpful in a comparative study. It helps explain why structural contradictions are demonstrated differently from one country to another - in contrast, our study focuses solely on the Soviet state. Thus, we have somewhat refined Petrescu's framework by adding new elements.

Under structural factors, we enlisted the sub-groups of *economic failure* and *ideological decay*. In contrast with Petrescu's definition of *economic failure*, which supposes a "perceived failure" of the statist economy as its main feature, we suggest that the Kremlin's decision to avert the traditional developmental path of the Soviet economy and switch to perestroika occurred due to the "absolute failure" of the state economy. The perceived failure of state socialism also had a significant role. However, the perceived failure followed the real failure, and the leaders in the Kremlin were the first to notice that the Soviet economy was declining in its absolute sense.

While explaining the 1989 revolutions, Petrescu defines *ideological decay* as the overall erosion of the communist ideology. The same opinion is shared by Andrzej Walicki, who argues that communism steadily ceased to symbolize a "unifying final goal," and that circumstance catalyzed the 1989 revolutions (Walicki, 1995, p. 517). Since our study identifies the factors contributing to the introduction of Gorbachev's *new thinking* in international politics, we somewhat modified the original category of ideological decay, defining it as an erosion of the ideology of one particular type of Soviet regime. Namely, traditional coercive methods of problem-solving became obsolete for the new leadership. The traditional Soviet ideology in politics had little in common with the communist original ideals. The Kremlin's central ideology that guided its domestic and foreign policy was its general dependence on hard power - this was the fundamental feature of Soviet ideology that guided its policies.

In contrast, communism was a general hypothetical umbrella for international propaganda that supposed the transfer of state socialism and democratic centralism abroad. The feature of imposing or preserving communism by hard power became obsolete for Gorbachev's leadership. They realized that this imperial ideology was no longer viable to defend the fundamental interests of the Soviet Union. Therefore, we define *ideological decay* as the erosion of the traditional Soviet ideology in the eyes of the Kremlin's new leadership, not the overall erosion of communism. In that sense, under the ideological decay sub-group, we incorporated two main elements – the “erosion of traditional Soviet ideology” and the “subsequent attempt of its transformation” by the new regime's new political culture.

The phenomenon of contingency played a significant role in shaping internal and external conjuncture that surrounded Gorbachev's institutional transformations. Under *internal conjuncture*, we suppose the combination of all domestic developments in the Soviet Union, which were unforeseen by the Soviet leadership and further embittered the domestic crisis in the country. These developments contributed to the Kremlin's leniency towards its Cold War-time enemies and inspired Soviet decision makers to liberalize their foreign policy. Our definition of *external conjunctural factors* implies all patterns of external conjuncture that embittered the Kremlin's crisis at home and contributed to the emergence of Gorbachev's liberal policy vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics later.

To portray the sequential progress of the Kremlin's retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics, we have identified four main phases: verbal recognition, *de-facto* recognition, *de-jure* recognition of German reunification, and *de-jure* recognition of the Baltic republics. The verbal recognition phase implies the period when Gorbachev was orally announcing the revocation of the Brezhnev Doctrine. This phase started as early as March 1985, from Chernenko's funeral, and lasted until August-September 1989. In the summer of 1989, the one-party rule finally came to an end, and a non-communist government was elected in Poland. The Kremlin's tranquil reaction to the Polish developments *de-facto* confirmed that Gorbachev was honest in his assurances.

It should be noted that until June 1988 (until the XIXth All-Union Conference of the CPSU), Gorbachev's verbal assurances had a certain kind of purposeful ambiguity – a phenomenon to which Békés refers as floating the Brezhnev Doctrine; we refer to it as *managed ambiguity*.

Therefore, managed ambiguity was the only means to avert the instant disintegration of the established institutional structures. It implied that Gorbachev never stated categorically that the “Soviet Union would not interfere with an ally’s domestic affairs should the political transition, *horribile dictu*, result in the total abandonment of socialism and the restoration of parliamentary democracy” (Békés, 2002, p. 243). On the XIXth All-Union Conference of the CPSU, this feature in Gorbachev’s discourse disappeared as he “without any preliminary elaboration declared that any nation had the right to choose its social-economic system” (Békés, 2002, p. 242).

The *de-facto* recognition phase implies that the Kremlin had finally (*de-facto*) revoked the infamous Brezhnev Doctrine. This phase started from August-September 1989 and lasted until the very end of the Soviet Union; however, the actual process, during which the limit of the Kremlin’s tolerance was tested in East central Europe, lasted until late December 1989, when Ceaușescu’s rule in Romania collapsed. The phase of *de-jure* recognition of German reunification and the former GDR’s integration to NATO started from 13 February 1990, when the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany was drafted (signed on 12 September 1990). It ended on 3 October 1990, when Germany was reunified, and the former GDR joined the FRG and NATO. The *de-jure* recognition of the Baltic republics was not a “phase” by classical sense but rather an episode that occurred on 6 September 1991, when the USSR *de-jure* recognized the Baltic republics’ independence.

By our conceptual framework presented above, we hope to shed light on the historical reality in which Gorbachev’s concessionary policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics were developed and implemented. We qualify Gorbachev’s policies mentioned above to be concessionary, according to the scholarship of George W. Breslauer (2002, p. 156), Archie Brown (1996, p. 232), Vladislav Zubok (2007, p. 330), Alex Pravda (2010, p. 376), Csaba Békés (2002, p. 245), Hannes Adomeit (1998, p. 692), and William R. Keylor (2015, p. 656). All these authors confirm that Gorbachev’s *quid pro quo* strategy was the concession of the Kremlin’s dominance in East Central Europe to create a favorable international atmosphere for successfully implementing perestroika and ultimate survival of the Soviet state. Our additional contribution to this scholarship is that this *quid pro quo* calculus concerned not only East Central Europe but also the Baltic republics.

## Sources of data

The Gorbachev Foundation's twenty-eight volumes of collected works of Gorbachev, edited by Loginov, Puchkova, and Koroleva, available in Russian only, is the material we have reviewed exclusively for our study. The documents contain Gorbachev's reports at the Congresses of the CPSU and the CPSU Central Committee Plenary Sessions, the Sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and the Congresses of the USSR People's Deputies, and his speeches during numerous trips within the USSR and abroad. For the first time, the publication carries Gorbachev's speeches at sessions of the Politburo and the Central Committee Secretariat and conferences of the staff of the CPSU CC apparatus and other confidential meetings based on the transcripts taken by his aides. Collected works also contain excerpts from Gorbachev's discussions with a prominent foreign government and public figures, records of telephone conversations, and excerpts from memoirs. It should be noted that according to the Gorbachev Foundation, 60 percent of these documents are released for the first time. Besides the twenty-eight volumes of Gorbachev's collected works, we studied two volumes of Russian primary document collections, compiled by the employees of the Gorbachev Foundation. These are: *Mikhail Gorbachev and the German Question*, edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev (2006), and *Union Could Have Been Saved*, with the general edition of Vladlen Loginov (2007). Besides the systematic review of Russian primary sources, we also utilized English language documents available at the National Security Archive's digital repository.

While collecting the information on the Gorbachev era, our second source was Russian and English scholarly literature. Some monographs and edited volumes we reviewed are available only in German and Georgian. We chose to look through the key publications on four major topics: 1. the Gorbachev revolution and the end of the Cold War; 2. the collapse of the Soviet Union; 3. the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe; 4. German reunification. Bibliographic essays provided in the third volume of the Cambridge History of the Cold War helped us identify the literature on each subject (Leffler and Westad (eds.), 2010). Particularly helpful were the bibliographic essays by Archie Brown, Alex Pravda, Jacques Lévesque, and Helga Haftendorn. Most of the literature is memoirs and monographs; several edited volumes and articles are reviewed too.

## Structure

Besides the present introductory part, our study consists of four chapters and the conclusion. In chapter 1, the literature review is presented. The sub-chapters concern the following topics:

- memoirs of Soviet officials;
- memoirs of American officials;
- Western scholarly studies of the Gorbachev era;
- historical treatments of nationalism in the USSR;
- the influence of the East Central European revolutions on the USSR;
- development of new thinking and transformation of Soviet foreign policy;
- the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe;
- the unification of Germany.

Chapter 2 presents the study's conceptual framework and portrays some important contextual elements essential for explaining the Kremlin's concessionary policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. Namely, the following:

- the Brest-Litovsk syndrome;
- managed ambiguity in Gorbachev's discourse;
- the foreign and the domestic Brezhnev Doctrine;
- the disputed Western promise of a no-NATO-enlargement.

Chapter 3 depicts the phases of the Kremlin's gradual retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics during the Gorbachev era. It consists of the following four sub-chapters:

- verbal recognition phase;
- *de-facto* recognition phase;
- *de-jure* recognition of German reunification;
- *de-jure* recognition of the Baltic republics.



Chapter 4 is divided between two main sub-chapters, presenting *structural factors* and *conjunctural factors* that impacted decision-making in the Kremlin. The first sub-chapter presenting *structural factors* is divided into the following two sections:

- economic failure and an attempt of its recovery;
- ideological decay and the Soviet leadership's attempt of ideological transformation.

The second sub-chapter presenting *conjunctural factors* is divided into two main sections: *internal conjunctural factors* and *external conjunctural factors*. The first section includes the following sub-sections:

- Gorbachev's leniency towards autocracy;
- Gorbachev's democratization policies;
- unintended consequences of democratization;
- natural and nuclear disasters.

The second section includes the following sub-sections:

- the Brezhnevite inheritance;
- the Reagan Factor;
- Western diplomatic pressure;
- credit risk-sensitive Western banks;
- nationalism-emboldening Western media;
- émigrés in the West;
- the Vatican factor;
- the snowballing effect of 1989;
- world market prices of crude oil; and
- influences from Iran.

After the general four chapters, the conclusion will follow.

# CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1. Introduction

While reviewing the literature, we chose to look through the key publications on four major topics: 1. the Gorbachev revolution and the end of the Cold War; 2. the collapse of the Soviet Union; 3. the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe; 4. German reunification. A bibliographic essay provided in the third volume of the Cold War Cambridge History helped us identify the literature on each subject (Leffler and Westad (eds.), 2010). Particularly helpful were the book chapters and bibliographic essays by Archie Brown, Alex Pravda, Jacques Lévesque, and Helga Haftendorn. The reviewed literature is available in English, Russian, and German; Eduard Shevardnadze's memoir, published in 2006, is available in Georgian only. It should also be noted that most of the literature reviewed are monographs; besides, several edited volumes and articles are reviewed too.

The first group of literature reviewed is the memoirs of Soviet political actors. We looked through Gorbachev's memoirs and the officials' who were reasonably close to Gorbachev and his political philosophy, such as Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Chernyaev Shakhnazarov, Dobrynin, and Palazchenko. The memoirs of those reasonably critical to Gorbachev's policies, such as Egor Ligachev, have also been reviewed. We also looked through the pieces by the "old-guard" representatives, such as Valery Boldin and Vladimir Kryuchkov. Memoirs of influential Russians, who were important actors in Soviet politics, such as Roald Sagdeev, Andrei Sakharov, and Andrei Grachev, were also reviewed. This sub-chapter ends with memoirs of Yegor Gaidar, sharing the Russian perspective of the final years of the USSR.

For accessing the English language primary source documents, we utilized the National Security Archive's online repository.<sup>1</sup> Besides, we have gone through the memoirs written

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/virtual-reading-room> (accessed: 07.31.2021)

by American officials. Memoirs of Jack Matlock, Ronald Reagan, George Shultz, George Bush Sr. and Brent Scowcroft, James Baker and Thomas DeFrank, and Robert Gates are reviewed and discussed in the sub-chapter.

Major Western scholarly studies of the Gorbachev era are presented by discussing the monographs of Vladislav Zubok, George Breslauer, Archie Brown, and Stephen Kotkin. Peter Kenez provides a brief survey of Soviet history, *inter alia* describing the multi-layer crisis Gorbachev's leadership faced. In his extensive review of the international history of the XXth century, William R. Keylor presents Gorbachev's policies and the reasons for Soviet demise. Alex Pravda provides the general view of the collapse of the Soviet Union during its final years. Mark Beissinger's piece sheds light on the dynamics of nationalism and popular mobilization in the USSR. Phillip Hanson provides an in-depth analysis of the Soviet economic decline. Alexander Motyl's and Valerie Bunce's monographs help analyze the Soviet Union's demise in a broader comparative context. Traditional treatment of nationalism in the USSR is presented by reviewing the pieces of Ronald Grigor Suny, Anatol Lieven, Stanley Vardys and Judith Sedaitis, Bohdan Nahajlo, and Taras Kuzio and Andrew Wilson. Mark Kramer's three-part series of articles describes how the end of communism in East Central Europe influenced the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Research findings of the development of *new thinking* and Soviet foreign policy transformation are available in the studies conducted by Beshloss and Talbott, Breslauer and Tetlock, Archie Brown, Robert English, and Matthew Evangelista. A volume edited by Richard Herrmann and Richard Ned Lebow, authoring: Brown, Herrmann, Evangelista, Lévesque, and Davis and Wohlforth, is another essential piece.

In another sub-chapter, we enclosed the literature on the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe. To review the primary documents on the 1989 developments in East Central Europe in English (primarily Russian sources), the volume edited by Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok is crucial. Charles Gati discusses the Soviet bloc in general. A comparative analysis of the 1989 revolutionary events is offered by Renée de Nevers, and Dragoş Petrescu. Gale Stokes provides an overall view of the developments. Jacques Lévesque analyzes permissive Soviet policies in East Central Europe. The monographs by

Timothy Garton Ash and Jacqueline Hayden deal with Poland and the Solidarity movement, whereas Rudolf L. Tokes's and Patrick O'Neill's pieces capture the revolutionary breakthrough in Hungary. A volume edited by András Bozóki deals with the analysis of the history of the Hungarian Roundtable Talks. One of its authors - Csaba Békés, provides a thorough historical examination of the international context of the political transition in Hungary; Melinda Kalmár's chapter reveals the strategy and tactics of the Hungarian communist party. John F. N. Bradley's monograph focuses on the political analysis of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. Peter Siani-Davis stresses the decline of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania, whereas Silviu Brucan's memoirs shed light on Romanian communism's system and its transformation. Richard Crampton presents Bulgarian political history from the 20th century until the collapse of the communist regime.

Another sub-chapter presents the literature on the unification of Germany. The volume by Küsters and Hofmann is a principal depository of German primary documents, whereas the volume edited by Galkin and Chernyaev includes 1986-1991 Soviet materials on the German question. Karl-Rudolf Korte's monograph deals with Kohl's leadership, and Werner Weidenfeld's book discusses international aspects of German reunification. Wolfgang Schäuble and Horst Teltschik present FRG's perspective on German reunification, so does Helmut Kohl in his memoirs. The GDR's view is well explained in the studies by Hans-Herman Hertle and Elizabeth Pond. Charles S. Maier analyzes the economic and political dimensions of the GRD's collapse. An American perspective on the process is reflected in the memoirs of Bush and Scowcroft, Baker and DeFrank, and Zelikow and Rice. Margaret Thatcher's memoirs serve to understand the British view well, whereas Frédéric Bozo's study presents the French perspective. For a better understanding of the Soviet position, one should read Hannes Adomeit's piece. Helga Haftendorn overviews the German foreign policy from 1945 to 2005.

## **1.2. Memoirs of Soviet officials**

Many leading Soviet politicians wrote concerning the end of the Soviet Union period, and Mikhail Gorbachev's memoirs are particularly important. In *Memoirs*, Gorbachev expresses himself, his policies and events of the era from his perspective. He was much more different

than other Soviet leaders in his perception of socialism, especially in being open-minded to the integration with the Western World. Gorbachev shares his opinions, why perestroika and softening of East-West relations was imminent. He criticizes conservative “Stalinist opposition” for halting the process of democratization and Boris Yeltsin’s presidency in his demagoguery and opportunism. The book has a value of historical facts and stories (Gorbachev, 1996). In his more recently published memoirs *Понять перестройку... Почему это важно сейчас* [Remembering Perestroika... Why It Is Important Now], available in Russian only, clarifies many peculiar details not discussed in his earlier publications. Mainly, we can clarify that the Western pledge on the no-NATO-enlargement to the East concerned the former GDR territory only and not the other Warsaw Pact countries, as argued by Russian officials today (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 246).

To better understand how Gorbachev’s thinking evolved, the book by his old friend Zdeněk Mlynář is particularly essential. Mlynář, coursemate of Gorbachev from the Lomonosov Moscow State University and one of the leading makers of the Prague Spring, recorded his discussions with his old friend and compiled them in this book. The most significant part of the book is Gorbachev’s discourse. Particularly interesting is the part where Gorbachev admits that the only time he sanctioned the use of the Soviet army for order-making purposes was in Baku in January 1990 (Gorbachev and Mlynář, 2002, pp. 127-132). There was no other way of preventing bloodshed, and the issue concerned not only inter-ethnic conflict but also the risks of international conflict with Iran. The 200 km-long Soviet state border with Iran in Nakhichevan was deliberately destroyed by locals, demanding to reunite “Northern Azerbaijan” with Azerbaijan. Gorbachev admits that he also sanctioned the temporary deployment of military patrols in Moscow in March 1991 (Gorbachev and Mlynář, 2002, p. 130).

Shortly after he resigned from the post of the Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze published short memoirs. While writing this book, Shevardnadze aimed to give a clear picture of foreign policy and its reevaluation in the Soviet Union. The book tells the story of Soviet-U.S. relations, Soviet-Europe relations, and Sino-Soviet conflict with a deep and scholarly frame. Russia, Georgia, and the Soviet order are explained well and intensively. The author’s perspective draws an obliging profile accompanying self-criticism (Shevardnadze, 1991a).

Interesting are Shevardnadze's more recent memoirs ფიქრი წარსულსა და მომავალზე [Thoughts about the Past and the Future] available in Georgian only. Particularly interesting for international society can be the details of the Shevardnadze-Khomeini meeting in February 1989. Shevardnadze quotes the Speaker of the Parliament of Iran, who shortly became the fourth President of Iran - Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. He told Shevardnadze during his visit to Tbilisi in 1995 that he was the "only foreigner Khomeini met [after the Islamic Revolution]" (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 151). Shevardnadze recalls when he, the first diplomat of the Soviet Union, waited for the meeting with Khomeini with shoes taken off, according to the Islamic protocol. He also reflects the asceticism of Khomeini's house and his short and only comment during their meeting, half of which concerned theology and not politics: "I am disappointed. I heard that Gorbachev is a thoughtful man. It was not a coincidence that I sent a letter to him. I discussed the role of a human being not so much on the earth but in heaven's kingdom. I am not interested in what happens on the earth. I did not get an answer on this matter (from Gorbachev). As far as the normalization of relations is concerned, I will assist this process" (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 149).

Much more helpful for understanding the process of the Soviet Union's demise is a dairy-based memoir by Gorbachev's principal foreign affairs adviser, Anatoly Chernyaev. In *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, the reader can find Chernyaev's notes, experiences, confidential documents of the state, and meetings with high-ranking government people during the Gorbachev period USSR. Chernyaev remarks that in the disarmament, applying less aggressive and more Western-oriented policy was crucial. Chernyaev supports the idea of perestroika but criticizes Gorbachev's economic policies. According to him, Gorbachev was late with the decentralization of the Union. Chernyaev points out the misunderstanding and misleading of reforms in the Communist Party - from this point, Boris Yeltsin strengthened his status and came to power afterward. Chernyaev notes that Gorbachev had no direct hand in the Vilnius 1991 January events but failed to prevent these developments (Chernyaev, 2000, pp. 317-330). The firm Western reaction to the January developments and their clear signals that further use of coercive power can significantly undermine East-West relations and jeopardize prospective economic aid, further consolidated Gorbachev's position on halting the coercive measures of the Kremlin hard-liners (Chernyaev, 2000, pp. 327-329). By

Chernyaev's understanding, Gorbachev's main mistake, which ultimately played a leading role in the demise of the USSR, was his disregard of the nationality problem, more precisely, his optimistic evaluation of the situation with nationalities. He underestimated the strength of widespread feelings (Chernyaev, 2000, p. 394).

One more powerful piece, describing the fall of the USSR from the scope of Gorbachev's aide is by Georgii Shakhnazarov: *Цена свободы. Реформация Горбачева глазами его помощника* [The Price of Freedom. Gorbachev's Reformation through His Aide's Eyes]; the book is not translated to English. It is exciting to know how Shakhnazarov explains the formation of the "old-guard" opposition in the Kremlin. The military and KGB officers imagined themselves as the guardians of the empire. They found it particularly difficult to come to terms with Gorbachev's new non-interventionist doctrine (Shakhnazarov, 1993, pp. 89-92). Accordingly, accurate was Gorbachev's comment in a conversation with the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party Jumber Patiashvili on 17 January 1990 in Gudauta that conservatism was the "main hurdle for the state" (Gorbachev, 2008g, pp. 266-269).

The memoirs of one more liberal aide of Gorbachev, Alexander Yakovlev, are also essential for understanding the peculiarities of the Soviet Union's demise and, preferably more, the Soviet leadership's attempts to undertake a historical reformation of the Soviet state. Yakovlev refers to the first months of Gorbachev's election as a Secretary-General of the CPSU as the "March-April democratic revolution of 1985." He shares his opinion about the consequences of this general reformation in the modern Russian Federation (Yakovlev, 2003). Yakovlev's periodization fundamentally changes the historiography of democratization in the region. He marks the Gorbachev era as a point of a countdown for democratization in the region.

For a better understanding of the Soviet Union's demise, Pavel Palazchenko's memoirs are also helpful. He was the interpreter of Gorbachev and, he took part in many important events in Soviet history, such as meetings with Bush, Reagan, Shultz, and Baker. In his book, he refers to facts rather than dates by not attempting to decipher the secret meetings or state secrets. According to him, there is nothing to blame the U.S. or Gorbachev for the collapse

of the Soviet Union. In his book, he explains how the Union arrived in the break-up situation. His tendency to write this book is more likely to show the puzzle pieces and focus on the influences of nationalism and globalism movements in the world, including the Soviet Union (Palazchenko, 1997).

Anatoly Dobrynin, a Soviet ambassador to the U.S., worked with six American Presidents from Kennedy to Reagan. He later became the Head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU. His reflections are most significant in understanding Soviet-American relations. He mentions the reasons why the Soviet Union declined from a global superpower to today's Russia. He states that political struggles in the Union, confrontation with Europe, lack of understanding of public demands and, the rise of neo-nationalism and globalism brought the Soviet Union to an end (Dobrynin, 1995).

Another fairly critical account of Gorbachev can be found in Egor Ligachev's monograph. This book is Ligachev's autobiography, and it exhibits Gorbachev's era. He describes Gorbachev's personality as a combination of old and new. According to him, Gorbachev was a modern communist, instead of a social-democrat by his insights and actions. Ligachev's book's exciting point is profoundly believing in the Soviet Union and strictly comparing capitalism and communism. Therefore, it is a great example to understand the history of Soviet politics and the contemporary politics of Russia (Ligachev, 1993).

To better understand the slightly poisonous accounts of Gorbachev and his team, the memoirs of State Committee on the State of Emergency's ['GKChP'] members are a good read. One of them is Valery Boldin's *Ten Years that Shook the World: The Gorbachev Era, as Witnessed by his Chief of Staff*. Boldin was an adviser on agricultural issues; then, he became the chief of staff. Although Boldin agreed on Gorbachev's idea in the case of reforms in the Union and Party, he was against Gorbachev's concessionary foreign policy, which, by his understanding, contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At this point, things turned to be changed for Boldin and, he blamed Gorbachev for causing and speeding up the collapse of the Soviet Union. Boldin criticizes his leadership for unexpected movements and not taking responsibility. Besides, he claims that Gorbachev became a dictator in the Party. By Boldin's understanding, integration of the democratic steps in the Party and dividing the



control mechanism caused the collapse of the Union. Thus, this book is worth reading to understand political conflicts within the Soviet elite, their opinions about the resolution of the Soviet Union, and its transmission to a modern Russian state (Boldin, 1994).

Former KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov portrays Gorbachev as a traitor to the USSR. His memoirs - Личное дело [Personal File] is an excellent read to get to know the psychological outlook of Gorbachev's "old-guard" colleagues. From Kryuchkov's book, we can understand that those Kremlin conservatives were troubled by the Helsinki Accords basket III commitments concerning human rights and freedom of information. They perceived it as a Western subversion. They viewed Gorbachev's concession over the GDR as "capitulation" and tried to pressure him into taking a tougher stance. According to the author, by June 1991, the Soviet State was "on the edge of catastrophe" (Kryuchkov, 1996, pp. 387-392). What is rather interesting, though, is that besides the author's emphasis on Gorbachev's treason, Kryuchkov argues that one of the main factors that shook the Union and brought it "to the edge of catastrophe" was the introduction of the freedom of information.

To some extent, we agree with this evaluation. We think that Gorbachev got it right, that the systemic reformation of the Soviet Union was vitally important, and he was likely expecting some severe turbulence in society. However, he underestimated the damaging effect of unleashing the power of the freedom of expression (Tchanturia, 2019a, p. 304). We can only speculate now, what could have been a less risky way of introducing the freedom of information in the Soviet society, but what remains a fact is that "paradoxically, the severe crisis Gorbachev was facing, was further exacerbated due to political reforms [including glasnost] initiated under his leadership" (Keylor, 2015, p. 656).

There are several memoirs by Russians who were not part of the top political establishment but still had a significant role in Soviet politics during the Gorbachev era. One of them is Roald Sagdeev's *The Making of a Soviet Scientist: My Adventures in Nuclear Fusion and Space from Stalin to Star Wars*. Roald Sagdeev is a physicist who directed the former Soviet Union's Space Research Institute from 1973 to 1990. He had a substantial role in controlling a Soviet counteroffensive to the U.S. Star Wars program. He has witnessed all research and

works from the Stalin era to the Gorbachev era. Sagdeev portrays the Soviet Space researches, Soviet military, and scientific machinery system and tells how the Soviet system was working compared to its competitor NASA. He notes that throughout the East-West confrontation, the only reliable channel for conducting arms control negotiations and discussions between the two blocs was the Pugwash meetings (Sagdeev, 1994).

Andrei Sakharov shares thoughtful memoirs. As a former Soviet dissident, Sakharov had a more different perspective than other high-level people in the Party due to his concerns and priorities in the Union. He considered that the Soviet state obtained its national-constitutional structure from Stalinism, which stood on the imperial thinking of the political principle “divide and rule” based on the administrative obedience principles. Sakharov proposed switching to a federation-horizontal system of national territorial units with equal political, legal, and economic rights. In this book, he mentions discussions with Gorbachev for topics he tried to draw attention to; however, he did not impress Gorbachev. He also states Gorbachev’s desire to have the only power (Sakharov, 1991).

Another Russian who shares essential pieces of memoirs concerning the Gorbachev era is Andrey Grachev. Grachev was Gorbachev’s spokesman and intimate. He served as the head of the International Department of the CPSU. Grachev states that Gorbachev was late to apply reformist policies and expanding his power towards the Union. He also underlined that Gorbachev was instead a charismatic speaker than an action-implementing politician. Grachev’s book is significant in understanding the political dimensions of the economic crisis. Impressive is his opinion that had the Western leaders pressured the Kremlin less in introducing an ambitious market reform, and advocated for a milder path as some West German bankers suggested, the outcomes of market liberalization could have been somewhat positive. Significant is Grachev’s observation that Gorbachev was hoping to secure Western support in his competition with Yeltsin by his efforts to keep the country together, as he was assured that the dissolution of the USSR would be intolerable for the West (Grachev, 1999).

Yegor Gaidar’s *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* is an essential read to know Russian perspectives of the Soviet final years. Gaidar explains why the Soviet Union collapsed as it did. Contrary to the views of Soviet believers and leaders, he thinks that the

collapse was supposed to happen at some point due to the nature of big empires. Soviet economy was not prepared to move with the times and, the struggle had begun much earlier than expected (Gaidar, 2006).

### **1.3. Memoirs of American officials**

For understanding the American perspective of the Soviet Union's demise processes, Jack F. Matlock Jr.'s two volumes of *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* are particularly significant. Matlock was an American ambassador to the Soviet Union in the years between 1987 and 1991. *Autopsy on an Empire* is more of an examination book rather than a memoir. It accurately reflects the name of the book. It seeks reasons for the Soviet collapse. Matlock argues that the primary cause of Gorbachev's loss of authority and legitimation was his failure to adopt a clear and well-founded economic program. His insights are especially interesting for understanding how much the US party was aware of the domestic conspiracy against Gorbachev. According to Matlock, one of the main factors which strengthened Gorbachev's position to avoid further interventions in the Baltic region was the firm Western reaction to the January 1991 events. The Western leadership signaled that the recurrence of military interventions would jeopardize East-West cooperation and economic aid. Interesting is Matlock's view of the Soviet Union's political struggle with "national movements." As he notes, the boldness of nationalist leaders to a great extent was based on their optimism about Western support if they managed to win the political struggle and consolidate power. Americans signaled that the recognition of independence was connected with the demonstrated control over the state territory rather than with the declaration of independence (Matlock, 1995).

Another essential reading is Ronald Reagan's *An American Life: The Autobiography*. In this book, Reagan tells of his struggles in his private life and politics. The most exciting part for us is where he shares his insights about American foreign policy vis-à-vis the USSR. Reagan argues that despite his Evil Empire speech, he was keen to achieve a thaw in the East-West relations and settle a world without nuclear armament. The reader can find Reagan's letters

to Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko, where the American President tried to persuade his counterparts to normalize relations, but they responded stuffily. Finally, Gorbachev was eager to start a dialogue (Reagan, 1990). “Gorbachev was indeed the Kremlin leader for whom Reagan [...] had been waiting,” wrote John Lewis Gaddis in his *Strategies of Containment*, when explaining Secretary-General George Shultz’s assessment of Gorbachev after Chernenko’s funeral (Gaddis, 2005, p. 362).

George P. Shultz wrote about his years as Reagan’s Secretary of State in *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*. As the title indicates, the author’s main objective is to portray American foreign policy’s triumph during Reagan. He describes the arguments supporting the so-called triumphalist view, depicting how the hard-liner policy of the President effectively ended the Cold War. Therefore, Shultz keeps Reagan responsible for spreading democracy in the Western Hemisphere (Shultz, 1993).

An important piece to understand US politics during the end of the USSR period is *A World Transformed* by George H.W. Bush and his national security adviser Brent Scowcroft. Both co-authors acknowledge that they did not foresee the revolutionary developments in the Soviet bloc, as it was instead a result of irrepressible mass momentum. Bush notes that he feared a Soviet military intervention with the leadership of communist hard-liners in the Baltic region and particularly in Lithuania. By citing the bloody 1956 Hungarian revolution precedent, it is clear that the President’s administration feared applying the same tragic scenario in Lithuania. As Bush notes, luckily, the outcome of a few armed confrontations was minimal. Interestingly, Bush supported the policy not to lend extensive credits to the Soviet Union unless the Kremlin introduced a fundamental market reform (Bush and Scowcroft, 1998). According to Grachev, this strategy played a significant role in the deterioration of the Soviet economy (Grachev, 1999). In his recently published biography of Gorbachev, William Taubman argues that Gorbachev could have been successful in his reforms had the West given full support to the Soviet leader at critical junctures (Taubman, 2017). Bush’s policy mentioned above perfectly illustrates the example of Western nonsupport to Gorbachev.

*Politics of Diplomacy, Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992* by James A. Baker III and Thomas M. DeFrank is another remarkable memoir to understand US-Soviet relations during Gorbachev better. Baker states that the only assurance he made to Gorbachev concerning the no-NATO-enlargement to the east was during their 9 February 1990 meeting. It concerned the former GDR territory only. Essential is Baker's information that in the early 1990s, Western banks became more risk-sensitive and reduced lending to the USSR. According to Baker, Gorbachev asked Americans and the G7 leaders for 15-20 billion USD to ease the Soviet economic crisis. Presumably, Baker and DeFrank mean the situation in September 1991, when the Soviet budget was literally on the brink of total bankruptcy and Gorbachev was negotiating the G7 support with the British PM Major (Gorbachev, 2018, pp. 488-489).

Interestingly, Baker and DeFrank's information is also about the fears of the Bush administration that Gorbachev's new vision was able to undermine NATO faster than perestroika was going to undermine the Warsaw Pact. Their greatest fear primarily concerned Germany, where Hans Dietrich Genscher supported pursuing an Ostpolitik-like tendency to reunify Germany even at the expense of its military neutrality (Baker and DeFrank, 1995). From this perspective, it is not surprising that the US leadership used all its diplomatic efforts to pursue its most congenial scenario in Germany, even at the expense of German "deep pockets" (Memorandum, 1990, p. 10).

Robert M. Gates's *From the Shadows* is particularly interesting for promoting the bribing-of-Soviets-on-the-German-question scenario. He straightforwardly declares that the American leadership used "inducements" and "incentives" to "bribe the Soviets out of Germany" (Gates, 1995, p. 492). Gates was a CIA official and a Soviet specialist. He worked with many politicians and became director of the CIA during the Bush administration.

#### **1.4. Western studies of the Gorbachev era**

We reviewed major Western scholarly studies of the Gorbachev era authored by Vladislav Zubok, George W. Breslauer, Archie Brown, Stephen Kotkin, Peter Kenez, Alex Pravda, Mark Beissinger, Philip Hanson, Alexander Motyl, Valerie Bunce and William R. Keylor. In

*A Failed Empire*, Vladislav Zubok offers a Soviet perspective on the USSR's development from Stalin to Gorbachev. The author has synthesized a massive amount of Soviet declassified documents with secondary materials and so-called "back-channel" documents demonstrating U.S.-Soviet interaction on the highest levels. His study is the only English language work covering the Cold War period from the Soviet angle; therefore, it is a crucial source for our research topic. While explaining the international behavior of the Soviet Union, Zubok puts the paramount importance on individual leaders. "Today, many historians are loath to admit that the character of a personality in a position of power at a critical juncture can make a major difference in the course of history," remarks the author (Zubok, 2007, pp. 303-304). The factors such as the shift of the global balance of power, Soviet internal structural decay, and the ideological revolution in the new Soviet leadership played a significant role in ending the Cold War. However, the personality of Mikhail Gorbachev – a leader "in a position of power at a critical juncture" played a decisive role. According to the author, Soviet foreign policy during Gorbachev initially aimed to overcome the USSR's international isolation, improve economic and trade relations with the West, and lower the arms race's paramount costs. However, by 1987-1988, as Gorbachev became increasingly alienated from the party nomenklatura and Soviet society, ironically, the Western leadership remained his only friend. Therefore, Gorbachev prioritized "the integration of the USSR into the world community" (Zubok, 2007, p. 330).

Breslauer's *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* focuses on the leaders' skills and adaptability in politics. He underlines that both leaders had similar mindsets regarding rebuilding the system and applying reforms rather than revolutionary movements. Essential for us was Breslauer's explanation of the rationale behind Gorbachev's foreign policy. "Gorbachev's concessionary foreign policy," notes Breslauer, "had tried to make the best of this situation by making a virtue of necessity, by attempting to integrate into Western multilateral organizations, by doing the bidding of the West on most issues in contention, and by seeking as much economic assistance from the West as he could hope to secure" (Breslauer, 2002, p. 156). From this perspective, it is understandable why Gorbachev was determined since the January 1991 developments to avoid further interventions in the Baltic region.

The purpose of Archie Brown's *The Gorbachev Factor* is to analyze and find answers beyond Gorbachev's actions. Hence, he divides the book into three parts to examine his term. Those are linked to the questions the author asked for: "What did Gorbachev believe? What did he hope to accomplish? Did he understand the forces he unleashed?" He concludes that those reforms were not suitable for a non-functioning system. Secondly, many Soviet believers and party members have already left Leninism and stopped believing in the combination of Leninism and democracy. Lastly, Gorbachev implemented four significant modifications that applied economy, foreign policy, governance, and the Union. However, he could only succeed in two of them. Considering the situation, the Soviet Union was in, he created a sort of a revolution in his way. Once again, Brown states that Gorbachev brought democracy to the Soviet Union. However, on the other hand, Gorbachev's weak political character failed him. Nevertheless, he deserves to be referred to as a successor rather than unsuccessful, concludes the author (Brown, 1996).

In *Armageddon Averted*, Kotkin starts examining Soviet policies, ideological agonies, understanding of socialism and its place versus capitalism from Stalin's death. The devaluation of the Soviet Union was not only related to Gorbachev but also many challenges beyond. Kotkin's book helps us to ask and find answers to questions like why was the idea of socialism declining? What was the impact of the Soviet elite during the collapse and afterward, or did it have an impact? Each development in a competition requires many efforts and a strong economy; however, the Soviet economy would not bear challenges. When Gorbachev started to apply his reforms, those attempts were signals to an introduction of the resolution. On the other hand, he softened the central power and flexed the policies on East Central European states and the Soviet republics. Those innovations weakened the dominance of Soviet power. In a nutshell, the Soviet economy could not afford to be a superpower as it could not bear its economic prices. Reforms were not sufficient and were implemented late. The Chernobyl disaster, invasion of Afghanistan, and softening the Kremlin's stance on East Central Europe conditioned the Soviet collapse. Liberal calls from Yeltsin and the Soviet elite weakened its potency. As a result, the Soviet Union collapsed (Kotkin, 2001).

In *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, Peter Kenez analyzes and describes the functions and failures of the central Soviet institutions and introduces major historiographical debates among Western scholars. For explaining the critical juncture Gorbachev's leadership was caught up in, the author argues that the three interrelated crises of the economic failure, the decay of political institutions, and the political deluge of nationalism led to the ultimate Soviet collapse. Therefore, the economic failure was a vital aspect of the above-mentioned three, as "had the economic reforms improved the standard of living for the majority of the people, the other issues might have been resolved" (Kenez, 2006, p. 265).

In one chapter of his massive study, *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond: An International History Since 1900*, William R. Keay discusses Gorbachev's policies and the collapse of the Soviet empire. The central aspect of Gorbachev's foreign policy was his readiness to settle all issues in contention with the West, even at the cost of geopolitical concessions, which by stabilizing the international atmosphere, could have provided him with a chance to mobilize all domestic resources for the successful implementation of Perestroika and Glasnost. As he notes, "paradoxically, the severe crisis Gorbachev was facing, was further exacerbated due to political reforms initiated under his leadership" (Keay, 2015, p. 656).

In the chapter "the collapse of the Soviet Union, 1990–1991" in *The Cambridge history of the Cold War* edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, Alex Pravda discusses the final years of the Soviet Union and reflects the reasons for its demise. According to him, Gorbachev's initial plan was to establish a friendly international atmosphere through his concessionary foreign policy, making it easier for him to implement Soviet domestic reforms successfully. However, what ultimately happened was that the Kremlin's liberal turn in East Central Europe catalyzed centrifugal processes in the Soviet Union, reducing the chances of perestroika's success and eventually contributing to the collapse of the Soviet state (Pravda, 2010).

In *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, Mark Beissinger provides a systematic exploration of the dynamics of ethnic nationalism and protest mobilization during



the Gorbachev era. In his research, Beissinger integrated thousands of demonstrations and nationalist protests in the Soviet Union during the perestroika period. He examines the spread of these movements and how the political process intensified and streamed with time. Beissinger argues that the sparkles of the collapse started way before the 1991 coup. Particularly interesting for us is that according to this study, there was a snowballing effect on nationalist mobilization in the Soviet Union, which erupted in East Central Europe. As Beissinger notes, activists in the Baltic republics and Ukraine were encouraged by nationalist movements in the Soviet outer empire. Beissinger illustrates the banners from the December 1989 Dnepropetrovsk demonstration, which read: “the peoples of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia have said no to a communist dictatorship. The next word is ours, citizens!” (Beissinger, 2002, p. 194). As we can see from the Russian primary sources, the snowballing eruption carried on inside the Soviet Union, where Lithuanian “Sajūdis” became its main trigger. Gorbachev discussed this issue while answering questions from the XXIst Congress of Komsomol delegates on 10 April 1990. “Emissaries of Sajūdis in Armenia and Azerbaijan are calling on locals for separatism and sedition,” he said (Gorbachev, 2011b, pp. 210-211).

Phillip Hanson provides a more in-depth analysis of the Soviet economic decline in *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*. Contrary to Grachev’s opinion that Western pressure played a role in the deterioration of the Soviet economy, Hanson argues that it was less connected with the international pressure than with the failure of the command economy and incorrect attempts of its reform. He argues that the economy’s weakening was related to leaders rather than the economy itself or conditions. According to him, “the main reason for the slow growth of the Soviet economy [was] that it [was] not suitable for empirical observation” (Hanson, 2003).

In *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires*, Alexander Motyl analyses the Soviet fall within a broader comparative context. The twentieth century witnessed many empires’ falls. The Soviet Union was one of them. As known, each empire becomes stronger gradually, and when they reach the peak, the fall starts. Motyl adds a different view to this reality. According to him, this decentralized state decomposed naturally. In other words, when the territory expanded and responsibilities advanced, the central power weakened, and

finally, it reached an inevitable ending as happened with European empires. However, this theory worked differently in the Soviet Union. While the East Central European part was drifting apart from the Soviet Union, former Soviet Republics remained under Russian dominance, especially in the Asian part. Therefore, Motyl claims that uncertainty and conflict will last in the former Soviet republics (Motyl, 2001).

Another vital piece having a broad comparative context of the USSR's collapse is Valerie Bunce's *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*. Bunce defines the conventional logic of Marxist-Leninist governance based on the tactic "divide and rule." It means separating and then debilitating the powerful in charge, synchronizing and reinforcing the weak while never losing control during its rise. Ideally, the whole system was supposed to work under this simple "divide and rule" logic; however, practically, the empire became overstretched. Gorbachev decided to halt the process by radical reforms, which softened centripetal forces and allowed local opportunist groups to mobilize power (Bunce, 1995).

## **1.5. Historical treatments of nationalism in the USSR**

Several significant pieces capture historical treatments of nationalism in the Soviet Union. In *Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Ronald Grigor Suny gives a broad overview of nationalism and nations in the Soviet Union. He makes a comparison of the understanding of Soviet nationalism between Stalin and Lenin. He touches upon creating a new nation while discussing the Soviet and Ukrainian nationality questions. The book also concerns the nation creation studies in Central Asia and how Stalin crafted those republics by the "divide and rule" principle. Suny explains the evolution of nationalism and its impact on the Soviet collapse (Suny, 1995).

Anatol Lieven's *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Path to Independence* is an essential read for understanding the Baltic revolutions' nationalist dimension. Lieven, as a journalist, aimed at giving a data analysis about news, reports of

conferences, and historical events in the Baltic states. Lieven notes that the confidence-building during the popular Baltic mobilization to a significant extent was based on assurances from émigré sources that the US was ready to back them if their push was successful (Lieven, 1993). This statement corresponds with Matlock's view, who noted that Americans signaled the nationalists in the USSR that in case of demonstrated control over the state territory, they would recognize their independence (Matlock, 1995).

*Lithuania: The Rebel Nation* by V. Stanley Vardys and Judith B. Sedaitis sheds light on Lithuanian history and its struggle with big empires in the past and later on during the independence fight and nation-state building process in the Soviet era until today. Lithuania had fought for its survival for many years, including both world wars. Economic reform, Western integration, political transmission, and relations with the EU and NATO strengthened Lithuanian politics against superpowers like the USSR/Russia (Vardys and Sedaitis, 1997).

In *The Ukrainian Resurgence*, Bohdan Nahajlo tells the history of the Ukrainian nation from the beginning to the Soviet period and afterward. The development of Ukrainian politics, democratization movements, Western integration, and economic restructuring are explained well. The book is made rich by many different primary sources. Interesting to know is how Catholicism reinforced and fed the national feeling in western regions of Galicia and Transcarpathia with the Poles. As we will see, besides Poland, the Vatican factor was also very influential in western Ukraine. We can also trace some similarities of these developments with the Romanian resurgence and the role of the Hungarian minority in Timișoara in the Romanian revolution. Nahajlo notes that Solidarity leaders supported nationalist mobilization in Ukraine by paying multiple visits and establishing contacts with the “anti-Soviet groups” (Nahajlo, 1999). The author's information concerning Polish influence on Ukrainian popular mobilization corresponds with Beissinger's (Beissinger, 2002, p. 194).

Another essential piece on Ukraine is *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence* by Taras Kuzio and Andrew Wilson. It presents the historical background of Ukraine during 1987-1991. How

has Ukraine become independent? What was the role of nationalist movements in Communist Ukraine? One can find the answers to those questions here. At first sight, it could be said that it is more an introduction to a story of independent Ukraine. While explaining the process of independence, the authors examine its economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects. The book also answers the question of how Ukraine declared its independence with detailed arguments. It also touches upon the conflicts, issues, and negotiations between the Communist Party, democratic parties, and Christian/religious parties in the post-Soviet Ukraine (Kuzio and Wilson, 1994).

## **1.6. The influence of the East Central European revolutions**

Mark Kramer wrote the piece that provides fundamental research of East Central European developments' influence on the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In his three-part series of articles, *The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union*, Kramer describes how the end of communism in East Central Europe influenced the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's team. Kramer notes that demonstrations in neighboring socialist states triggered the nourishment of nationalist movements in the USSR. The exchange of information with the CEE leadership increased the efficiency of the strategies of nationalist groups (Kramer, 2003). In part II, Kramer examines four leading causes conditioning the decline of Marxist-Leninist ideology: 1. augmented reality of the Soviet exposure; 2. derogation of the Soviet military forces; 3. forerunning Western integration and 4. democratization of East Central Europe. These tendencies harmed Gorbachev's efforts to halt the collapse of the Union. Particularly interesting for us was that, according to Kramer, Gorbachev did not sanction the use of force for quelling nationalist demonstration in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989 (Kramer, 2004). This statement corresponds with the information we were able to find in the studied primary documents. At the 20 April 1989 Politburo meeting concerning the 9 April developments in Tbilisi, Gorbachev addressed Yazov (Soviet Minister of Defense) with the réplique: "from today, the army must not interfere in these kinds of matters without the resolution of the Politburo" (Gorbachev, 2010a, p. 117). In part III,

Kramer concludes the trilogy and explains how on the one hand, the “losing” of East Central Europe and undermining the Kremlin’s interests there exacerbated the crisis in the Soviet political elite and on the other, how the diffusion of strategies and information from the “outer” to the “inner” empire contributed to strengthening the nationalist stance and ultimately to the Soviet demise (Kramer, 2005).

### **1.7. New thinking and the transformation of Soviet foreign policy**

Several significant pieces shed light on the transformation of Soviet foreign policy and the development of *new thinking*. Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott collected interviews with directly involved witnesses of the end of the Cold War period. Therefore, their book *At the Highest Level: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* is rich with oral histories empirical data from the top officials. A reader can find all details about Soviet–U.S. relations, leaders’ conversations, the unknown aspects of diplomacy, domestic issues, foreign policies, struggles, and comparisons between the Reagan and Bush administrations to the relations with the USSR. Essential for us was their interview with the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, who claimed that back in 1990, the USA pledged the Soviets not to expand NATO eastward if Moscow agreed to the unification of Germany (Beschloss and Talbott, 1993, pp. 185-186).

*Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy*, edited by George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, depict Soviet-US relations and snitches on the two leading powers’ policies towards 3rd World countries, the Middle East and alliances. Policy-makers and their learning process of the conceptualization in their foreign policy implementations constitute the book’s main topic. This book is a new level of study of decision-making by adding historical dimensions. According to the authors, although many leaders are experts in demagogy and public relations, most of them fail to understand the complexity of regional affairs (Breslauer and Tetlock (eds.), 1991). This statement perfectly suits Mikhail Gorbachev, as his public relations strategy and discourse had a relatively solid philosophical construct. However, it failed to reflect the complexities of the multi-ethnic Soviet state. A good illustration of this

kind of discourse is the following excerpt from Gorbachev's address to people in Vilnius on 11 January 1990. Gorbachev tried to convince the Lithuanian public about the inevitability of perestroika and the unity of the USSR. "it is important to understand the dialectics of the relationship between perestroika, the vision of our near and distant future, and the whole range of international relations," he mentioned (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 79). Gorbachev's oratorical skills here are lovely, and his statement seems plausible too. However, the main problem of his discourse is its unsuitability with the existing social and political reality.

In *The Demise of Marxism-Leninism in Russia*, edited by Archie Brown, the change of Leninist ideas among Soviet leaders is analyzed. Leninism's main challenge appeared to be political pluralism. The growth of diverse opinions in the political and social environment during the last years of the Soviet Union was something Leninism could not cope with. Although Gorbachev rejected the essentials of Leninism, he tried to innovate it and make it suitable for his reformatory ideas. Gorbachev's interpretation was engaging and appealing initially, but when the Soviet economy started to decline, the state's main ideology's decline followed. Gorbachev, to a considerable extent, undermined Marxism-Leninism from within (Brown, 2004).

In *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War*, Robert D. English brings a different perspective for the end of the Cold War. According to him, after the strict Stalinist rule, the process of seeking much softer solutions devaluated the potency of Soviet politics and leaders. The book's central thesis is that to comprehend Gorbachev's policies, one should analyze the very base from which they evolved - the Soviet intellectual elite that emerged in the 1950s. English argues that besides the economic decline, the general intellectual transformation of the Soviet political elite rather than solely Gorbachev's personality contributed to Gorbachev's policies and ultimately to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR. English also highlights the influence of foreign intellectuals on Gorbachev's ideas. i.e., the significance of the Swedish PM Olof Palme's Commission in initiating the discussion on disarmament – unsurprisingly German social democrat and the engineer of Ostpolitik Egon Bahr, and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance were among its members (English, 2000).

Matthew Evangelista's *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* is another bright example of the study of the influence of intellectuals on global politics and decision-making. What could be a more transparent demonstration of this causality than the fact that the very expression "new thinking" first appeared in the founding document of the Pugwash movement, which Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein compiled in 1955? Evangelista, just like English, highlights the significance of the Palme Commission in commencing the talks on global disarmament and influencing Gorbachev's policies (Evangelista, 1999).

*Ending the Cold War: Interpretations, Causation, and the Study of International Relations*, the book edited by Richard K. Herrmann and Richard Ned Lebow, presents competing interpretations made by prominent experts of the USSR and the Cold War in the context of "five turning points" at the end of the Cold War. These five are the following: 1. the rise of Gorbachev to power (written by Archie Brown); 2. withdrawal from regional conflicts (written by Richard Herrmann); 3. arms control (written by Mathew Evangelista); 4. the liberation of East Central Europe (written by Jacques Lévesque); and 5. German reunification (written by James Davis and William Wohlforth) (Herrmann and Lebow (eds.), 2004).

Archie Brown wrote about the significance of the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the CPSU at the end of the Cold War. According to Brown, a high concentration of power in Gorbachev's hands allowed him to introduce fundamental reforms. The turning point when Gorbachev's ideas acquired revolutionary character was the XIXth CPSU Conference in June 1988. At this conference, Gorbachev permitted pluralization of politics by holding popular elections. Without any preliminary elaboration, he declared that every nation was free in choosing its own political and economic system. While giving the "green light" to national self-determination, he ultimately contributed to the collapse of Communism in East Central Europe and further radicalized his internal opposition in the Kremlin. The 1989 popular elections brought new actors to the political scene, who easily catalyzed national separatism movements in the conditions of loosened central power and

destabilized the Kremlin's politics, which ultimately resulted in Soviet collapse (Brown, 2004).

The second turning point – withdrawal from regional conflicts is discussed in Richard Herrmann's chapter. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan indicated a major retreat of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the occupation of Afghanistan turned out to drain Soviet resources, and on the other hand, the withdrawal also involved high domestic and foreign costs. Superpower withdrawals from Nicaragua and Angola are also discussed. Finally, the Kremlin's hesitation during the Gulf War and its commitment to contain the threat rather than exploit it for reviving the Cold War indicated a fundamental shift in the Kremlin's decision-making (Herrmann, 2004).

Matthew Evangelista's chapter is on arms control. The first precedent when the USSR abandoned opposing on-site verification was Gorbachev's July 1986 announcement on the unilateral nuclear test moratorium. Another precedent was the signature of the INF Treaty by the Soviets, as they agreed to reduce Soviet missiles disproportionately. The next turning point was reducing Soviet conventional forces and withdrawing them from East Central Europe unilaterally – Gorbachev announced this decision in his December 1988 speech in the U.N. According to Evangelista, these developments signaled the end of the Cold War in Europe. Evangelista also notes that the Kremlin's acceptance of significant reductions under a START treaty, while Americans expressed no commitment to the ABM treaty, ultimately created room for achieving the 1991 START agreement (Evangelista, 2004).

Jacques Lévesque analyzed the liberation of East Central Europe in 1989. The East Central European region was always highly essential for the Kremlin geopolitics as it appeared to be a buffer zone between the Western coalition and the USSR. The Kremlin's acceptance to allow East Central European nations to choose their political and economic system on their own confirmed the credibility of Gorbachev's new thinking in foreign affairs (Lévesque, 2004).



James Davis and William Wohlforth analyzed the unification of Germany. Soviet retreats in regional conflicts, unilateral reductions of armament, and acceptance of the collapse of communism in East Central Europe were essential precedents, but Gorbachev and his team still believed in a new pan-European security idea. However, achieving the settlement on German reunification and the role of NATO in the Spring-Summer of 1990 and signing the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany in September of the same year meant that the Cold War was finally over. The steps taken by the Kremlin were almost impossible to reverse (Davis and Wohlforth, 2004).

## **1.8. The 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe**

*Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*, a volume edited by Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, contains primary source material on the 1989 revolutions in English (Savranskaya et al., 2010). Most of the documents available here are Soviet sources, and they are also available in *Collected Works by M.S. Gorbachev* in the original Russian language. Therefore, this book is crucial for studying the primary documents on the 1989 developments in East Central Europe for non-Russian speakers.

Charles Gati's *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet–East European Relations in Transition* deals with the Eastern bloc in general. Gati investigates economic, political, and military aspects of East Central Europe–USSR relations and presents the Soviet attitude toward revolutionary movements in East Central Europe. According to him, Gorbachev was aware of the fundamental crisis of communism in East Central Europe, but he did not have any other choice than to accept the Soviet retreat. The author's positions comply with Gorbachev's views (Gati, 1990).

Renée de Nevers's *Comrades No More: The Seeds of Political Change in Eastern Europe* is a comprehensive comparative analysis of the 1989 revolutions in each East Central European country. De Nevers analyses and emphasizes some significant points of what caused the collapse in East Central Europe. The Gorbachev factor was crucial, but East Central

European leadership had a significant role too. Their unwillingness to introduce reforms and stubborn self-confidence helped the destruction and fall of communist regimes in East Central Europe (De Nevers, 2003).

Dragoş Petrescu's *Entangled Revolutions: The Breakdown of the Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe* is a comparative study of the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe. Petrescu explains the timing, sequence, and nature of these revolutionary events. According to him, the interplay of structural, conjunctural, and nation-specific factors contributed to the unfolding of the 1989 developments. In Poland and Hungary, the fractionism of the political elites contributed to "negotiated revolutions;" in the case of Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Bulgaria, the monolithism of the system caused un-negotiated but peaceful revolutions; whereas in Romania, the repressive character of the regime ultimately ended up in a violent revolution (Petrescu, 2014).

In *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe*, Gale Stokes focuses not only on the East Central European communist regimes but also on Yugoslavia. He goes even further and refers to the empires such as the Ottoman and the Habsburg. The reason he gives those references is to show the similarities between people during democratic transformations. Stokes explained the collapse of the Soviet Union by reflecting reasons and similarities with other communist regimes (Stokes, 1993).

To better understand Soviet concessionary policies in East Central Europe during 1989, Jacques Lévesque's *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* is a vital read. Lévesque examined the beginning of Gorbachev's leadership, perestroika, Poland's breakaway, and finally, the Fall of 1989. In his book, one can understand how Soviet governance had become weakened alongside the East Central European regimes' uncertainty in the face of reforms and new world order (Lévesque, 1997).

Timothy Garton Ash's *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* is a crucial study of the revolutionary events in Poland. Garton Ash, a British historian, witnessed the developments in Solidarity, the Polish regime, and society. He expresses what happened during those years,

what the background of the fall was, and why it happened. Garton Ash argues that the “great convergence” of KOR (Committee for Defense of Workers) dissident movement, East-West détente, the role of the Vatican (especially of Pope John Paul II), and society’s disappointment with the government’s promises for economic improvements, gave a major hit to the Polish revolution. Polish nationalism and historical hatred against foreign domination were essential background factors of communism’s collapse. Exciting for us is Garton Ash’s reference to the Polish revolution as a “telerevolution,” as Solidarity’s effectiveness in popular mobilization was based on TV media (Garton Ash, 2002).

Interestingly, the term *mediatization of politics*, which reflects the process Garton Ash is describing, was coined by German political scientist Heinrich Oberreuter in 1989. With this term, Obberreuter meant the subjugation of politics to the media as politics was transforming into some kind of TV spectacle (Oberreuter, 1989). Obberreuter had a critical view of the phenomenon. However, Garton Ash and he depict the same trend – increased role of media in politics, by political planning turning into communications planning. The most exciting part is that more than three decades later, *the mediatization of politics* is probably the most powerful tool of policy-making in post-Soviet states today, and probably not only there.

Another critical piece on Poland is Jacqueline Hayden’s *The Collapse of Communist Power in Poland: Strategic Misconceptions and Unanticipated Outcomes*. Hayden provides a detailed analysis of the Polish leadership’s decision-making, calculations, and expectations regarding Solidarity. She points out the communist party leaders’ ignorance and arrogance. As a result of the ruling communist party’s negligence to what was discussed in the Round Table meetings, they lost power in the democratic elections (Hayden, 2006).

For a better understanding of Hungary’s revolutionary breakthrough, Rudolf L. Tokes’s *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1987–1990* is an essential read. Tokes express an extensive overall assessment of Hungarian political history in economics, socio-culture, politics, policies, and history. Kadar’s policy with both East and the West aimed to integrate the country into the new world order in political, socio-cultural, and economic aspects. Hungarian democratization was

much more progressive and negotiable with the West compared to other East Central European countries. Undoubtedly, Kadar's role had a significant impact on it (Tokes, 1996).

Patrick O'Neill explains the collapse of the Hungarian communist regime by a neoinstitutionalist approach in *Revolution from Within: The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the Collapse of Communism*. The "Kadarist" compromise of accepting intellectuals in the ranks of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in greater numbers, although efficient in its early years, turned out to be counterproductive for the communist power in the long run. According to O'Neill, the younger generation of the 1970s started to openly discuss the inevitability of economic and political liberalization, which set the ground for the communist collapse. The case of the Hungarian negotiated revolution was unique in East Central Europe, as its major hit came from within the local party apparatus rather than from Gorbachev's reforms (O'Neill, 1998).

*The Roundtable Talks of 1989: The Genesis of Hungarian Democracy: Analysis and Documents*, a volume edited by András Bozóki, deals with the analysis of the history of the Roundtable Talks based on primary documents. All authors agree that the Roundtable talks were the primary catalyst of a revolutionary breakthrough in Hungary (Bozóki (ed.), 2002). Melinda Kalmár's chapter is a pioneering study of the strategy and tactics of the Hungarian communist party, based on formerly unavailable Politburo minutes. She argues that until the Fall of 1989, the HSWP hoped to build a hybrid regime whereby the party could retain its dominant position in a coalition government even following genuinely free elections (Kalmár, 2002).

Particularly interesting for us was a chapter by Csaba Békés – "Back to Europe: The International Background of the Political Transition in Hungary, 1988–1990." Békés provides a thorough historical examination of the transition process in Hungary, discussing the Kremlin's policy in East-Central Europe – the strategy and expectations of Gorbachev's leadership and Hungary's opening to the West. According to him, Lenin's motivation for accepting the signature of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918 was to stop the further invasion

of the Central Powers by formally ceding the western and south-western territories of Soviet Russia and thus, saving the imperial center. Similarly, Gorbachev's motivation for accepting the concessions on the East-Central European region was achieving stable relations with the West by settling all international political disputes. This would have allowed him to mobilize all foreign and domestic resources for the successful implementation of perestroika, without which the future existence of the whole Soviet state seemed impossible (Békés, 2002).

John F. N. Bradley's monograph *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution: A Political Analysis* is an essential read for studying the decline of communism in Czechoslovakia. The author presents the history of socialist Czechoslovakia and his investigation of the 1989 revolutionary events in Prague using the Civic Forum proclamations and pamphlets, supplemented with interviews as his primary source. Political strategies and tactics of the opposition are well explained and analyzed (Bradley, 1992).

Peter Siani-Davis's *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* is a prudent scholarly monograph on the Romanian revolution. It stresses the decline of the Ceausescu regime. The Romanian December revolution was unpredictable, and it shocked people and leaders of East Central Europe and the Soviet Union as well. Siani-Davis wrote the book by collecting official documents, news, reports, interviews, and transcripts of speeches published in media during the December 1989 revolution - it also includes previous and later facts of the revolution (Siani-Davis, 2005).

Silviu Brucan's memoirs are a must-read to understand Romanian communism's system and its transformation from an insider's perspective. Brucan was an ambassador to the US in 1955 and the UN from 1959 to 1962. Since the 1960s, he became increasingly critical of Ceaușescu's dictatorship – he was under house arrest when the regime fell. In his book, he emphasizes the strategies of the Romanian communist regime and their political reevaluations. Brucan recalls his November 1988 meeting with Gorbachev when he informed him about preparing a coup against Ceaușescu. As the author notes, the Soviet leader replied that the Kremlin could not participate in this; however, Gorbachev welcomed this kind of

scenario if the Communist Party remained the leading political force in the country (Brucan, 1993).

There are not many monographs, written particularly on Bulgarian events in 1989 - *History of Bulgaria* by Richard Crampton is one of the few. Crampton mainly focuses on Bulgarian political history from the XXth century until the collapse of the communist regime. His purpose is to stress key actors, two different regime models, and their influence on Bulgarian history, nationalism and nationalist movements, and lastly, on the state-building process. Another high point of this book is that it expresses a Bulgarian role in international politics, especially in the Balkan area, from the EU and NATO perspectives (Crampton, 2005).

## 1.9. The reunification of Germany

A great deal of literature exists on the topic of German reunification. The must-read for a historian is a collection of primary documents in the volume *Deutsche Einheit: Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik* edited by Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hofmann. The book explains the German unification, its terms, and conditions. It also gives information about implemented policies and procedures such as the liberalization and the economic policy. The volume also sheds light on the intergovernmental negotiation process on the German question. Particularly essential is a transcript of the 10 February 1990 Kohl-Gorbachev conversation in Moscow. If in Russian version Kohl's réplique concerning NATO's non-extension is rather vague ("NATO must not extend the sphere of its activity" (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 618)), the German version of the document clarifies that Kohl spoke on the former GDR territory only (Kohl: "naturally, NATO must not extend its sphere to the territory of today's GDR" (Küsters and Hofmann, 1998, pp. 795-807)).

For reviewing the collection of Soviet documents on German reunification, a volume edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev *Михаил Горбачев и германский вопрос. Сб. документов. 1986–1991 [Mikhail Gorbachev and the German question: Collection of Documents, 1986-1991]* is a must-read. In their introduction, editors support the view that Gorbachev did the maximum possible for averting the threats of nuclear war and eliminating

the arms race by putting paramount importance on stable neighborly relations with Germany. Accordingly, the editors argue that the concessions Gorbachev made were for the sake of world peace. We thoroughly checked the editors' position on the topic of the Western no-NATO-enlargement pledge and could not find any direct reference. However, by our interpretation, an indirect reference to this matter is in the editorial text. "Kohl," write Galkin and Chernyaev, "transferred his approach to the USSR to Russia, without [...] humiliating himself with the diplomatic 'memory loss,' to which some former partners were exposed" (Galkin and Chernyaev, 2006, p. xxii). Undoubtedly, these former partners "humiliating themselves with the diplomatic memory loss" are *inter alia* the representatives of the Bush administration, and the issue they "forgot" is most likely their informal pledge in 1990. Technically, the Bush administration was honest in their pledge – it was Clinton's administration, not Bush's, who implemented NATO's further enlargement. Also, when NATO expanded, it did not pose a threat to the USSR because it was no more. The reason why Galkin and Chernyaev have this regretful and, at the same time, slightly pretentious approach is their criticism of diplomatic dishonesty.

Karl-Rudolf Korte's *Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft: Regierungsstil und Entscheidungen 1982–1989*, discusses the role of Kohl's leadership and policies on German unity. Korte elaborates facts, confidential documents, and key actors in the German unification process. He gives extensive coverage to Kohl's role, ambition, leadership crusade, decision-making, and contribution to the FRG's governance before the unification (Korte, 1998).

International aspects of German reunification are discussed in Werner Weidenfeld's *Außenpolitik für die Deutsche Einheit: die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90*. Weidenfeld analyzed the overturning process at the end of 1989. The author supports his analysis and examinations through interviews, meetings, reports, and news. Weidenfeld defines two main factors which had a decisive role in German reunification. Firstly, it was Gorbachev's policy and the Soviet Union's soft power stance. Moreover, Gorbachev agreed on German NATO membership after the unification - in other words, he accepted the Soviet retreat from Germany. In this part, Weidenfeld questions whether



Gorbachev had any other options – and the answer looks like he did not have one. Another issue was the economic conditions in the GDR and the Soviet Union. The Soviet economy appeared to be in a severe crisis, and the overstretched empire's prices got too heavy to bear. On the other hand, Kohl's policies and leadership significantly impacted German reunification (Weidenfeld, 1999).

To better understand the FRG's perspective of German reunification, the memoirs of two insiders - Wolfgang Schäuble and Horst Teltschik- are precious. In *Der Vertrag: wie ich über die deutsche Einheit verhandelte*, Wolfgang Schäuble talks about his duty as the FRG's Minister of Interior and his role in reunification negotiations. The book contains plenty of primary sources. As an insider, the author stresses how the negotiation process was difficult and painful and expresses his experiences. Schäuble notes that “the unity was possible only because no blood was shed” (Schäuble, 1991, p. 15).

Horst Teltschik, Kohl's foreign-policy aide, presents his story of the international negotiations on German reunification in *329 Tage: Innenansichten der Einigung*. East-West relations and challenges are well expressed and defined in the book. Particularly interesting for us was Teltschik's capture of Gorbachev's position on the German question. As he notes, Gorbachev advocated for German reunification only alongside the political realities of the Helsinki Accords. If the inviolability of borders and the question of alliances were to be respected, he was ready to accept Germany's reunification. He was promising not to pose any additional political demands (Teltschik, 1991).

Helmut Kohl's perspective on the German reunification can be traced in his memoirs - *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*. Kohl tells about how he was elected and what has changed since his reforms. Europe, Germany, and NATO relations are also mentioned. A reader can find detailed information about the leaders of the era, their policies, and their relationships with each other. Kohl's critical position, which allowed him to successfully implement his long waiting goal, was his insistence that German unity was possible only through the continuation of the European integration process (Kohl, 2005). As Willy Brandt was able to assure the



concerned Western coalition that his *Ostpolitik* was contributing to European security, Kohl made it clear that the reunified Germany would serve European interests better.

Hans-Hermann Hertle's monograph *Der Fall der Mauer: die unbeabsichtigte Selbstaflösung des SED-Staates* focuses on the GDR, basing his analysis on the SED party primary documents. The fall of the Berlin Wall solidified communist collapse in East Central Europe and catalyzed the Soviet Union's disintegration. Hertle retraces the decision-making process that brought the Berlin Wall fell. The author does examine not only the primary sources but also his interviews, mostly with East German role players. It becomes clear that the Wall fell against all intentions and plans of the political actors (Hertle, 1996).

Elizabeth Pond's *Beyond the Wall: Germany's Road to Unification* presents a Berlin-based American journalist's story of German reunification. The book is based on Pond's collected documents and interviews. She also had close connections to the diplomatic actors, which served her well in capturing the process beyond a journalist's scope. Pond emphasizes the critical role of the U.S. in German reunification (Pond, 1993).

In *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany*, Charles S. Maier analyzes the economic and political dimensions of the GDR's collapse by putting it into the Cold War context. Maier also offers a comparative perspective with the other communist regimes in East Central Europe. The role of the German population in the collapse is well defined. The East German administration found itself in a severe crisis, contributing to its collapse alongside Moscow's hesitation and Bonn's insistence on reunification. The sharp drop in productivity and economic growth, accompanied by aging and fractious SED leadership, pushed East Germans to express their frustrations freely (Maier, 1997).

The memoirs of leading American political figures - George Bush Sr. and Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, Philip Zelikow, and Condoleezza Rice, reviewed in the sub-chapter above, serve well in understanding the process of German reunification.

For understanding a British view on the developments in Germany, Margaret Thatcher's memoirs *The Downing Street Years* is a valuable source. Thatcher was very critical of

German reunification, and in that sense, Gorbachev based his hopes on her support during German question negotiations. When Kohl asked for her help, she declared that other issues such as East Central Europe's transformation, the role of four powers, and Gorbachev's perestroika were way more important than German reunification. It will undermine Gorbachev's reform, and open Pandora's Box of border claims through central Europe, remarked Thatcher to Kohl (Thatcher, 1993, pp. 794-797).

Frédéric Bozo presents the French view on German reunification in *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification*. Bozo utilized primary sources, interviews, conversations, meetings, and documents analytically. Did France have an impact on the dissolution of the GDR and the reunification of Germany? What were Mitterrand's objectives? He answers those questions. Bozo also emphasizes how Gorbachev, the U.S., and Kohl took a role in unification. The impact of Kohl and the U.S. was incredibly high in the unification process. On the other side, Gorbachev failed in East Central Europe and indirectly in the GDR. He lost his efficiency and voice in the GDR politics and decision-making. Ultimately Gorbachev had no other choice instead to agree on unification led by the U.S., the European Union, and NATO. Mitterrand wanted to be involved in the unification process, but he wanted it to happen instead in the longer term. He aimed to control the process and dominate Europe politically (Bozo, 2009).

Hannes Adomeit offers a Soviet perspective on the German question. In *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev*, analysis is based on archival evidence, memoirs, and interviews. The author discusses Germany's division and its reunification process from the perspective of the Kremlin – how the policies were applied and decisions taken from Stalin to Gorbachev. Particularly interesting for our study was the author's position concerning why Gorbachev had to accept reunified Germany's membership in NATO. According to Adomeit, Gorbachev was isolated in his insistence on Germany's dual membership in NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Besides, he and his military advisor Marshal Akhromeev were convinced of the Warsaw Pact's viability and prospects to counterbalance NATO.

On the other hand, the Western leadership assured Gorbachev that NATO was committed to structural reforms, and it no more was an adversary to the Kremlin. In all the factors mentioned above, the Soviet Union's economic vulnerability played a decisive role. Adomeit observes that most probably, the Soviet leadership made "far-reaching concessions on security issues for short-term and possibly short-sighted economic and financial benefit" (Adomeit, 1998, p. 692).

Helga Haftendorn offers an overview of the German foreign policy from 1945 to 2005 in *Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy since 1945*. Her analysis is based on primary documents. She points out how Germany's leadership was developed and how it kept its self-interest policy since 1945. Haftendorn argues that although Germany followed a traditional self-restraint policy in the post-WWII world, once the post-war generation came to power after reunification, they counterbalanced this stance by a more assertive stance (Haftendorn, 2006).

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, we portray some critical contextual elements that, by our understanding, are essential for explaining Gorbachev's policies in the Soviet Union and abroad. By shading light to the Brest-Litovsk syndrome, managed ambiguity in Gorbachev's discourse, and foreign and domestic dimensions of the Brezhnev Doctrine, we clarify the rationale behind Gorbachev's initiatives how he tried to ensure the success of his policies. The chapter also includes a section discussing the disputed Western promise of a no-NATO-enlargement to Gorbachev. This debate is not losing its topicality, and we are ensured that it will continue to be so during the coming decades.

### 2.1. The Brest-Litovsk syndrome

In his study of the international background of the 1988-1990 political transition in Hungary, Csaba Békés presented his interpretation of Gorbachev's *quid pro quo* strategy while accepting the Kremlin's historical retreat from East Central Europe. "Since the Russian Civil War [...] the Soviet state [...] found itself in a situation in which its survival was at stake" - accordingly, the Soviet leader gradually gave up the USSR's East Central European periphery, for saving the Soviet imperial 'centre' (Békés, 2002, p. 245). In a historical parallel, Békés compares the situation Gorbachev's leadership was caught up in with the 1918 critical moment of the Russian Civil War, when Lenin agreed to make a peace treaty with the Central Powers, aiming to preserve the Soviet state in exchange for compromising significant peripheral territories. The author coined this phenomenon as the *Brest-Litovsk syndrome*. Since the early stages of our research, this feature from Csaba Békés's scholarship became our inspiration and guided us throughout our study. Therefore, we would like to thank the author warmly and wish him to stay as sharp-minded as he is for the coming decades.

Békés's argument is essential, as it portrays Gorbachev primarily not as an idealist, as many argue, but as a pragmatic thinker and a realist. When deciding to implement his *new*

*thinking* in international politics, Gorbachev's calculus was not necessarily based on his voluntary aspiration to make the world a more peaceful and just place, but rather on a very pragmatic objective – self-survival of the Soviet state. In many ways, he imitated his idol, Vladimir Lenin, here, but if “Lenin proved to be right on this point [...], Gorbachev was [...] overtaken by history” (Békés, 2002, p. 245).

After thoroughly reviewing the Soviet archival documents, we found several passages where Gorbachev compares the USSR's situation with the “Brest Peace.” At the Politburo meeting on 2 January 1990, Gorbachev noted that in 1918 the Kremlin needed to make such principled decisions that were unimaginable even for Lenin's inner circle but had created the “Brest Peace” settlement. “We should not panic and act accordingly,” he said (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 63). On 26 January 1990, during an inner circle meeting concerning the German question in the Kremlin, Gorbachev admitted that the Soviet Union situation was the “Brest peace number two. If we do not cope with it, half of our country will be taken away from us again” (Gorbachev 2011a, p. 192). By January 1990, the East Central European revolutions were complete, but the principal German question negotiations were still ahead. Straight after he remarked on the risks of the USSR losing half of its territories, Gorbachev noted that the Kremlin would finally lose its influence on the GDR and Poland, as both were the special cases (Gorbachev 2011a, p. 192). These passages confirm the credibility of Békés's argument; furthermore, they portray that the *Brest-Litovsk syndrome* is not merely a historical parallel but rather a historical reality through the lenses of which Gorbachev was shaping his policies abroad.

We argue that the Brest-Litovsk *quid pro quo* concerned not only East Central Europe but also the Baltic republics. There is enough evidence presented in the study confirming the accuracy of this statement. i.e., a brief example would be Boris Yeltsin's short comment at the 6 September 1991 Politburo meeting, where the decision to recognize the Baltic independence was taken – he remarked that the decision was supposed to solve the Kremlin's international problems (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 104). Regardless of Gorbachev's acknowledgment to Margaret Thatcher that Russia could not give up the Baltic region, as it had been trying to gain access to the sea for centuries (Gorbachev, 2015, p. 120), he decided to retreat from there once the integrity of the imperial center came under threat. However,

where was this very imperial center of the Soviet Union? Békés discussed the case of the Kremlin's retreat from East Central Europe in the context of a broad Soviet empire. He correctly argued that the Soviet imperial center was the Soviet Union itself. However, the location of the Soviet imperial center needs clarification in the context of the USSR itself. We think the very imperial center of the Soviet Union was the unity of four Soviet nuclear republics: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet nuclear-four territory was the one concession of which the Kremlin could not afford at any price. Besides, this was a critical matter of security for Moscow and the Western leadership. As Keylor notes, from the two main questions international society was concerned about after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first one was the nuclear question (Keylor, 2015, p. 659). Alongside the escalation of the Soviet domestic crisis, Western leaders became very cautious about the future of Soviet nuclear armament. It was in the cardinal interests of both parties to avoid such a level of chaos in Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Kazakh Union republics, which could have undermined the issue of Soviet nuclear control. Several passages from archival documents confirm this statement: i.e., as Gorbachev noted in his address in the Odessa military district on 17 August 1990, the regional partition of the USSR's nuclear system was a cardinal threat not only for the Soviet Union but also for international security (Gorbachev, 2012, p. 378). During the 5 July 1991 Kohl-Gorbachev meeting, Chancellor Kohl noted that the USSR collapse would be a catastrophe for everyone, as far as it is unknown, who would become a possessor of the Soviet nuclear weapons (Gorbachev, 2015, p. 364).

In the context depicted above, Gorbachev could have counted on Western support for the recreation of the Soviet Union until his leadership had a stable demonstrated control of the nuclear arsenal in the four Union republics.

Gorbachev might have been ready to compromise not merely the Baltic region, but all the rest of Union republics, except the nuclear four (at least during the short deadline, as it happened in the case of the Baltic republics), and his strategy might have worked. What appeared to be the direct hit for Gorbachev's plans was that the Western leadership became convinced that Gorbachev was not able to guarantee the security and control on the territories

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<sup>2</sup> In the early 1990s, these four were the only ones, holding large numbers of nuclear arsenal in the USSR. See - William Walker: Nuclear Weapons and the former Soviet Republics, *International Affairs*, vol. 68, N2, 255-277 (Apr. 1992), p. 256.

of the Soviet nuclear four. The most explicit demonstration of this circumstance for the leaders in Western capitals was the August coup. It should be noted that the Western leadership was aware of the potential threats to Gorbachev's leadership at least one year and some months earlier than the August coup.

In his cable from Moscow to the Department of State, sent on 11 May 1990, U.S. ambassador Jack Matlock wrote: "no matter what Gorbachev's fate, change will continue in the Soviet Union for objective reasons, though its course will be uneven, at best, and could even be interrupted by an authoritarian interregnum" (Cable, 1990a, p. 1). One year later, in June 1991, he transferred alarming information to Washington D.C., received from the Mayor of Moscow Gavriil Popov, informing that a group of the Politburo high officials (Pavlov, Kryuchkov, Yazov, and Lukyanov) had plans to oust Gorbachev. Matlock wrote about this episode in his book *Autopsy on an Empire* (Matlock, 1995). As Matlock notes, when this information was delivered to him from Popov (20 June 1991), Yeltsin had an official visit in Washington D.C. as a newly elected President of the RSFSR. According to Matlock, Popov asked him to transfer this information to Yeltsin as well. After sending a short notice to State Secretary Baker, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, and President Bush, Under Secretary of State Robert Kimmitt replied to Matlock, informing him that President Bush would notify Yeltsin regarding the matter (Gorbachev, 2017, p. 446). According to Nikita Zagladin (currently the Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO)), during this official visit, Yeltsin categorically stated: "before the end of the year there will be a coup. Gorbachev does not believe in it, but I am getting ready" (Gorbachev, 2017, p. 447). The most exciting part of Zagladin's source is that the U.S. intelligence agency was tasked with helping Yeltsin establish a more reliable communication system between the Kremlin and the White House (Gorbachev, 2017, p. 447). This episode demonstrates that Yeltsin's persona (newly elected President of the RSFRS - the first Soviet leader to be chosen by direct voting) acquired serious support from the White House. Most likely, the U.S. leadership started to consider shifting their support from Gorbachev to Yeltsin.

The August coup confirmed the doubts of the U.S. leadership on Gorbachev, and it is very likely that since then, Gorbachev's leadership became a formality. In August 1991, the Senate

Armed Services Committee Chair, Democratic Senator Sam Nunn, and Senator L. Espino proposed allocating one billion dollars from the Pentagon's budget for humanitarian and "nuclear" aid as part of the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program.<sup>3</sup> According to them, if the main threat to U.S. security was a military attack from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, now a significant risk was the emergence of chaos in the USSR, which possessed 30 thousand nuclear weapons. After the failure of the coup, Nunn visited Moscow. On 1-2 September, he met with the Soviet Defense Minister Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, the Deputy Head of Committee for Operative Management of the USSR economy Arkady Volsky and Mikhail Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 531).

During meeting with Gorbachev, Nunn expressed his interest in nuclear control in the Soviet Union and asked him whether he was sure that during the three days of the August coup, nuclear control was ensured - Gorbachev replied that he was confident in this. Senator Nunn also noted that during his meetings with Shaposhnikov and other Soviet officials, they discussed installing self-destruction mechanisms on nuclear missiles in case of an unauthorized or accidental launch (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 62). Four days later, in the live USSR-USA teleconference of Yeltsin and Gorbachev, Yeltsin noted that all nuclear weapons on the Soviet Union territory would be transferred to the RSFSR in the nearest future (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 98). Ultimately, by signing the Agreement on Measures for nuclear weapons on 21 December 1991, as part of the Alma Ata Declaration, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan agreed to eliminate all nuclear weapons not later than 1 July 1992<sup>4</sup> (Loginov, 2007, p. 497).

The last hopes of the reorganization of the Soviet Union faded away once the results of the 1 December 1991 Ukrainian referendum became known - 90.32% voted for independence. As Medvedev notes, the referendum's results were shocking, "even the Crimea, not to mention the south and east and the more western Ukraine, voted for independence" (Loginov, 2007, p. 417). Accordingly, as Gennady Burbulis notes, "by the time of Belovezha Agreement, the

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<sup>3</sup> The source does not indicate, whether these developments took place before the August coup or meanwhile.

<sup>4</sup> In case if it was needed, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan had a right to transfer nuclear weapons from their territories to the territory of Russia with the aim of elimination.



Soviet Union as an integral state according to the legal, economic and socio-political reality no longer existed” (Loginov, 2007, p. 422).

Considering all the above-noted circumstances, we argue that East Central Europe and the Baltic republics were not the only regions, Gorbachev was ready to compromise. Gorbachev’s plan to turn a pseudo-Soviet federation into a genuine federation ended with his acceptance of forming a loose confederation in late 1991 (Brown, 2006, p. 346) - nine out of fifteen Soviet Union republics were willing to become members. The 23 April 1991 “9+1” joint statement “on urgent measures to stabilize the situation in the country and to overcome a crisis,”<sup>5</sup> was signed by only nine Union member states - Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova stayed out, and there was nothing that Gorbachev could do about it. At the extraordinary session of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union on 27 August 1991, Gorbachev admitted that some republics in the USSR might not decide to enter into a new reorganized Union. Therefore, he pointed to the necessity to agree on the new terms with these republics (Gorbachev, 2017, p. 308). Gorbachev agreed to release the “secessionist-six” (the Baltic three, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova) from the Kremlin’s orbit. Stephen Cohen argues that even as a small number as seven republics grouped around Russia (except the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics and Moldova) would have been adequate to form a new reformed Soviet state, as the “remaining eight [...] republics constituted more than 90 percent of the old Union’s territory, population, and resources” (Cohen, 2009, p. 37). Brown also notes that some ways existed “in which a smaller, voluntary Union could have survived” (Brown, 2009, p. 50). What adds to the Cohen’s and Brown’s arguments more credibility is that their articles from which the above-depicted passages are cited were published in the Gorbachev Foundation’s volume on the critical analysis of perestroika. Mikhail Gorbachev himself wrote a foreword for his book, noting that it is supposed to “contribute to a better understanding of the ideas and actions of the initiators of perestroika” (Gorbachev, 2009, p. 6).

In addition to the arguments stated above, here is what U.S. Ambassador Jack Matlock cabled to U.S. State Department as early as in May 1990: “Gorbachev began to prepare the public

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<sup>5</sup> The joint statement supposed to set basis for the creation of the Union of Sovereign States (reorganization of the Soviet state).

for the partial dissolution of the Union through the law on secession and the willingness to consider confederal relations between Moscow and the Union republics. He could eventually put together a coalition for continuing with reform even at the expense of accepting a fractured Union” (Cable, 1990a, p. 1). Cohen notes that “according to a non-Russian leader who participated in the abolition of the Soviet state” (probably he means Nazarbayev), a new Union could have consisted of four republics (Cohen, 2009, p. 37). Based on this context, we assume that Gorbachev probably would have been ready to compromise not only East Central Europe and the Baltic region to save the Soviet imperial center, but the South Caucasus and Moldova too (Tchanturia, 2019b, p. 95). Theoretically, he could have been ready to compromise the Kremlin’s control on the Central Asian republics except for Kazakhstan; however, the chances of this kind of scenario were very marginal, as there was no strong opposition to the Kremlin in Central Asia.

## **2.2. The only means: managed ambiguity**

Alongside the introduction of socialist pluralism in East Central Europe that bore the risks of immediate destabilization in the region, the only means for the Kremlin to achieve at least a temporary stabilizing effect, according to Békés, was the floating the idea of the Brezhnev Doctrine (Békés, 2002, pp. 242-243). Besides the broad promotion of the idea of *new thinking* in private meetings or public appearances, which *inter alia* advocated for the non-interference in sovereign countries’ internal affairs, Gorbachev never stated categorically that the “Soviet Union would not interfere with an ally’s domestic affairs should the political transition, *horribile dictu*, result in the total abandonment of socialism and the restoration of parliamentary democracy” (Békés, 2002, p. 243).

The Kremlin’s discourse consisted of two, not necessarily contradictory, but at the same time, neither necessarily not contradictory elements: 1. the ambiguous verbal promise of non-interference, but only when the specific conditions applied - what these conditions were, it was unclear, and 2. no unconditional promise of non-intervention with all conditions clearly defined. Békés illustrates this ambiguous feature of Gorbachev’s discourse, by citing Gorbachev’s conversation with Károly Grósz, which took place in March 1989 in Moscow.

At this meeting, Gorbachev assured Grósz that the Kremlin had no intentions to intervene in other socialist countries' domestic affairs but, on the other hand, reminded him concerning the drawing of boundaries, without any further specification (Békés, 2002, p. 243). We found another example of this ambiguity in Gorbachev's discourse in the 28 April 1988 Politburo meeting's memcon. Talking about Ryzhkov's visit to Hungary, Gorbachev instructed "not to impose anything on [Eastern Bloc countries]. Everything [should be] based on equality, cooperation, and mutual benefit," he said (Gorbachev, 2009a: 317). In this short excerpt, it is clear that on the one hand, Gorbachev supports the full non-intervention in the domestic politics of the Eastern Bloc countries by "not imposing anything" on them. On the other hand, he insists that everything should be based on the "mutual benefit." Would it have been beneficial for Gorbachev if "the political transition, *horribile dictu*, resulted in the total abandonment of socialism and the restoration of parliamentary democracy?" (Békés, 2002, p. 243) - most certainly no.

It is also worth mentioning that, when the thesis concerning the Kremlin abandoning the Brezhnev Doctrine came to be adopted in the second half of 1988 and early 1989, "it was formulated in the hope that the outcome of the radical changes would be a new model of socialism, [...] which [...] could ensure a dominant role for the communist party in political life even after free elections" (Békés, 2002, p. 241). A leading adviser in the Kremlin on Europe, Sergei Karaganov in 1990, wrote that the changes in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Romania were providing a "potent push for perestroika" and strengthening its irreversibility (Karaganov, 1990, p. 122). Although the Soviet leadership might have hoped for the optimistic scenario in East Central Europe, it is clear that Gorbachev's rhetoric was intentionally ambiguous. "Initially [it was] instinctive, but later [it became an] increasingly conscious tactic," which aimed at "floating" the idea of the Brezhnev Doctrine, as it was the only means for achieving a stabilizing effect in the region (Békés, 2002, pp. 242-243). Gorbachev's tactic to make his rhetoric intentionally ambiguous about this highly controversial topic was his attempt to find a middle path between an openly declared concession and a famous Brezhnev-Doctrine-threat-bearing speech. According to Tamta Khalvashi, an assistant professor at the Free University of Tbilisi, the phenomenon of a *managed ambiguity* (the term ultimately coined by her) is typical for the post-Soviet

political leaders, and it has its bases in the Soviet period (Khalvashi, 2018). We think that the term *managed ambiguity* perfectly describes Gorbachev's tactic.

Brown notes that Gorbachev does not mean the Soviet states when he declared each people's right to choose; instead, he had in mind existing states, and "his doctrine of liberation was not intended to lead to separatism in the USSR" (Brown, 2006, p. 346). Even if we consider that the respected leaderships knew very clearly the context behind Gorbachev's discourse, we cannot deny that to some extent, this very ambiguous feature of Gorbachev's tactic created room for the mobilization of civil resistance groups in the Soviet Union. Accordingly, it is not a coincidence that the protest mobilization among the USSR's major nationalities started to unfold only after Gorbachev's groundbreaking speech at the XIXth All-Union Conference of the CPSU in June 1988. According to Beissinger's data, the inception phase of the significant institutional changes and protest mobilizations among ten major nationalities of the USSR starts from 1988 April-July, the period of the XIXth Party Conference and delegate selection (Beissinger, 2002, p. 84).

Although the strategy of *managed ambiguity* in Gorbachev's discourse "was successful and effective, at least temporarily, [and it] also had a definite stabilizing effect upon the accelerated transition both in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union and contributed to a large extent to preserving a peaceful nature of changes" (Békés, 2002, p. 244), ultimately it gave a significant stimulus to the civil resistance groups in the Soviet Union and to some extent, contributed to its final demise.

### **2.3. The Brezhnev Doctrine: foreign and domestic**

As we are analyzing the liberalization of the Kremlin's relations vis-à-vis the two radically different groups of states according to their legal status – East Central European states and the Baltic republics, the question about the conceptual integration of the Brezhnev Doctrine into our framework arises.

As Kramer defines, the Brezhnev Doctrine was a codification of Soviet policy toward East Central Europe justifying the interference in the allied CEE countries' domestic affairs, based on the assumption that "the fate of each socialist country [was connected] with the fate of all

others.” Kramer quotes Brezhnev, from the Pravda article, published in 1968 (13 November), where Brezhnev himself directly reaffirmed the doctrine, by vigorously defending the military intervention “when internal and external forces hostile to socialism [were] threatening to turn a socialist country back to capitalism” (Kramer, 1990, p. 25).

Accordingly, we can conclude that the concept of the Brezhnev Doctrine was based on two main elements:

1. the inevitability of military intervention “when internal and external forces hostile to socialism [were] threatening to turn a socialist country back to capitalism;” and
2. the assumption that the fates of the socialist countries were intertwined.

Although the doctrine was a codification of the Soviet policy toward East Central Europe, the same kind of approach of the Kremlin existed toward the Union republics. It never happened that it was necessary to define this on paper or declare it in public. It was a non-written, intuitively agreed rule that the Union republics were not supposed to deviate from the socialist ideals pressed upon by the Kremlin (even though the Soviet Constitution entitled the so-called titular nations to secede from the USSR voluntarily). Until the late 1980s, none of the Union republic regimes ever doubted that had their politics took the path of abandonment of socialism and restoration of parliamentary democracy, the Soviet military forces would interfere.

In the late 1980s in the Soviet Union, specifically in the Baltic region, the “separatism virus” development started to unleash (Gorbachev, 2009d, pp. 324-325). The origins of this “virus,” which later appeared to be a “pandemic” in the Soviet Union, can be traced in Lithuania, back on 3 June 1988, when the “Sajūdis” movement was formed in Vilnius with the principal demand of Lithuanian separation from the Soviet Union (Loginov, 2007, p. 33). A clear demonstration that the Lithuanian Union republic was on the path of separation as early as January 1989 is Medvedev’s report to Gorbachev about the first meeting of Politburo’s special commission on Baltic Affairs held in January 1989. Medvedev reports Chebrikov’s réplique at this meeting, directed to Brazauskas (The First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania): “Should we use the special measures, comrade Brazauskas? You know that we will not tolerate the separation of the republic” (Loginov, 2007, p. 55). Chebrikov’s réplique

clearly illustrates that once the classical obedience *status quo* in the Soviet Union appeared to be at stake, the intuitively agreed, the non-written *domestic Brezhnev Doctrine* acquired a distinct body; Chebrikov without any preliminary theoretical elaboration threatened the Lithuanian leader by using “special measures.” What else would these words indicate, rather than the alarming reminder about the threat of activation of the Brezhnev Doctrine?

We base our analysis on the assumption that, on the one hand, the Brezhnev Doctrine was an instrument of Soviet foreign policy vis-à-vis the Eastern Bloc – and on the other hand, it was a non-written, intuitively agreed instrument, regulating the Kremlin-Union republics’ relations. During the Gorbachev period, the doctrine was applied in its passive form in East Central Europe, and it never happened to be activated. On the other hand, in the case of Union republics, the Brezhnev Doctrine was also applied in the form of floating; however, it did was activated on several occasions, i.e., in Alma Ata (1986), Tbilisi (1989), Baku (1990), Dushanbe (1990), and Vilnius and Riga (1991).

## **2.4. The disputed Western promise of a no-NATO-enlargement**

There is a considerable scholarly and political debate over the issue, whether it is true that Western leaders during their 1989 and 1990 negotiations promised Gorbachev that if the USSR consented to Germany’s full membership in NATO, the alliance would not expand beyond the borders of the former GDR to the east. The dispute was activated in the late 1990s when it became clear that the Clinton administration was backing the idea to enlarge NATO borders to the former Soviet bloc territory. After the 1999 enlargement, it lost its bitterness; however, it acquired a new resentment by the 2004 enlargement and later after the 2008 Bucharest Summit, where Ukraine and Georgia were promised that they would become NATO members one day. This promise was ultimately followed by the Russo-Georgian 2008 War and a present-day war in Ukraine since 2014.

Former United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, in his interview, recorded by the journalists Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, argued that the United States’ officials promised Gorbachev back in 1990 that NATO will not expand eastward if Moscow agreed

to the unification of Germany (Beschloss and Talbott, 1993, pp. 185-186). In 1996, at the House Committee on International Relations hearing, former U.S. Ambassador Jack Matlock endorsed the same view (House Committee on I.R., 1996, p. 31). According to Kramer, Mikhail Gorbachev made similar assertions during 1996-1997 (Kramer, 2009, p. 39). Former Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin, who occupied the post in 1990, claimed the same (Gordon, 1997, p. E3). In 1998, a British analyst Michael MccGwire in his article in *Review of International Studies* argued that NATO's decision to invite Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to the alliance was contradicting with the Western assurances to Gorbachev, made back in 1990, about the no-NATO-enlargement to the East beyond the territory of the former GDR (MccGwire, 1998, pp. 26, 39). This article was re-published later in 2008, after the Russo-Georgian War, with the introduction of the Director of the Royal United Services Institute, Michael Clarke (MccGwire, 2008). In 2000, the Director of the Northeast Asia Cooperative Security Project at the Social Science Research Council, Leon V. Sigal, wrote that by expanding NATO to East Central Europe, the Clinton administration broke the pledge of U.S. officials given to Gorbachev back in 1990 (Sigal, 2000, p. 174). In September 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke at the Charlie Rose Show about the broken Western promise concerning no-NATO-enlargement. He argued that NATO's proposed admission of Ukraine and Georgia triggered Russia's reaction to defend its security interests in South Caucasus (Lavrov, 2008). Also, in September 2008, Hungarian-born American political scientist George Friedman stated the same argument (Friedman, G. 2008: 24). In 2014, Russian foreign policy thinker Alexander Lukin argued in his *Foreign Affairs* article that successive U.S. Presidents forgot their promises to the Kremlin during the German unification talks back in 1990 about not expanding NATO eastward (Lukin, 2014, p. 85). In the next issue of *Foreign Affairs*, American historian Mary Elise Sarotte wrote that although Gorbachev never got a written promise from the Western officials about freezing NATO's borders, there was a verbal promise that NATO would not expand to the east. The pledge entailed not only East Germany but also East Central Europe (Sarotte, 2014, p. 96).

We further clarified if the politicians listed above have reformulated their positions in their more recent appearances or publications. Mainly we were interested in the positions of Robert McNamara, Jack Matlock, and Mikhail Gorbachev. We found more up-to-date positions of Jack Matlock and Mikhail Gorbachev – both views were publicized in 2014.

Jack Matlock, in his 2014 post on his website, clarifies that the promises that had been made from U.S. party to Gorbachev during the 1989 Malta Summit, concerning the U.S. not “taking advantage” of changes in East Central Europe, concerned only Bush’s and Gorbachev’s leadership, and not their successors - these promises had no binding character.” I am sure that if Bush had been re-elected and Gorbachev had remained as president of the USSR, there would have been no NATO expansion during their terms in office,” notes Matlock (Matlock, 2014). He also argues that “all the discussions in 1990 regarding the expansion of NATO jurisdiction were in the context of what would happen to the territory of the GDR” only (Matlock, 2014). There were no formal assurances that had a binding character. However, even if there had been one, it might have quickly appeared to be a subject to *clausula rebus sic stantibus* (a clause in international conventions that provides for the unenforceability of a treaty due to fundamentally changed circumstances). “When the Soviet Union collapsed, the ‘circumstances’ of 1989 and 1990 changed radically,” notes Matlock (Matlock, 2014).

In his 2014 interview with *Russia Beyond* on the question concerning his position on the Western no-NATO-enlargement pledge, although Gorbachev remarked that Westerners violated “the spirit of the statements and assurances made [...] in 1990,” he further noted that the official pledge concerned the former GDR territory only, which is followed today. “So do not portray Gorbachev and the then-Soviet authorities as naïve people who were wrapped around the West’s finger,” he remarked to a journalist (Russia Beyond, 2014). He expresses the same view in his 2006 published memoirs (available in Russian only) - *Understanding Perestroika. Why It Is Important Now*. Unlike his 1996-1997 rather vague statement, where he generally stated that Westerners pledged not to expand NATO eastward, here Gorbachev clarified for the first time that the pledge on halting eastward expansion of NATO concerned the former GDR territory only. For more clarity, please find the bilingual excerpt of the entire paragraph below (Gorbachev talks here about his meeting with Baker on 9 February 1990):

“Бейкер тут же тожественно заявил мне, что - цитирую по стенограмме – ‘не произойдет распространения юрисдикции и военного присутствия НАТО ни на один дюйм в восточном направлении... Мы считаем, что консультации и обсуждения в рамках механизма "2+4" должны дать гарантии, что объединение Германии не приведет к распросртанению



военной организации НАТО на Восток.’ Это понимание было зафиксировано в договоре об окончательном урегулировании в отношении Германии.”

[“Baker immediately festively declared to me that - I quote from the transcript – ‘there will not be a one-inch eastward expansion of jurisdiction or military presence of NATO ... We believe that consultations and discussions under the “2 + 4” mechanism should guarantee that the unification of Germany will not lead to the expansion of NATO’s military organization to the East.’ This understanding was recorded in the German Final Settlement Treaty”] (Gorbachev, 2006: 246).

Even though Gorbachev’s position seems evident in the above-cited paragraph, he aired something different in his 2008 interview with *The Daily Telegraph*. “The Americans promised that NATO would not move beyond the boundaries of Germany after the Cold War, but now half of Eastern Europe are members, so what happened to their promises? It shows they cannot be trusted” (Daily Telegraph, 2008). Perhaps Gorbachev meant here that Americans broke “the spirit of the statements and assurances made [...] in 1990,” but apparently, it is not easy to grasp Gorbachev’s clear position on this matter - perhaps due to the *managed ambiguity* in his discourse. Nevertheless, in his most recent comment in 2014, he endorses the view that all formal assurances have been candidly followed (Russia Beyond, 2014).

Chernyaev and Galkin – the editors of the Gorbachev Foundation’s volume on the German question, in their editorial, wrote that unlike Chancellor Kohl, who “transferred his approach to the USSR to Russia,” some former partners humiliated themselves “with the diplomatic ‘memory loss’” (Galkin and Chernyaev, 2006, p. xxii). We think that the editors’ complaint here about the diplomatic dishonesty concerns the violation of “the spirit of the statements and assurances made [...] in 1990.” As former CIA Director Robert Gates noted in his Miller Center interview (in 2000) as part of the George H.W. Bush oral history project, “Gorbachev and others were led to believe” that NATO’s eastward expansion would not happen (Gates, 2000, p. 101). Most likely, this is the most accurate statement that had been made concerning the debate.

U.S. President George Bush Sr. and his staffers: Secretary of State – James Baker, National Security Advisor – Brent Scowcroft, and Phillip Zelikow - senior official on the National Security Council (NSC) staff responsible for German reunification issues, maintain that there was no commitment at all from the U.S. about NATO future expansion plans in East Central Europe. Bush and Scowcroft argue that the topic did not even come up during the German question negotiations with Moscow (Bush and Scowcroft, 1998, pp. 236-242); James Baker argues the same in his memoirs (Baker and DeFrank, 1995, pp. 234-235). Phillip Zelikow wrote that the only commitments which the U.S. party took during the German question negotiations with Gorbachev were enclosed in the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, signed in September 1990 (Zelikow, 1995, p. 5). From the above posed three, Zelikow's statement seems most accurate.

The Director of the Cold War studies program at Harvard University, Mark Kramer, dedicated a separate article to the issue in *The Washington Quarterly* in 2009. Titled *the myth of no-NATO-enlargement pledge to Russia*, the article presents Kramer's analysis of the dispute. He generally supports Zelikow's argument above and argues that the misunderstanding mainly concerns the divergent interpretations of the notion - "expansion to the east.". Basing his analysis on primary documents, Kramer maintains that when Baker pledged Gorbachev during their 9 February 1990 talk that "there will not be a one-inch eastward expansion of NATO jurisdiction" (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 615), both parties knew that the talk was on East Germany only and not the East Central European countries beyond. "It would never have occurred to them to raise an issue that was not on the agenda anywhere, not in Washington, not in Moscow, and not in any other Warsaw Pact or NATO capital," notes Kramer (Kramer, 2009, p. 48). Accordingly, the only pledge Baker was offering Gorbachev pertained to Eastern Germany only. Kramer also clarifies Kohl's vague statement during his 10 February 1990 meeting with Gorbachev – "NATO could not extend the sphere of its activity" (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 618). As he notes, although the Soviet stenogram of the dialogue is rather vague, in the West German version, the context of "NATO's extension" is clear: "Kohl: naturally, NATO must not extend its sphere to the territory of today's GDR" (Küsters and Hofmann, 1998, p. 59). Respectively, both pledges from Baker and Kohl concerned the former GDR territory only, and this notion was enshrined in September 1990 treaty on Germany.

The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany signed on 12 September 1990 in Moscow by Four Powers, the FRG, and the GDR included two major commitments from the Soviet and the Western parties: 1. according to Article 4, the Soviet troops stationed on the former GDR territory, were to be fully withdrawn by the end of 1994, and 2. Article 5 indicated that following the Soviet troops' withdrawal, only the Bundeswehr troops (including NATO integrated units) were allowed on this territory - deployment of foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons was not allowed, respectively (Torkunov et al., 2020, p. 353). All legally enshrined commitments in this Treaty are candidly observed today. There are no foreign NATO troops, but only Bundeswehr troops stationed on the territory of the former GDR (Zeit, 2020).

Although Gorbachev confirms that the Western pledge of a no-NATO-enlargement concerned East Germany only, Russian officials interpret the 9-10 February Baker and Kohl assurances to Gorbachev differently - literally. Reasons for this kind of approach are understandable; however, it should be noted that this kind of literal interpretation is inaccurate.

Although we agree with Kramer's main argument about the context of the notion of "expansion to the east," we find it questionable that one of the main reasons why the Soviets did not raise the issue of NATO's enlargement beyond East Germany was the fact that Gorbachev "was not yet even thinking about the possibility that, at some point in the future, several other East European countries might seek to join NATO" (Kramer, 2009, p. 51). Questionable is also Kramer's other statement that by February 1990, "it never would have occurred to [any Western leader]" to raise the issue of NATO's enlargement to any other East Central European country (Kramer, 2009, p. 48).

We clarified that the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher mentioned during his 6 February 1990 meeting with the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Douglas Hurd that Gorbachev was not ruling out the risk of NATO's expansion beyond the East German territory. NSA's digital repository of primary documents contains the 6 February 1990 letter of Douglas Hurd to the British Ambassador in Bonn - Sir Christopher Mallaby, informing him about his 6 February talk with the German Foreign Minister. Hurd informs: "Genscher added that when he talked about not wanting to extend

NATO that applied to other states besides the GDR. The Russians must have some assurances that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next” (Telegraphic, 1990, p. 262). It is not surprising that Genscher was voicing the interests of Gorbachev – according to Ammon, by May 1990, Genscher was promoting the concept of German neutrality, similarly to Gorbachev (Ammon, 2019, p. 33). Sarotte also refers to this conversation in her 2014 *Foreign Affairs* article and notes that Hurd immediately agreed to the above-cited Genscher’s statement (Sarotte, 2014, p. 92). The part of Sarotte’s argument, which we cannot confirm after reviewing the above-cited letter, is her statement that when Genscher spoke about a possible extension of NATO to other Warsaw Pact member countries besides the GDR, he mentioned Hungary (Sarotte, 2014, p. 92). It should be considered that Sarotte used West German primary sources, and we are using British sources - there is a possibility that these two differ. It is more likely that Genscher spoke about Poland rather than Hungary, and here is why: at the 26 January 1990 inner circle meeting about the German question in the Kremlin, Gorbachev noted that from the Eastern Bloc countries, the GDR and Poland were the “special cases.” “Economically, politically and historically Poland does not depend on us [the USSR].” Therefore, it is a special case, although “the relations between Polish people and us are not worsened,” Gorbachev noted (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 193). From that perspective, we think that the British version of the Genscher-Hurd meeting document is more accurate than the version Sarotte used. It is also possible that Sarotte has made a simple technical mistake.

Nevertheless, from the above-cited document, it is clear that contrary to Kramer’s argument, West German and British leaders had discussed the issue that Moscow was beware of NATO’s enlargement to East Central Europe besides the former GDR; also, Gorbachev, by January 1990, thought about the possibility that, at some point in the future, Poland might seek to join NATO. At the same 26 January inner circle meeting, Gorbachev remarked: “there was a Brest peace N1, now we are in the situation of the Brest peace N2. - If we do not cope with it [...], half of our country will be taken away from us again” (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 192). From the above-cited excerpt, it is clear that Gorbachev’s strategy was to save the USSR from the Brest Peace N1 scenario by accepting a compromise on the GDR and potentially on Poland too. Therefore, by no means was Gorbachev not beware of NATO’s possible future expansion further eastward.

According to the editors of the National Security Archive briefing book *NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard* - Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, the declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British and French documents show “that discussions of NATO in the context of German reunification negotiations in 1990 were not at all narrowly limited to the status of East German territory,” and this is manifested “in written contemporaneous memcons and telcons at the highest levels” (Savranskaya and Blanton, 2017). Savranskaya and Blanton present the collection of these documents in their briefing book, which proves that the highest-level Western officials, such as Genscher, Kohl, Baker, Gates, Bush, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Major, Wörner, and others discussed East Central European membership in NATO in early 1990 and through 1991. i.e., in *U.S. Embassy Bonn Confidential Cable to Secretary of State on the speech of the German Foreign Minister*, it is noted that NATO should rule out “expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e., moving it closer to the Soviet borders” (Cable, 1990b). Why would anyone insist on ruling out an option if there is no chance that this option becomes implemented? Savranskaya and Blanton note that the documents presented in their briefing book strengthen the view of former CIA Director Robert Gates, who in his Miller Center interview (in 2000) as part of the George H.W. Bush oral history project, notes that “Gorbachev and others were led to believe” that NATO’s eastward expansion would not happen (Gates, 2000, p. 101).

The Western leadership, so as the Soviets, considered and discussed the scenario on NATO’s enlargement in East Central Europe beyond the borders of the former GDR, and the credibility of this argument can be quickly confirmed by reviewing the declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British and French documents presented in NSA’s briefing book edited by Savranskaya and Blanton. There was a cascade of verbal assurances from the Western officials to Gorbachev’s leadership that if the Kremlin agreed to the settlement of German reunification and its membership to NATO the way it was enshrined in the subsequent German Treaty, NATO’s expansion to the East, beyond the former GDR territory was not going to happen. However, these assurances had no binding character, and they were limited to the particular leaderships involved in these negotiations. As Gorbachev noted concerning the Berlin Wall at the 15 June 1989 press conference in Bonn, “nothing under the moon is eternal. [...] The wall can disappear as soon as the conditions that gave birth to it no longer exist. I do not see a big problem here” (Gorbachev, 2010a, pp. 505-506). In that context, not

only the verbal assurances in conversations were supposed to be eternal, but the formal treaties, too – if the *clausula rebus sic stantibus* applied, and no doubt that Gorbachev was well aware of this kind of scenario.

What is a rather interesting puzzle for us is understanding why Gorbachev and his associates in the Kremlin never insisted during the German question negotiations, or some time afterward, to achieve an agreement with the West on no-NATO-expansion to the East, beyond the former GDR. i.e., during the Malta summit, as Zubok remarks, “Gorbachev [...] did not even try to elicit any specific agreements and promises from Bush. [...] He was satisfied with Bush’s assurances that he would not ‘dance on the Berlin Wall’ and not ‘jump-start’ the process of German reunification” (Zubok, 2007, p. 329). Firstly, there always will be enough basis to argue that Gorbachev’s leadership made a miscalculation. However, by our understanding, this is a somewhat simplistic explanation. To answer the question more competently, one should consider the context of Gorbachev’s team’s situation. Gorbachev’s domestic problems in the USSR were legion: the economy was collapsing, nationalism was at its peak, inter-ethnic conflicts existed at several spots, and Gorbachev’s popularity was declining. Although Gorbachev’s reforms had many supporters initially, once it became evident that the path to a successful implementation of perestroika was laid through high inflation and unemployment, the Kremlin’s legitimacy declined. Accordingly, the only path to Soviet survival and the Gorbachev leadership’s survival laid through the prompt recovery of the Soviet economy – in other words, Soviets needed budget investments derived from extensive credits, and they needed these investments as soon as possible. That is why the scenario of “bribing the Soviets out of Germany,” noted by Gates (Gates, 1995, p. 492), turned out to be efficient. Everyone knew that Mr. Gorbachev had a chronic harsh crisis at home, and he needed substantial foreign credits as soon as possible.

The credibility of the “bribing the Soviet out of Germany” argument can be further solidified by the following excerpt from the memorandum of conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush during their meeting at Camp David on 24 February 1990: “Kohl: Soviets will want to get something in return [if they accept reunited Germany in NATO]; Bush: you have got deep pockets” (Memorandum, 1990, p. 10). In this conversation, President Bush presented an image different from the one created by his policy of “prudence” vis-à-vis East

Central Europe and the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> On the remark of the West German Chancellor that Soviets were negotiating, but this was probably going to “end up as a matter of cash,” Bush reacted: “What worries me is talk that Germany must not stay in NATO. To hell with that. We prevailed, and they did not. We cannot let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat” (Memorandum, 1990, p. 9). We think it is hardly possible to find a more efficient demonstration of the fact that Gorbachev’s leadership was defeated in the diplomatic “war” against the Westerners, rather than the above-cited excerpt from the Bush-Kohl memcon.

In his memoirs, Gorbachev notes that he is often asked whether the Soviets made a miscalculation when they did not insist on making it binding not to allow the expansion of NATO to the east beyond the former GDR. “If our demand for the territory of the GDR was absolutely appropriate and correct, then putting forward a demand for non-expansion of NATO to the east at that time would have been simply stupid since NATO and the Warsaw Pact existed,” notes Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 246). Accordingly, the preservation of the Gorbachev leadership in the Kremlin, alongside the preservation of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, was the only guarantee that might have ensured freezing NATO’s further expansion beyond the former GDR. “I am sure, and no one can prove the opposite that if the Soviet Union had been preserved, and therefore the relations that had already developed between the USSR and the United States, there would have been no NATO expansion,” Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs (Gorbachev, 2006, pp. 246-247). Was Gorbachev’s approach optimistic enough by late 1990 that it counted that all preconditions of halting NATO’s expansion were going to remain intact at least during the years to come? We do not think that a person, having such massive experience in international relations, could have been that overoptimistic. Most likely, he had no other choice but to bid “All-in” on this optimism, even though he was not sure of achieving a congenial outcome. This kind of setting still preserved some chances for the Gorbachev leadership to maintain power in the Kremlin – if he remained in power and the USSR averted the collapse, there still was a chance to work on Gorbachev’s idea of *Common European Home* and to transform the two military alliances ultimately – NATO and the Warsaw Pact into one universal European security system. At

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<sup>6</sup> For the better understanding of President Bush’s policy of “prudence,” please see: Beth A. Fischer, “US foreign policy under Reagan and Bush” p. 282, in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol 3, Cambridge University Press: 2010.

this particular moment, Gorbachev was overtaken by history. However, we are convinced that sometime in the future, the idea of collective European security will prevail, and most likely, Mikhail Gorbachev will be considered one of its' forefathers.



## **CHAPTER 3: PHASES OF THE KREMLIN'S RETREAT FROM ITS WESTERN PERIPHERIES**

We identified four main phases of the Kremlin's retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. The whole process took place from March 1985 until September 1991. This four-phase divided period illustrates the sequential decrease of the Kremlin's interference in the domestic affairs of the respected states and recognition of their sovereignty. These phases are the following: 1. verbal recognition phase; 2. *de-facto* recognition phase; 3. *de-jure* recognition of German reunification; and 4. *de-jure* recognition of the Baltic republics.

### **3.1. Verbal recognition phase**

The *verbal recognition phase* started from March 1985 and lasted until August-September 1989, when the one-party rule finally ended, and the non-communist government was elected in Poland. The Kremlin's tranquil reaction to the Polish developments clearly showed that Gorbachev's verbal assurances concerning the non-interference were more than generous words.

In general, Gorbachev's speeches that bore the elements of Soviet foreign policy liberalization were based on *new thinking*. Gorbachev notes that the most significant official speeches in this context were the following: communiqué on meetings with President Reagan in Geneva; communiqué on meetings with President Mitterrand in Paris, during Fall 1985; statement by the Secretary-General of the CPSU Central Committee on 15 January 1986; report at the XXVIIIth Congress of the CPSU; speech in Tolyatti in April 1986; the book "Perestroika and new thinking for our country and the whole world" (published in the fall of 1987); speech during a visit to Washington (December 1987); report at a XIXth party conference in June-July 1988; speech at the U.N. General Assembly in December 1988; speech at Guildhall in London in April 1989; speech in Washington D.C. on 31 May 1990; speech in Sorbonne on 5 July 1989; speech at the Pan-European Meeting in Paris in November 1990; Nobel lecture in Oslo in June 1991 (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 36).

It is not surprising that the reliability of Gorbachev's new thinking philosophy was not very promising in the beginning. Even if the audience took for granted that Gorbachev was honest in his new philosophy, the convertibility of this concept into reality was questionable. After all, Gorbachev's new team was comprised not only of liberals such as Yakovlev or Shevardnadze but of conservatives, such as Ryzhkov or Ligachev. In his memoirs, Gorbachev remarks that the East Central European leaders were questioning the reliability of *new thinking*. He notes that as early as the funeral of Chernenko (10 March 1985), he informed the Eastern Bloc leaders that the Kremlin was going to transform Kremlin-Eastern Bloc relations radically and liberalize it; however, they were not convinced (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 70). In an interview with the Spanish daily "El País" on 26 October 1990, during his visit to Madrid, Gorbachev mentioned that the Kremlin had announced the non-interventionist policy in the internal affairs of East Central Europe five years' prior (Gorbachev, 2013a, p. 305). These assurances about non-interventionism were made in private meetings and letters, also in interviews with the media. i.e., in an interview with Pravda on 7 April 1985, Gorbachev noted that while building the Kremlin's foreign policy, it was incremental not to violate the sovereign rights of other states and consider their state interests (Gorbachev, 2008a, p. 169). For illustrating another example, Gorbachev's address to the people of France through the French television "TF1" on 30 September 1985 can serve well – in his address Gorbachev declared that the primary basis for the construction of the Kremlin's foreign affairs should be the respect for the sovereign rights of other states (Gorbachev, 2008a, p. 541).

The turning point speech, since when Gorbachev's discourse acquired more credence, was delivered in June 1988, at the XIXth All-Union Conference of the CPSU. At this conference, Gorbachev officially stated: "without any preliminary theoretical elaboration [...] that any nation had the right to choose its own social-economic system" (Békés, 2002, p. 242). Brown also notes that this speech indicated a crucial shift in Soviet policy. Gorbachev declared: "the concept of freedom of choice holds a key place in the new thinking. We are convinced of the universality of this principle in international relations at a time when the most important general problem has become the very survival of civilization [...] That is why the policy of force in all its forms and manifestations has become historically obsolete" (Gorbachev, 2009b, pp. 151-152). Gorbachev's discourse in his speech at the U.N. General Assembly in

December 1988 to a significant extent was similar (Brown, 2010: 253), and according to George Schulz, quoted by Palazchenko, “if anybody declared the end of the Cold War, he did in that speech” (Palachenko, 1997, p. 370).

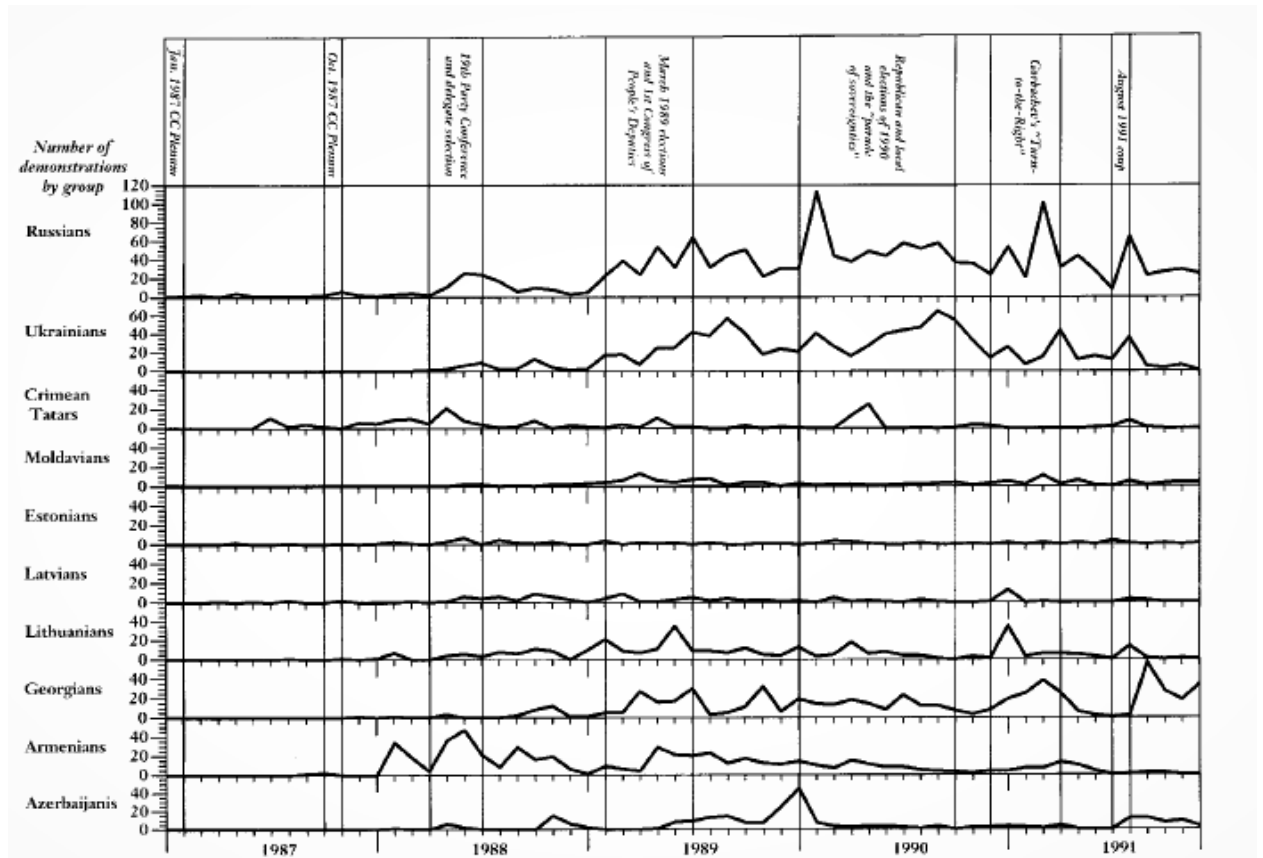
The June 1988 speech was when the Soviet leader’s assurances about widening the limits of the Kremlin’s tolerance started to sound more convincing. Shortly, on 7 July 1988, at the meeting with the Defense Ministers of the Warsaw Pact, Gorbachev mentioned that each Warsaw Pact country was responsible for their internal affairs (Gorbachev, 2009b, p. 270). It is worth mentioning that a few weeks earlier before the XIXth All-Union Conference, in his interview with the newspapers “Washington Post” and “Newsweek” on 18 May 1988, on the question of the editor of *Washington Post* - Meg Greenfield – could the 1956 and the 1968 scenario happen again? – Gorbachev unambiguously declared that this scenario was out of the table (Gorbachev, 2009a, p. 613).

Jacques Lévesque notes (quoted by Békés) that three main reasons stimulated Gorbachev’s decision to declare the unambiguous statement in his June 1988 speech cited above. Firstly, he aimed to demonstrate to the West that his assurances concerning the liberalization of foreign relations vis-à-vis all sovereign states were genuine. Secondly, he wanted to prepare the Soviet nomenclature for the upcoming radical changes, and thirdly, this was a visible warning to the communist leaders of Eastern Bloc that in case of future domestic crisis, the Kremlin would not have backed them, as a “big brother” (Békés, 2002, p. 246).

Gorbachev’s other important unambiguous statement on the Brezhnev Doctrine’s denunciation was made on 6 July 1989, in his address to the Council of Europe. “Any interference in internal affairs, any attempts to limit the sovereignty of states — whether of friends and allies or anybody else — are inadmissible,” he commented (Gorbachev, 2010b, p. 158). Lévesque qualified this speech as “a most explicit repudiation of the Brezhnev Doctrine” by Gorbachev (Levesque, 2010, p. 318).

As Brown notes, Gorbachev does not mean the Soviet states, when he declared each people’s ‘right to choose,’ but instead he had in mind existing states and “his doctrine of liberation was not intended to lead to separatism in the USSR” (Brown, 2006, p. 346). It is difficult not to agree with this statement – Gorbachev could not have intentionally signaled the dissolution of the state’s territorial integrity, which he was trying to save.

Table 1: Periods of significant institutional change and protest mobilization among ten major nationalities of the USSR, 1987-91



Source: Beissinger, Mark R. 2002. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.84.

The reason what makes us assume that Gorbachev's liberalization discourse was solely aimed at the Kremlin's allies in East Central Europe is the following: once the Baltic republics and Georgia raised secessionist demands, at the Politburo meeting held on 11 May 1989, Gorbachev noted that national intelligentsias were digging into the past, what triggered a process of re-evaluation of the meaning of "sovereignty" in public (Gorbachev, 2010a, p. 518). According to these words and the time context of their delivery, we can conclude that there were two controversial concepts of sovereignty in the Union republics, the one tolerated by the Kremlin (non-secessionist by its character), and another one - not tolerated by the Kremlin (secessionist by its character). Gorbachev was tolerating the changes in East Central Europe, and the concept of sovereignty applied there. However, his leadership was absolutely

against supporting the same scenario in the USSR, where the Union republics should have followed another concept of sovereignty – non-secessionist by its character.

Alongside the consolidation of the liberalization discourse in the Kremlin, the protest mobilizations among the USSR's major nationalities were escalating. According to Beissinger's data, the inception phase of the significant institutional changes and protest mobilizations among ten major nationalities of the USSR starts during 1988 April-July, the period of the XIXth Party Conference and delegate selection (see Table 1). Table 1 shows that Gorbachev's official statement at the XIXth All-Union Conference of the CPSU had a significant effect on Moscow-Eastern Bloc relations and the internal politics of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's liberalization discourse, which was solely aimed at the Kremlin's allies in East Central Europe, was perceived as a "green light" for the secessionist groups inside the Soviet Union and stimulated subsequent civil resistance campaigns. More precisely, Gorbachev's June 1988 speech was perceived by the groups with secessionist ambitions in the USSR as an indication of the Kremlin's weakness, which equipped them with significant stimuli.

The dynamics depicted above shed light on the complexity and, to some extent, contradictory character of the USSR's democratization task. As the most prominent Georgian philosopher, Merab Mamardashvili noted about *glasnost* in his lecture on nationalism and post-totalitarian society delivered in Paris in 1988, the "[demolition of] phantom-like forms of totalitarian discourse [...] paves the way to the new life, to the real-life, with its natural diversity and complexity" (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 244). During this lecture, he noted: "The whole process [of transformation] takes place alongside the uncertainty of a post-totalitarian society, where seemingly neutralized and blocked totalitarian structures still exist in the social and mental space" (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 245). Gorbachev was attempting to end the "monolithic unity" of the country and risked the "era of schism," and it was not surprising that severe consequences followed (Cohen, 2009, p. 30). According to Mamardashvili, the fundamental reason behind the radicalization of inter-ethnic conflicts in the USSR was that the main foundation of the national identity, which was constructed during Stalinism, disappeared alongside the introduction of *glasnost* (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 255).

*Glasnost* aimed at transparency and pluralization of the political and public space. Therefore, the new pluralistic discourse it created was contradicting the nationalist narratives engineered during Stalinism that advocated for the justness of hierarchical violence, which was, on its behalf, inscribed in the administrative division of the USSR. Another prominent Georgian philosopher, Giorgi Maisuradze, argues that the radical shift in Soviet nationality politics during the 1930s, when the Stalinist regime started the (re)creation of national symbols for all Soviet nationalities, paved the way to the establishment of a new historical narrative ‘national in form and socialist in content.’ Consequently, all the radical ideas that suddenly turned up on the political scene in the USSR at the end of the 1980s had roots in Stalinist nationalism (Maisuradze, 2019, pp. 80-81).

### **3.2. De-facto recognition phase**

The second phase of the liberalization of Soviet relations is referred to as the *de-facto recognition phase*. At this stage, factual evidence existed that the Kremlin did not aim to intervene in the domestic affairs of its allies. According to Gorbachev, the general motive behind this policy was the “creation of favorable international environment [...] and easing the pressure of [international] problems.” As he wrote, the Soviet leadership understood that the content and nature of relations between the USSR and the socialist countries was a litmus test for assessing the Kremlin’s intentions in the West. Had the Kremlin not abandoned its imperial politics in East Central Europe, the Western leadership would not have been persuaded in the USSR’s peaceful intentions. Accordingly, Gorbachev could not have counted on their political and financial support (Gorbachev, 2006, pp. 29-33). On the other hand, by Gorbachev’s understanding, any single attempt to intervene militarily in East Central Europe would have placed the Soviet Union on the brink of military conflict with NATO (Gorbachev, 2012, p. 379).

The Kremlin’s *de-facto* retreat phase from East Central Europe started from August-September 1989, when the revolution was complete in Poland and was completed by the end of December 1989, when the Nicolae Ceaușescu’s rule in Romania collapsed. In these developments, the non-interference of the Soviet Union was clear evidence that Gorbachev

did was honest in his verbal assurances. Since August 1989, *de facto* evidence existed that the Brezhnev Doctrine became obsolete in the Kremlin.

What would have been a more evident manifestation of the Kremlin keeping its promises than the peaceful and festive fall of the symbolic and tangible confirmation of the East-West division – the Berlin Wall? Although the fall of the Berlin Wall was a confirmation that the Kremlin gave up the Cold War’s primary battle, by no means it meant that the Kremlin was unaware of the risks it was taking. In early December 1989, at the meeting with the West German Foreign Minister Genscher, Gorbachev referred to the Kohl’s ten-point plan as a diktat, as he was aware of how the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany would catalyze the escalation of the Soviet crisis in East Central Europe. In contrast, he assured his associates in the Kremlin as early as January 1990 that the giving up of GDR and Poland was a special case.<sup>7</sup> According to Gorbachev, this scenario would not be spread to Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary - “they will not be able to go far,” he mentioned (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 192).

What is clear now is that Gorbachev did not have many options by then. Besides, we should note that the decision to give up the Kremlin’s control over East Central Europe was politically motivated and had economic roots. As Gorbachev notes, “huge resources went to support the socialist camp. The CMEA countries received from [the USSR] 17 billion-worth foreign exchange goods, and [the USSR] from them – good worth of 3.5 - 4 billion” (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 33). Accordingly, the liberalization of the Kremlin’s politics vis-à-vis its East Central European allies, to some extent, meant a massive relief for the eroding Soviet budget and economy.<sup>8</sup>

Right after the completion of the revolutions in East Central Europe, the parade of sovereignties unfolded in the USSR. Beissinger highlights the importance of the “republican

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, one and a half years later, when the Kremlin decided to recognize the independence of the Baltic republics, Gorbachev similarly mentioned that the recognition of the Baltic independence was a special case, and it was limited only to the Baltic republics.

<sup>8</sup> For the better illustration of the situation Gorbachev’s team was experiencing, one Georgian proverb comes into my mind: “it’s better to get involved in a difficult situation voluntarily, rather than to get dragged into it forcefully.” In original, this proverb consists of three words only - ჩათრევას ჩაყოლა სჯობიაო [‘chatrevas chakhola sjobiao’]. We think that this principle inspired Gorbachev’s *modus operandi* while accepting concessions in East Central Europe and the Baltic republics.

and local elections of 1990” as one of the crucial periods of significant institutional change and protests mobilization in the Soviet Union - it started from January 1990 and lasting until November 1990 (see Table 1). We cannot deny that one of the factors that had a direct influence here was the “snowballing effect” of East Central Europe’s 1989 revolutions. Petrescu argues that the “snowballing effect” was one of the determinant factors in creating the 1989 chain of revolutions (Petrescu, 2014, p. 31). The “snowballing effect” from Poland to the rest of the Eastern Bloc was later spread to the Soviet republics, located on its western frontiers, which created one of the central stimuli for the processes of the demise of the Soviet Union. This thesis is in accordance with Kenez’s argument, who argues that the infection of dissolution in the Soviet Union came from East Central Europe (Kenez, 2006, p. 263).

### **3.3. De-jure recognition of German reunification**

The fates of East Central European states were settled after the 1989 revolutions, but the German question remained open. Toleration of German reunification was an uneasy process for the Kremlin, as it not only supposed the reunification of the nation but the integration of the former GDR’s territory into NATO.

In his address to the inner circle meeting on the German question (26 January 1990), Gorbachev was trying to assure participants that reunifying German membership to NATO was not realistic, “no one should count on this,” he said. “The presence of our troops there would not allow it. We will withdraw our troops, only when Americans do the same – and they are not going to do it for a long time [...] These years are at our disposal [...] Let us use them wisely,” he mentioned (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 192).

Four months later, during his meeting with U.S. State Secretary Baker on 18-19 May 1990 in Moscow, Gorbachev remarked that the Kremlin’s support for unified German membership in NATO was impossible, as it would inflame his domestic foes and kill perestroika. In May 1990, the Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze demanded a lengthy probation period for the German reunification (Haftendorn, 2010, p. 347). The Kremlin needed more time to finalize its domestic reforms, and the reunification of Germany would have meant nothing but a huge burden to this process. The Kremlin was not alone in these fears – the British PM



Margaret Thatcher also had skeptical expectations concerning the harmful effects of German unification on Gorbachev's perestroika. She warned her partners in Western capitals on the risks of opening a Pandora's Box of border claims through central Europe (Thatcher, 1993, pp. 794-797). The President of France, Francois Mitterrand, was another European leader supporting the preservation of the *status quo* in Europe. In December 1989, he flew to Kyiv to persuade Gorbachev in averting the German unification by the Kremlin's support for the new East German government (Ammon, 2019, p. 33).

Gorbachev's number one scenario for the German question was the German military neutrality (Haftendorn, 2010, p. 344). Shevardnadze notes that the Kremlin's initial firm stance on German neutrality "prompted Western countries to dynamize the process of NATO transformation" (Shevardnadze, 1991b, pp. 234-235). According to Ammon, in the early phase of the 2+4 negotiations, in May 1990, the FRG's Foreign Minister Genscher also voiced the same idea (Ammon, 2019, p. 33). Due to this reason, many suspected Genscher of being tempted to pursue an *Ostpolitik* (like former Chancellor Willy Brandt), which was not much different from the idea of unified neutral Germany. Besides, Genscher was a politician delivering the first Western assurances on German reunification to Soviets in his major public speech at Tutzing on 31 January 1990. Genscher declared that the changes in East Central Europe and the German unification process must not lead to the "impairment of Soviet security interests." Therefore, NATO should rule out an "expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e., moving it closer to the Soviet borders" (Savranskaya and Blanton, 2017).

The German-Soviet negotiations, where major documents on German reunification were agreed, took place on 15-16 July 1990, firstly in Moscow and later in Arkhyz, North Caucasus. The parties agreed that the reunified Germany could become a member of NATO (if the German people decides to do so); however, the Soviet troops would remain on the former GDR territory with an orientation time of 3-4 years. Meanwhile, only the German Bundeswehr detachments (not integrated into NATO) were to be stationed there alongside the Soviet troops. After the end of the transitional period, no foreign troops were to be

allowed on this territory, and no nuclear weapons either (Galkin or Chernyaev, 2006).<sup>9</sup> On the joint press conference, Kohl commented that no NATO troops would be stationed on the former GDR territory until the Soviet troops are withdrawn (Galkin and Chernyaev, 2006, p. 527). On his behalf, Gorbachev highlighted: “We are expecting that after our troops are systematically withdrawn within a certain period, on a territory that will naturally fall completely under the sovereignty of a reunited Germany, nuclear weapons and the foreign troops would not appear” (Galkin and Chernyaev, 2006, p. 530).

The Soviet Union had no other option but to accept Germany’s ongoing process – it was better for Gorbachev to accept this scenario voluntarily because the process was irreversible. Accordingly, it would have happened anyway with or without the Kremlin’s support. According to Westad, “as [the Kremlin’s] economic needs grew, especially for trade and credits, [Gorbachev’s] priorities began to shift” (Westad, 2017, p. 547). What Gorbachev needed was accepting the concession by saving face. As Haftendorn notes, to make the concessions easier for the Soviets, Gorbachev was promised economic aid from Bonn at an overall sum of DM 12 billion and an interest-free loan of DM 3 billion. On the other hand, Americans promised to sign a bilateral grain and trade agreement and, additionally, to speed up the ongoing START talks (Haftendorn 2010, p. 350).

The American and German parties undertook strenuous diplomatic efforts to prepare the Soviets for further concessions. As a result, the foreign ministers of 2+4 nations signed the final settlement regarding Germany on 12 September 1990, which went into effect on 1 October.

There is a scholarly debate over the issue, whether it is true that Western leaders during the 1990 negotiations of the German question promised Gorbachev that NATO would not expand beyond the borders of the former GDR. As we clarified above, the only binding assurances the Western leadership gave Gorbachev during the German question negotiations were enclosed in the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany. When Baker and Kohl pledged Gorbachev during their 9-10 February 1990 talks that NATO’s jurisdiction

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<sup>9</sup> For further details, please see the stenographic records of Gorbachev and Kohl meetings on 15-16 July 1990 and their joint press-conference afterwards in: Galkin, A. – Chernyaev, A. (eds.): Mikhail Gorbachev and the German Question: Collection of documents, 1986-1991, Gorbachev Foundation, Ves Mir, Moscow, 2006, pp.495-530 (published in Russian).

would not move eastward, all parties knew that the pledge only applied to the former GDR territory. What was violated by the Americans was the general spirit of these assurances – they pledged that NATO’s expansion was not going to harm the Kremlin’s security interests in the future. These assurances concerned President Bush and President Gorbachev and their respected leaderships only, and Russian officials’ general claims today that Americans broke their promises are broadly inaccurate.

### **3.4. De-jure recognition of the Baltic republics**

Gorbachev was trying hard to convince the public that the Kremlin’s politics in East Central Europe strengthened Soviet security (Gorbachev 2012, p. 379). However, the Kremlin’s generous concessions in East Central Europe were taken to signify its weakness by the local national fronts in the Union republics. As President Putin recalled later about his experience while serving as a KGB officer in East Germany in 1989, he returned to Moscow with full bitterness at how “the Soviet Union had lost its position in Europe” (Sarotte, 2014, p. 97). Soviet officials were not the only ones who clearly understood that the Soviet concessions in East Central Europe meant nothing but that the Kremlin’s power consolidation was on one of its all-time lowest levels. The opportunity window was open - now was the time to dare and check the limits of the Kremlin’s tolerance inside the USSR.

As we can see from Beissinger’s data (see Table 1), at least five major nationalities of the Soviet Union (Russians, Georgians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Moldovans) experienced the peaks of their institutional changes and protest mobilizations after October 1990.

At the meeting of the State Committee of the Soviet Union on 6 September 1991, Gorbachev noted that the recognition of the Baltic republics was not a precedent to follow for others, as this decision was solely limited to the former League of Nations’ member republics only – practically the Baltic republics (Gorbachev, 2018, pp. 101-104). As it was mentioned in the declaration by the Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin on 6 September 1991, the USSR recognized the independence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, based on “consideration of the special historical and political circumstances that accompanied the process of their unification with the Soviet Union” (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 553).

One of the critical factors why the Kremlin decided to recognize the Baltic states was Western diplomatic pressure. The majority of the Western states, including the USA, Canada, the UK, France, the FRG, Italy, Australia, etc. never *de-jure* recognized the annexation of Baltics by the Soviet Union; the USA, Ireland, and the Holy See, explicitly did not recognize the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, neither *de jure* nor *de facto*. This principled position was several times highlighted by the Western leaders in their talks with Gorbachev. i.e., during Gorbachev-Major meeting in Moscow - on 5 March 1991, Major explicitly noted that politically the situation in the Baltic states was causing difficulties for the U.K. for two reasons: “firstly,” mentioned Major, “we never recognized and will not recognize the inclusion of the Baltic states in the Soviet Union. Secondly, we support the Baltic aspirations for independence.” The British PM expressed his hope for settlement of the issue through negotiations (Gorbachev, 2014, p. 515).

What was another, and by our understanding, the main reason for the Kremlin’s acceptance of recognition of the Baltic republics’ independence was the total failure of the Soviet economy and a promise of generous help from the West. The price to pay for this financial help was a Soviet concession in the Baltic region. As Gorbachev recalls, during his visit to the United States in June 1990, it was openly declared in the Congress that the U.S. should not provide the USSR with “economic presents” anymore, unless the Kremlin “retreats” from the Baltic region (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 257). As Zubok notes, a half year earlier during the Malta Summit, both parties achieved an understanding that “Americans would refrain from any attempts to help the Baltic independence movement, while in return Gorbachev refrained from using force in dealing with the Baltic problem” (Zubok, 2007, p. 320). The fate of the Baltic independence hanged upon the indirect influences from the two leaderships and the moment of the critical juncture.

It is not a coincidence that on the same 6 September meeting, where the Soviet leadership decided to recognize the Baltic independence, the alarming issue of the total Soviet bankruptcy was discussed. From the stenographic record of the 6 September meeting of the State Soviet of the Soviet Union, we can see that the state was on the brink of total bankruptcy. As Silaev (Chairman of the Committee on Operational Management of the Soviet Economy) reported at the meeting, by bankers’ assessments, the state would be utterly

bankrupt by 10-15 September. He said: we desperately need one billion dollars in cash, which we do not have (Gorbachev, 2018, pp. 488-489). At the end of the meeting, Gorbachev asked all participants to keep in secret the subjects discussed. It would be too dangerous these talks to become public, he said. I spoke with Major at the closed meeting, and he pledged to work with the G7 countries to help resolve our debt issues, commented Gorbachev. He also mentioned that due to the decline of oil prices from 108 to 60, the Soviet budget lost about 40% of its revenue (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 113). Here we can see that the factors of economic decline in the Soviet Union were internal and external.

## CHAPTER 4: STRUCTURAL AND CONJUNCTURAL BASIS OF GORBACHEV'S POLICIES

### 4.1. Structural factors

#### 4.1.1. Economic failure and an attempt of recovery

In his study of the 1989 East Central European revolutions, under *economic failure*, Petrescu supposes “the perceived failure of state socialism [in East Central Europe] to offer a living standard similar to that of the more advanced Western societies, and not necessarily [...] the absolute failure of [the] regimes to achieve a certain level of economic development.” Here the emphasis is on the “economic performance [as] an essential source of legitimation for the regime” (Petrescu, 2014, p. 30).

We argue that the formation of Gorbachev's concessionary policy vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics was influenced by both – “absolute failure” and “perceived failure” of the Soviet economy. When Gorbachev radically averted the USSR's foreign policy orienteers, he aimed to settle all issues in contention with the West and secure Western economic aid for reinvigorating the declining Soviet economy. The decisive role was played by the “absolute failure” of the Soviet economy and not the “perceived failure” because until the public noticed that the USSR's economy was declining, the Kremlin knew it in advance - the perceived failure followed the absolute failure.

The approaching absolute failure of Soviet economic growth was visible after 1970 when the growth rate dramatically dropped (Allen, 2001, p. 861), but the gerontocratic Soviet Politburo preferred to stick with the *status quo*. After Gorbachev was appointed the CPSU's General Secretary, the Kremlin's policy was radically shifted, and the radical reformation of the Soviet economy by perestroika became its primary goal.

Generally, in the context of institutional transformation, we can differentiate between two types of regimes in the USSR – *status quo-oriented* and *reform-oriented*. *Status quo-oriented* regimes were the ones that equipped themselves with the *path stabilization* scenario, which

is, according to Ebbinghaus, “marginal adaptation to environmental changes, without changing core principles” (Ebbinghaus, 2005, p. 17). Reform oriented regimes could have pursued the scenarios of *path departure*: “gradual adaptation through partial renewal of institutional arrangements and limited redirection of core principles,” and/or *path cessation*: “intervention that ends the self-reinforcement of an established institution and may give way to a new institution in its place” (Ebbinghaus, 2005, p. 17). Under the term *reform*, we do not merely mean a change, but as Cohen notes, a “change that betters people’s lives, usually by expanding their political or economic freedom or both” (Cohen, 2009, p. 23). Accordingly, considering the aspects of path dependence and the definition of the term *reform*, the regimes under the leadership of Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko, in general, were *status quo oriented* (even though Brezhnev’s and Andropov’s leaderships had some attempts to pursue the path departure scenario marginally).

In contrast, the Gorbachev era can be explicitly defined as *reform-oriented*. It should also be noted that this generalization cannot be absolutely accurate. i.e., Gorbachev’s reforms did expand the political and economic freedom of people. However, it is questionable to what extent it contributed to bettering people’s lives in terms of economic conditions. During Stalin, political and economic freedoms were radically suppressed, but industrialization increasingly solved unemployment issues and contributed to economic growth. We think that the critical aspect here is the notion of freedom and the question of moral: economic growth and low unemployment cannot make better people’s lives if the regime of mass terror rules them; therefore, political and economic freedom can make still better people’s lives, even if in the short term, they fail to stimulate economic growth. We should criticize the liberal democratic model, and dozens of reasons can inspire us to do so. However, we are assured that totalitarianism – even if it solves the problems of economic income – cannot be considered its alternative.

Unfortunately, in some post-Soviet states, the communist sentiments are re-activated, and this nostalgia primarily concerns the Brezhnev and the Stalin era.<sup>10</sup> The re-activation of a

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<sup>10</sup> While thinking about the post-Soviet nostalgia in general, the passage from the Nobel lecture by Olga Tokarczuk comes to my mind: “yet we do see frequent attempts to harness rusty, anachronistic narratives that cannot fit the future to imaginaries of the future, no doubt on the assumption that an old something is better than a new nothing, or trying in this way to deal with the limitations of our own horizons” (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 3).

communist sentiment happens due to people's disappointment in liberal democracy – people waited for improvements, and as a significant number of them still suffer from unemployment, they prefer to live in Stalin or Brezhnev era, as the problems of unemployment were lower by then. Soviet writer and publicist, Anatoly Strelyany, in his article about Gorbachev's speech at a working meeting in the Kremlin with scientists and journalists specializing in economic problems (held on 27 July 1990), published in *Literaturnoe Obozrenie* [Literary Review] in 1990, very accurately described the problem of disappointment with freedom in the USSR. Gorbachev understands, he wrote, “that if the situation continues to deteriorate, many people might start to support Stalinists. He understands how dangerous it is that people waited for improvements, but the situation got worse. He understands that the danger does not disappear with the advent of economic freedom, private property, and entrepreneurship. [...] He is worried because that many workers in the USSR, similarly to China, prefer to get at least some kind of salary and preserve their jobs; they do not want to fight for everyone having equal opportunities on the free market, but rather to equalize everyone in poverty” (Gorbachev, 2012, p. 472).

The situation, Strelyany described above represents the vicious circle of totalitarianism. Although his article was written in 1990, we think that the problem depicted there is still actual. That is why it is very problematic to single-handedly argue that the idea of communism finally eroded in post-Soviet space with the disappearance of the USSR. In some ways, it is still kept eternally, as Lenin's embalmed body, and is open for new interpretations. Alexander Motyl's observation can strengthen our argument – in his 2001 study of the USSR's collapse, Motyl noted that while East Central Europe was drifting apart from the Soviet Union and Russian dominance, former Soviet Republics, especially in Asia, remained under Russian dominance. Motyl claimed that uncertainty and conflict would last in the former Soviet Republics (Motyl, 2001). We think that the reason why the Russian dominance is preserved in some post-Soviet states today is not single-handedly the result of Moscow's power politics. There is certain ideological conformity between Putin's regime and the regimes in Central Asia and Belarus, and one cannot neglect this fact. The most crucial part is that this conformity does not merely concern the political leaderships but a significant share of the public – the source of legitimation for these regimes.



Soviet economic policies seemed promising during the early ages of their development. As it is well known, the highest growth numbers of the Soviet economy were demonstrated during Lenin's New Economic Policy (1921-1928). After the devastating experience of the *War Communism*, the Soviet leadership was compelled to introduce market liberalization policies: self-financing ['khozraschet'] was introduced, the labor market was reinstated, private sector in industry and trade emerged, and cooperatives developed rapidly. The Soviet government had some innovative initiatives, such as the service concession arrangements, to improve the capital inflow and the promotion of labor inflow by supporting foreign workers' immigration. Besides, the employment creating policies backed by a "soft budget" turned out to be efficient at this stage. The results of the NEP were promising - industrial production was tripled, agricultural production grew, and the national income *per capita* surpassed the pre-Great War levels. We should also bear in mind that the reason why the NEP turned out to be successful does not merely concern the Bolshevik leadership and their mastery of policy craftsmanship, but the very conditions in which the NEP was developed. Soviet Russia was devastated by the Great War, the subsequent Civil War, and the 1921-1922 famine. From this perspective, achieving economic growth from almost zero points was relatively easy in the conditions of no ongoing war.

It should also be noted that all the reforms mentioned above were not introduced merely due to the Soviet leadership's insistence. Lenin's government received vital signals from the public rebellions demanding the shift in economic policy. The Tambov (1920-1921) and the Kronstadt (1921) rebellions indicated that the government's economic policies, especially those ending up in forced confiscation of grain, were unbearable for the peasantry and some economic freedom was to be introduced. Although suppressed harshly, these uprisings speeded up the introduction of the liberal economic reforms and convinced the leadership that no other economic development path was viable. Accordingly, as George Kennan notes, the New Economic Policy was the regime's response to the country's general situation and not merely to the Kronstadt rebellion (Kennan, 1968, p. 448).

Stalin radically shifted Lenin's policies, and the elimination of the private sector primarily demonstrated this. Stalin's new "second revolution" was represented by his vigorous program of industrialization. Since 1928 up to 1500 industrial enterprises were built and set

in motion, which considerably increased the pace of industrial growth (Reiman, 2016, p. 72). According to Davies, from 1928 until 1940, Soviet industrial production grew by 10% per year (Davies, 1998, p. 43). The main problem of the Stalinist economic policy is that the core price for the growth of production factors was its unjustified material and human losses. The rapid industrial development altered the living standards of the peasantry as their almost slave labor was the main fundament of this breakthrough.

On the other hand, the policy of forceful collectivization resulted in the 1932-33 famine. The Stalinist system of social and political terror was so vast and well organized that the society was unlikely to organize any general uprising; only some cases of passive resistance took place. Morally unacceptable economic growth – probably this will be the briefest characterization of Stalin’s policies. At the expense of millions of lives, the Soviet industrial monolith was built – a creation that was to lead the USSR’s path to become a world superpower.

According to Allen, during 1928-1970, the USSR’s growth lagged behind Japan, but it was the world’s second most successful economy (Allen, 2001, p. 861). From the below-presented table from Gur Ofer’s study of the Soviet economic growth during 1928-1985, we can see that from the 1960s, the growth rates were slowed down, and after 1970 they dropped drastically (Ofer, 1987, p. 1778). The 1965 Kosygin reform was the Kremlin’s courageous attempt to increase enterprises’ productivity by introducing profitability and sales, and in this manner, to accelerate the slowed-down growth rates. In theory, the 1965 Soviet economic reform had many innovations. The main aim of newly appointed Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin was the gradual decentralization of economic planning. However, the main problem was that, as Vladimir Mau notes, in practice, the 1965 reform appeared to be a contradictory construct, as in theory, liberal economists elaborated it, but in practice, it was implemented by conservatives. The officials with moderate views prepared its’ normative documents. Accordingly, the reform could not achieve the goals outlined in 1965. Although the 1966-70 Soviet economy demonstrated some growth compared with the 1959–65 Five Year Plan, it “was accompanied by a growing imbalance in the proportions of the economy” (Mau, 1996, p. 213).

Table 2: Inputs, outputs and productivity of Soviet economic growth, 1928-1985

	1928-40	1950-60	1960-70	1970-75	1975-80	1980-85
GNP	5.8	5.7	5.2	3.7	2.6	2.0
Labour	3.3	1.2	1.7	1.7	1.2	0.7
Capital	9.0	9.5	8.0	7.9	6.8	6.3
Land	1.6	3.3	0.2	1.0	-0.1	-0.1
Total inputs	4.0	4.0	3.7	3.7	3.0	2.5
Productivity	1.7	1.6	1.5	0.0	-0.4	-0.5

NOTE: To emphasize the long-run trends, the figures for the 1940s have been omitted; growth rates in that decade were very low, because of the Second World War.

Source: Gur Ofer (*Gur Ofer, 1987: 1778-9*) cited by Allen (*Allen, 2001: 862*)

By 1970 all sources of economic growth deteriorated; scholars generally consider three leading causes: technological failure, diminishing returns of capital, and investment errors (Allen, 2001, p. 866). In the mid-1920s and 1930s, the soft budgets contributed to the settlement of unemployment problems, but during the 1970s and 1980s, it became one of the main reasons for growth failure. János Kornai's study of the soft budget constraint explicitly discusses this problem (Kornai, 1986).

The Soviet economy peaked its development and ceased to grow further - the era of surplus labor economy growth was over. Shortages were developed in labor and capital production factors (Hildemeier, 1998, p. 886). The post-1970 story is the story demonstrating the primacy of capitalism over the Soviet statist economy. In the conditions of maximal exploitation of all production factors, the Soviet economy appeared unable to create surplus capital. As Wilfried Loth notes, the Soviet leadership was "no longer in a position to reassure their population with the promises of a better future" (Loth, 2010, p. 523).

The USSR's new General Secretary decided to end with the conservative path of economic development, as it dragged the whole country into failure. Therefore, Mikhail Gorbachev adopted a *path cessation* scenario of the institutional transformation. The first steps looked more like *path departure*. However, the general idea was to start the transformation gradually "through a partial renewal of institutional arrangements" and accelerate this process further by switching the old institution with the new. As Mau notes, Gorbachev's new policies relied on economists' most progressive ideas, and he tried to fundamentally transform the Soviet economy (Mau, 1996, p. 220). Grigori Yavlinsky argued for a Polish type shock therapy, and

Stanislav Shatalin elaborated a 500 days' plan for transferring the Soviet economy to market principles.

However, before Gorbachev initiated the fundamental reform of the Soviet economy, he made one massive miscalculation by introducing his famous anti-alcohol campaign. Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 7 May 1985 "On Measures to Overcome Alcoholism and Eradicate Home Brewing," and the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 16 May 1985 "On Strengthening the Fight against Alcoholism," laid the foundation for the anti-alcohol campaign, which lasted until 1988 (Gorbachev, 2008b, p. 536). Although the campaign aimed to contribute to the rise of productivity, the prices of its implementation were extremely high. Revenues from selling alcohol were an essential source of the Soviet budget (Kenez, 2006, p. 250), and Gorbachev was assured that USSR's economy was strong enough to bear these losses. During the Malta summit in December 1989 during his talk with President Bush, Gorbachev admitted that the Soviet budget lost 42 billion Rubles from restricting alcoholic beverages. To understand the actual sizes of this loss, we can compare it with the damages caused by the Chernobyl catastrophe and the Spitak earthquake in Armenia. The cost of the Chernobyl was 14 billion Rubles (Gorbachev, 2012, p. 246), whereas the money spent on reconstruction of the districts in Armenia accounted for 12-14 billion Rubles (Gorbachev, 2010d, p. 215). During the USSR's Supreme Soviet session on 17 June 1991, the people's deputy of the USSR, colonel Viktor Alksnis, argued that the material loss caused by the anti-alcohol campaign accounted for 200 billion Rubles (Gorbachev, 2015, p. 471). Besides the economic losses caused by the campaign, age-old vineyards were uprooted, i.e., in Georgia, three-quarters of local vineyards were uprooted (approx. 90.000 ha) (Anderson, 2013, pp. 3-4). A significant share of vineyards was uprooted in Moldova - another big vine-producing country in the USSR. The vineyard and wine are considered a historical legacy in these cultures, having deep connections with the Christian culture and local nationalism – no wonder that massive uprooting of vineyards aggravated nationalist feelings and caused public discontent in the locals.

Gorbachev believed that implementing "no fundamental reform is possible without creating a favorable international environment" (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 29). According to Gorbachev, the likelihood of perestroika's success was minimal without Western support. Therefore, *new*

*thinking* was the instrument to transform the image of the USSR in the eyes of Western leadership. Perestroika and *new thinking* were two inseparable parts of Gorbachev's institutional transformations – two sides of one coin. A fundamental transformation of the Soviet economy and the Soviet official ideology was the path Gorbachev's leadership chose. Implementation of perestroika seemed impossible without the Western backing, and the main aim of the *new thinking* was not merely to contribute to world peace but to assist perestroika by creating a "favorable international environment." Brown argues that Gorbachev was influenced by the ideas of universal humanism and a "new calculus of the costs and benefits of maintaining Soviet hegemony over reluctant East European peoples" (Brown, 2009, p. 49). Both factors were important, but we think the "new calculus of the costs and benefits" of the *new thinking* was decisive. Gorbachev was a rational and pragmatic thinker, and when he decided to terminate the USSR's imperial path, he did it as a realist. His *new thinking* was indeed a credo of idealism, but Gorbachev had very pragmatic reasons for becoming an idealist. He was ensured that the continuation of the Kremlin's conservative policy was dragging it into an ultimate failure. Therefore, he chose to take a risky path – an idealist path, but probably the only path that secured some chances for the USSR's survival.

From a general perspective, the reviewed literature supports the view that one of the main motivations of Gorbachev, while accepting multiple concessions to the Western leadership, was his strive to secure as much economic aid from the West as possible for solving the Soviet economic crisis and implementing perestroika successfully. Breslauer notes that "Gorbachev's concessionary foreign policy had tried to make the best of this situation by making a virtue of necessity, by attempting to integrate into Western multilateral organizations, by doing the bidding of the West on most issues in contention, and by seeking as much economic assistance from the West as he could hope to secure" (Breslauer, 2002, p. 156). According to Adomeit, most probably, the Soviet leadership made "far-reaching concessions on security issues for short-term and possibly short-sighted economic and financial benefit" (Adomeit, 1998, p. 692). Weidenfeld argues that as the Soviet economy appeared to be in a severe crisis and the prices of the overstretched empire got too heavy to bear, Gorbachev was left with no other choices in his repertoire, rather accept concessions in East Central Europe (Weidenfeld, 1999). Matlock recalls that the Western leadership signaled the Kremlin that the recurrence of interventions in the Baltic region after the January

1991 events would jeopardize East-West cooperation and economic aid (Matlock, 1995). Kenez notes that ending the Cold War seemed like a required price to pay for securing Western credits and access to technology (Kenez, 2006, p. 262). According to Keylor, the central aspect of Gorbachev's concessionary policy was his readiness to settle all issues in contention with the West, even at the cost of geopolitical concessions. By stabilizing the international atmosphere, it could have provided Gorbachev with a chance to mobilize all domestic resources to successfully implement perestroika and *glasnost* (Keylor, 2015, p. 646). The situation was a "life or-death fight for the survival of the Soviet Union" and when the Kremlin, for the first time since the Russian Civil War, "found itself in a situation, in which its own survival was at stake," chose to compromise its periphery for the sake of saving the imperial center (Békés, 2002, p. 245).

The Soviet economy was in constant decline. One of the cornerstones of Gorbachev's plan to save the collapsing economic system was settling all issues in contention with the West to secure their economic assistance and credits and invest these finances in reinvigorating the declining economic system. From this perspective, the Soviet Union's critical economic situation dictated Gorbachev to avert Soviet foreign policy radically and to retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. If for the U.S. leadership, Gorbachev's concessions on the German question were seen as "bribing the Soviets out of Germany" (Gates, 1995, p. 492), for the Soviet leader, it was a bid for the USSR's survival. Gorbachev risked his leadership and was unfortunate to lose in this game. As Ammon notes, "Gorbachev's political leniency towards war-time enemy Germany, including the abandonment of the Soviet glacis in East Central Europe by withdrawing all troops, provoked opposition, culminating in plans to oust him by a military coup" (Ammon, 2019, p. 37). On its behalf, the August coup, although unsuccessful, revealed the fragility of the Gorbachev leadership and ultimately contributed to the Soviet collapse. As Brown notes, the 1991 putsch appeared to be a "mortal blow both for the Union and Gorbachev's leadership" (Brown, 2006, p. 349).

What appeared to be the main problem for Gorbachev's economic reforms was the fact that they were constructed in the logic of that [Soviet] system, and did not postulate any weakening of its foundations" (Mau, 1996, p. 200). As Werner Heisenberg spoke in his 1946 lecture at the University of Göttingen on science as means to international understanding,

"the universe is made up of objects that exist in space and change over time" (Heisenberg, 2011, p. 12) - Gorbachev seemingly undervalued this part. The foundations of the Soviet system were rapidly weakening over time, and this contingency created a significant challenge for Gorbachev's reforms. Had Gorbachev's puzzle been the structural problem of the Soviet economic decline only, the probability of perestroika's success could have been much higher. However, the main problem was that all foundations of the Soviet state started to crack almost simultaneously and at an accelerated pace.

Contingency played a decisive role in Soviet economic failure. Although "setting free" the Kremlin's allies in East Central Europe seemed a viable decision (as the CMEA countries received cheap and stable energy resources worth 17 billion, and in return the Soviet budget's income was 3.5-4 billion (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 33), the decline of the Soviet superpower image and its "shameful" retreat from its old backyard, instigated indifferent reactionary processes in the USSR. "Old guard" pushed for a coup and remobilized power, whereas nationalists tried to secede from the weakening federation. Besides, the scarcity of daily products on the market, especially bread, decreased the population's support to Gorbachev's leadership, and Yeltsin's and other national leaders' populisms became more attractive. Miners regularly went on strikes, especially during June-July of 1989 – productivity of the industrial sector was declining.

On the other hand, due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, up to 600.000 IDPs appeared in the Soviet Union by early 1990. As Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Vitaly Doguzhiyev reported their number in Moscow and its surroundings was 60.000, in Armenia and Azerbaijan – 230.000 in each. The influx of Armenian and Azerbaijani IDPs in Moscow caused discontent in locals (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 654) and undoubtedly played a role in strengthening Russian nationalism.

Ultimately, due to all the factors mentioned above, the Soviet budget appeared to be on the brink of total bankruptcy by September 1991. As Chairman of the Committee on Operational Management of the Soviet Economy, Ivan Silaev reported at the 6 September 1991 meeting of the State Soviet of the Soviet Union, by bankers' assessments, the state would be utterly bankrupt by 10-15 September. He noted that they desperately needed one billion dollars in cash, which they did not have. Silaev suggested asking for credit to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait,

and South Korea as the USSR already had preliminary agreements on financial support signed with these countries. Also, lending from Taiwan was proposed. One more solution was selling arms to Finland, Sri Lanka, and Ireland, as they seemed interested (Gorbachev, 2018, pp. 488-489). This particular meeting of the State Soviet is unique. It depicts how the Soviet leadership tries to mobilize the hard currency for the bankrupting state budget during the one-week deadline. Gorbachev based his hopes on help from the G7 states. He informed the audience about his talk with John Major – the British PM promised to work with the G7 countries to help resolve Soviet debt issues (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 113). According to Baker, Gorbachev asked Americans and the G7 leaders for a 15-20 billion USD credit (Baker and DeFrank, 1995). When asking the British PM for help, Gorbachev tried to assure him that the country's collapse would not happen if people felt some improvement in the economy and vice versa (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 34). It is not a coincidence that the above-mentioned Gorbachev-Major talk took place five days before the Kremlin recognized the independence of the Baltic republics. The Western leadership had a well-established price for supporting the Soviet economy. Gorbachev knew that Western support hanged *inter alia* on the Kremlin's position vis-à-vis the Baltic republics.

Soviet economic decline, which was demonstrated by lowering the growth rates since the 1960s and a dramatic drop after 1970, influenced the new Soviet leadership to re-evaluate the paths of the Soviet institutional development and to switch the Kremlin's policies from the traditional conservative line to liberal. As Zubok notes, "the nature of the economic malaise of the 1970s and 1980s during and following Brezhnev's regime and the political class's inability to deal with it greatly contributed to the decline of the Soviet global influence and ultimately became one of the major causes of Soviet collapse" (Zubok, 2007, p. xi). The Gorbachev leadership tried to deal with the crisis by two liberalizations, which applied the Soviet economy and the foreign policy. These two were the inseparable instruments for the Soviet survival – Gorbachev aimed to settle all issues in contention with the West and, by their support, implementing perestroika and transforming the Soviet Union into a modern confederation.



#### **4.1.2. Ideological decay and an attempt of transformation**

Petrescu suggests the following definition of ideological decay of communism: “overall erosion of the revolutionary ideology [and] fading away of the utopian goal of building a radically new, classless society” (Petrescu, 2014, p. 34). According to Andrzej Walicki, communism’s ideological decay is a situation in which communism steadily ceased to symbolize a “unifying final goal” (Walicki, 1995, p. 517). Petrescu’s and Walicki’s studies concern the ideological decay of communism in East Central Europe, which ultimately resulted in the revolutions of 1989. In that sense, they refer to the final overall erosion of communism. They argue that the final erosion of communist ideology was a factor contributing to the 1989 revolutions. In our study, we argue that the erosion of the ideology of one particular Soviet regime played a role in the reevaluation of the Kremlin’s policies and not the universal decay of the communist idea.

There were as many variations/interpretations of communism as many communist regimes. We argue that the different interpretation of one ideological artifact represents a different ideology. If one ideological artifact – the hypothetical idea of communism – is interpreted differently, in practical terms, it ends up shaping different regimes with rather different political cultures. Therefore, if the regimes and the political cultures differ, the ideologies of these regimes’ political elites cannot be similar. Accordingly, if communism’s original ideological artifact was more or less understood similarly in the Messianic way – something like paradise on earth – the means to achieve this end was understood very differently. According to the conventional wisdom in the communist camp – the end justified the means (and communists were not alone in this, I believe). We argue that when two regimes have different means to achieve an identical end, their ideologies are different. None of the “communist” regimes were successful enough to achieve the state of communism, as it is well known. They were not communist regimes but socialist regimes which tried to achieve the “unifying final goal” of communism by different paths. Therefore, their policies were transitory paths to communism (it is problematic to generalize this thesis to some East Central European states, because, as it appeared, by the 1980s the policies of their leaderships aimed not at the transition to communism, but to a mixed model based on “Eastern” and Western

values, and to some extent some of them were successful – e.g., János Kádár’s leadership in Hungary).

According to Kitschelt et al., in East Central Europe, we can distinguish between the following three varieties of communist regimes: bureaucratic-authoritarian, national-accommodative and patrimonial (Kitschelt et al., 1999, p. 39). The only thing that unified these regimes was the ideological artifact – a hypothetical umbrella of communism. As the famous Yugoslav politician and dissident Milovan Đilas notes in his memoirs, for the Yugoslav communists, Moscow represented “an embodiment of the abstract ideal of the ‘classless society’” (Đilas, 1991, p. 11). This very image of communism unified all communist regimes, but that does not mean that their ideologies were the same. The political culture in Hungary, where the national-accommodative regime was established, was different from the political cultures in patrimonial Romania and Bulgaria or the bureaucratic-authoritarian GDR. Therefore, the ideologies of the respected leaderships of these states were different too. Otherwise, it is unclear how can the ideologies of the regimes of Erich Honecker, János Kádár, and Nicolae Ceaușescu be similar.

Differences existed between the different leaderships in every state too. For instance, in Poland, although Gomulka’s, Bierut’s, Gierek’s, and Jaruzelski’s regimes had the same “communist” label, policies, and the political cultures they established or tried to establish, were different; therefore, their ideologies were different too. If Bierut established the Polish variation of Stalinism, during Gomulka and Gierek, it had a rather national-communist stance, and Jaruzelski tried to establish a military dictatorship, at least for some time. All these leaders tried to preserve their power by different means, varying from personality cult to nationalism and military dictatorship – their ideologies could not have been similar.

The idea and the action are two integral components of the same process. The action reflects the idea, and the idea determines the action. Therefore, the way we act defines who we are and what our ideology is, and not the way we express ourselves. i.e., when Vladislav Zubok wrote that “Stalin’s and his successors’ foreign policy motivations cannot be separated from how they thought and who they were” (Zubok, 2007, p. x), he meant that Stalin’s and his successors’ ideology was reflected in their policy choices. Accordingly, the political decisions they made and the methods they used defined their ideology.

Since every human being is different, their ways of thinking are different. Two human beings cannot understand and interpret the same idea precisely similarly. The disparity of interpretation becomes broader as the complexity of an idea increases. In our case, we discuss the variety of interpretations of such a comprehensive system of values as a political ideology. It is theoretically impossible for two persons to understand and interpret communism in a precisely similar way, and this does not merely refer to communism. i.e., let us discuss the idea of Christianity in this context. Not only was/is the ideology of every religious group different, but the interpretations of that ideology by every member of that respected group were/are also different. In that sense, there are as many interpretations of Christianity as its followers. Furthermore, there are as many Christian ideologies as its followers. The same rule applies to communism. The only thing that united/unites the communist ideology is a hypothetical umbrella – an ideological artifact that is supposed to be eternal in form but interpretive in content. The best illustration of this phenomenon for Soviet communism is Lenin’s embalmed body in mausoleum. Also, the fact that this artifact is still preserved in the very center of the Kremlin creates the impression that the idea of communism is still there and open for new interpretations and for shaping new ideologies.

Stephen Cohen notes that in the USSR, communism was merely a name of the official ideology. In contrast, its real meaning depended on the current Soviet leadership, who interpreted it in their ways. Therefore it “varied so greatly over the years that it could mean almost anything” (Cohen, 2009, p. 24). We can distinguish between at least five prominent interpretations of communism in the USSR, affiliated with Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Mikhail Gorbachev. There were also the regimes under Georgy Malenkov, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, but they failed to acquire a consolidated shape for several reasons. Some of these interpretations were somewhat similar, like Lenin’s and Gorbachev’s, or Khrushchev’s and Gorbachev’s. In contrast, the regimes under the leadership of Brezhnev and Andropov had many similarities with the Stalinist rule.

If the regimes under the leadership of Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko can be generally considered *status quo-oriented*, Gorbachev’s leadership was *reform-oriented*. The new Soviet leadership, who demonstrated many links with the intellectuals worldwide, was

assured that the Soviet Union had no future without the fundamental ideological and economic transformation. According to their “new calculus of the costs and benefits” of these transformations, the USSR had to overcome some turbulences, but its’ foundations were solid enough to outlive these challenges.

We argue that the ideological decay of the *status quo-oriented* regimes created a certain kind of thirst for the new generation of politicians to adopt a *path cessation* scenario of institutional transformation. As a result, the Kremlin’s new leadership chose to pursue a concessionary foreign policy vis a vis the West, and the USSR retreated from East Central Europe and later from the Baltic republics.

Cohen suggests defining and evaluating the Soviet system not as an abstract phenomenon or ideological artifact but as a functional organism. We agree with Cohen, as his approach is efficient in capturing the real essence of the Soviet system in practical terms. Cohen summarizes six main functioning components of the Soviet system emphasized in Western literature. These six components, which will be defined below, were the ones Gorbachev tried to reform – therefore, they were the features of the *Brezhnevite* regimes. These are the following: 1. official and obligatory ideology; 2. the CPSU’s authoritarian nature; 3. the CPSU’s absolute monopoly over politics; 4. the network of pseudo-democratic soviets; 5. the statist economy; and 6. the multinational formally federal state dominated by the Kremlin (Cohen, 2009, p. 24). These six functional elements were the cornerstones of the Brezhnev regime and, therefore, the main foundations of the *Brezhnevite* political culture, which was also preserved during the leaderships of Andropov and Chernenko.

The new Soviet leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev started to demolish this “rotten” monolith by the *path cessation*, as they clearly understood that it was dragging the whole country to the ultimate failure. As Gorbachev notes in his memoirs, the deaths of three general secretaries and four prominent members of the Politburo in four and a half years had a symbolic meaning. “The system itself became decrepit, and its stagnant, senile blood already had no liveliness” (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 46). There is an iconic conversation that is often cited for symbolizing the genesis of Gorbachev’s reforms. The conversation took place in 1984, and it involves two persons: the secretary of the CPSU Central Committee – Mikhail Gorbachev, and the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist party – Eduard

Shevardnadze. These two take their long walk at Pitsunda, Abkhazian ASSR, on the Black Sea - Shevardnadze notes: “everything is rotten. It has to be changed,” and Gorbachev agrees. Explaining the pretext to his reforms, Gorbachev notes that when his inner circle noticed that the West entered a new technological era with higher productivity after substantial structural innovations, they realized that the USSR was lagging (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 14).

The fundamental point about the decay of the Brezhnevite ideology is the fact that its “rottenness” was primarily realized by the Soviet intellectual elite and not the masses (unfortunately, a significant share of masses cannot even realize its’ “rottenness” today). Transformations during the Gorbachev era were a revolution from above. Gorbachev himself argues that all his reforms started from “above” (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 53). As Shevardnadze notes, “the philosophy of *new thinking* came into a clear contradiction with the philosophy and psychology of ‘velikoderzhavnost’ [great-powerness]” (Shevardnadze, 1991b, p. 111). The Brezhnevite ideology primarily eroded for the Soviet intellectual elite. Therefore, the reforms Gorbachev’s leadership undertook were an attempt to initiate an intellectual revolution, or at least an intellectual transformation. “Life raised the question of arrival of the new generation of politicians to the top of power,” notes Gorbachev, and the “society expected change” (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 9).

The new Soviet intellectual elite that emerged in the 1950s acquired political power by the mid-1980s. Their new stance was to “make the Soviet Union great again” through the path of democratization, which supposed radical reformation of almost all functional elements of the Soviet system. Even though the USSR’s low economic growth accelerated the process of searching for new paths of development and a new *modus vivendi* on the international arena, the changes in the Soviet leadership were undeniably also the by-product of the broader process of intellectual transformation. In many ways, Gorbachev’s policy seemed to follow the path outlined by Milovan Đilas twenty years earlier. In *Conversations with Stalin*, initially published in 1961, Đilas argued: “As long as the party does not break, both in theory and especially in practice, with everything that constitutes the very originality and essence of Stalin and Stalinism, namely with ideological unitarity and the so-called monolithic structure of the party [...], undoubtedly it will be a sign that it did not come out of Stalin’s shadow” (Đilas, 1991, p. 199).

Robert English argues that the general process of intellectual transformation, rather than merely Gorbachev's personality, contributed to Gorbachev's policies and ultimately to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR (English, 2000). As Evangelista observes, the very expression "new thinking" first appeared in the Pugwash movement's founding document, which Bertrand Russel and Albert Einstein compiled in 1955 (Evangelista, 1999). Roald Sagdeev notes that through the period of East-West confrontation, the only reliable channel for conducting arms control negotiations and discussions between the two blocs was Pugwash meetings (Sagdeev, 1994). The new Soviet leadership, in many ways, demonstrated that their way of thinking was a part of a broader international network of intellectuals. Both English and Evangelista highlight the Palme Commission's significance in commencing the talks on global disarmament and influencing Gorbachev's policies. Persons like the Swedish PM Olof Palme, German Social democrat Egon Bahr, the former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, the former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, and many others influenced Gorbachev's ideas. As Gorbachev notes, the moral pathos of perestroika was the rejection of the principle that "the end justifies the means." In that sense, the new generation's "cleansing from Bolshevik morality" followed the path outlined by Mahatma Gandhi (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 38). According to Cohen's citation of Gorbachev, his interpretation of communism was a consistently democratic system that "put universal values above everything else" (Cohen, 2009, p. 24). In this manner, the Brezhnevite ideology became obsolete for the Soviet intellectual elite, and they initiated fundamental reforms.

Brown has identified five transformations during the Gorbachev era that contributed to the dismantling of communism in the Soviet Union. These were the following: "1. the dismantling of the command economy; 2. the transition from an extremely authoritarian political system to political pluralism; 3. the ending of the Cold War; 4. the abandonment of Soviet hegemony over East Central Europe, and 5. the breakup of the Soviet Union" – "the ultimate unintended consequence of his actions" (Brown, 2009, p. 42).

According to Cohen, Gorbachev succeeded in reforming the USSR's official ideology, monopoly of the CPSU over politics, and the pseudo-democratic network of soviets. By 1990, Stalinist and Leninist punitive dogmas were replaced by the Western-style social democracy, which was not much different from the liberal democracy. Therefore, the central

heresy of communism became the state's official ideology. The monopoly of the CPSU on politics and particularly of public discourse was dissolved, the censure was abolished, political organization and mass demonstrations became legal and free elections were allowed (Cohen, 2009, p. 25).

It is crucial to understand that the main driving force of this ideological transformation was the new intellectual elite of the Soviet Union, headed by Gorbachev. This revolution came from above and not from below – and this was very logical: the majority of the Soviet population, unfortunately, was not able to initiate any revolution from below, nor was it mentally ripe to thoroughly comprehend the essence of the western democracy. The only reason they initially appeared to support Gorbachev's reforms is their misunderstanding of the real essence of the transition from totalitarianism to western democracy and from statist economy to capitalism. The general expectation was that perestroika was going to bring freedom and economic prosperity almost immediately. That is why having high expectations is dangerous. The population appeared not to understand the complexities of Gorbachev's bold reforms. American journalists from "Time" correctly noted in their interview with Gorbachev on 22 May 1990 that according to most Soviet and Western economists, it was impossible to carry out a radical reform of the Soviet economy without experiencing inflation and unemployment on a very significant scales. Gorbachev generally agreed to their observation (Gorbachev, 2011c, p. 68).

Had the Soviet society known the price they would pay for the historical transformation initiated by Gorbachev's team, we are not sure that they would have supported Gorbachev's perestroika. That is why Putin's thesis about "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" has many supporters. President Putin does not suppose here that the fall of Gorbachev's Soviet Union was the catastrophe of the century, but rather the fall of the Soviet monolith, at least in its Brezhnevite, if not Stalinist sense. Mamardashvili argues that this not-readiness for accepting the heresy of freedom was due to post-totalitarian stigmas in society. In his lecture on nationalism and post-totalitarian society, delivered in Paris in 1988, he noted: "the whole process [of transformation] takes place alongside the uncertainty of a post-totalitarian society, where seemingly neutralized and blocked totalitarian structures still

exist in the social and mental space” (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 245).<sup>11</sup> Gorbachev ended the fiction of the “monolithic unity” and risked the “era of schism” (Cohen, 2009, p. 30) – therefore, it is not surprising that he ended his leadership as a heretic – expelled and condemned by the conservative forces.

The transformation of official Soviet ideology initiated by Gorbachev took place in the context of the erosion of the Brezhnevite/neo-Stalinist ideological punitive dogmas. This erosion primarily happened in the eyes of the new Soviet intellectual elite. The new Soviet leadership realized that continuing the same conservative policy founded on the Soviet ideological monolith was dragging the whole country into an ultimate failure. In his 1991 memoirs, Shevardnadze notes that the traditional imperial policies of the Kremlin turned the USSR “from a winner to a loser” (Shevardnadze, 1991, p. 112). The Soviet Union was no more the country that could afford the price of being a superpower – and the primary reason for this was its failing economy and inability to compete in the costly arms race. Gorbachev’s strategy, by initiation the ideological transformation of the Soviet Union, aimed to navigate the country, as Gorbachev once noted, “between the Scylla and Charybdis” of freedom and order (Gorbachev, 2017, p. 317). How to avoid radicalization of internal political struggle in the conditions of democracy and pluralism? – this was the critical puzzle for Gorbachev, and he frankly admitted this during his talk with the U.S. ambassador Matlock during their meeting after the Vilnius January 1991 events (Gorbachev, 2014, p. 132). Gorbachev talked about the same issue during his meeting with the State Secretary Baker too on 8 November 1990, on what Baker replied that he knew about this “thin line that separates freedom of speech and democracy from anarchy, as well as from repression” (Gorbachev, 2013b, p. 473). Routing through this “thin line” was not easy. On some occasions, Gorbachev’s leadership chose to accept some coercive measures; however, these measures were applied in some cases without him being informed.

Gorbachev’s effort to transform and liberalize Soviet official ideology and initiate a “perestroika of thought” (Gorbachev, 2010d, p. 184) was not left unnoticed in the West.

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Merab Mamardashvili, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Raisa Maksimovna Titarenko (later Mikhail Gorbachev’s wife) studied at the Moscow State University at the same time. Mamardashvili and Raisa Maksimovna were enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy; Mikhail Gorbachev studied law. It would be interesting to research if this circumstance influenced (and if yes - in what ways) the conformity of their philosophical views about the Soviet system.



However, contrary to many, we do not think that the initial driver of Gorbachev's reforms was necessarily his strive for international humanism or the world peace, but rather a very objective reason – the declining Soviet economy. As Kenez notes, the USSR's improved relations with the Western countries “was a precondition for acquiring Western technology and credits” (Kenez, 2006, p. 251). When pursuing the *path cessation* scenario of institutional transformation, Gorbachev's primary aim was to save the failing Soviet economy and contribute to the prosperity of the Soviet people. However, the means by which he supposed to achieve this end was the Soviet Union's ideological transformation. This statement does not necessarily mean that Gorbachev was indifferent to international humanist ideas – not at all. We mean that Gorbachev's international humanism and idealism were formed based on searching for the Soviet self-survival. In that sense, Gorbachev's evolution to idealism had a very pragmatic basis. We think that Csaba Békés's historical parallel on the *Brest-Litovsk syndrome* accurately captures the Gorbachev leadership's situation. The only path of self-survival seemed to go through the abolition of the Soviet imperial policies abroad. Through the concession of the Soviet imperial peripheries, Gorbachev hoped to save the Soviet imperial center. Not surprisingly, Gorbachev imitated here his idol – Vladimir Lenin; however, if “Lenin proved to be right on this point, [...] his later successor, Gorbachev, like the Soviet Union itself, was to be overtaken by history” (Békés, 2002, p. 245).

## **4.2. Conjunctural factors**

### **4.2.1. Internal conjunctural factors**

In their pioneering study of the birth of Polish Solidarity, Nørgaard and Sampson identified several categories of factors that impacted the birth of the Solidarity movement. They note that conjunctural factors in world politics, economy, or climatic conditions affecting agriculture, explain why the structural crisis appears at a particular time (Nørgaard and Sampson, 1984). In his 1989 East Central European revolutions study, Petrescu has further refined Nørgaard and Sampson's conceptual approach and divided the conjunctural factors between external and internal dimensions (Petrescu, 2014). Contingency played a decisive

role in embittering the USSR's domestic crisis and made Gorbachev's leadership more submissive to Western diplomatic pressures. Similarly to Petrescu, we have divided the conjunctural factors between external and internal dimensions. In this sub-chapter, we will present the internal conjunctural factors the Kremlin was facing during 1985-1991 and discuss their impact on the formation of Gorbachev's concessionary policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. Under *internal conjuncture*, we suppose the combination of domestic developments in the Soviet Union, which was unforeseen by the Soviet leadership and further embittered domestic crisis in the country, *inter alia* contributing to the Kremlin's leniency towards his Cold War-time enemies.

In general, internal conjunctural factors in the USSR had either accidental or causal character. i.e., the Chernobyl disaster and the 1988 Spitak earthquake in Armenia occurred accidentally (although the Chernobyl disaster was not 100% "accidental" by its character, as far as to the significant extent it was a result of mismanagement, we still would like to qualify it as an accidental occurrence). In contrast, the embitterment of nationalism and intra-ethnic conflicts in the USSR, or the formation of substantial anti-Gorbachevist fractions in the CPSU, were unintended consequences of Gorbachev's democratization policies.

Gorbachev's policies had a paradoxical character, which many scholars and politicians observed, and Gorbachev himself confirmed it in his 22 May 1990 interview with the "Time" magazine. He mentioned that under the conditions of democratization and glasnost, the national revival was developing. On its behalf, the national revival impeded the process of perestroika, as it triggered separatist and selfish national tendencies (Gorbachev, 2011c, p. 82). Although there is a consensus on the paradoxical nature of Gorbachev's reforms, there is much more exciting debate concerning what would have happened had Gorbachev not introduced his reforms. In 1993 Malia argued that communism's intrinsic irreformability was no longer a question of opinion but rather a matter of historical fact (Malia, 1993, p. 60). On the contrary, Brown argues that "the Soviet state could have survived into the twenty-first century, had not radical reform, or 'revolution from above,' shaken its foundations" (Brown, 2006, p. 319). According to Cohen, "The 'intrinsic irreformability of the Soviet Communism' is one of the worst formulated axioms in the literature" (Cohen, 2004, p. 460). Malia argues that Soviet communism was irreformable; Cohen is convinced that Gorbachev had a chance

to reform it, and Brown thinks that the USSR would not have fallen apart had Gorbachev not introduced his radical reforms. Although the opinions of Brown and Cohen are debatable, as there are dozens of arguments that might support or oppose them, Malia's opinion is very categorical and mostly inaccurate. The fact that communism collapsed in Europe and the Soviet Union does not necessarily mean that communism was irreformable. Even if we disregard the examples of China and Cuba and talk solely about the irreformability of Soviet communism, there is no way to prove this argument empirically due to the complexity of understanding the causes of the Soviet collapse. Besides, political science is not an exact science. Therefore, we cannot single-handedly claim that the USSR's collapse confirms that the irreformability of Soviet communism is a historical fact. Gorbachev's failure to reform Soviet communism is a historical fact, but not the irreformability of Soviet communism.

Gorbachev's decision that appeared to be a Trojan horse for the Soviet Union was democratization. Gorbachev introduced the liberalization reforms of domestic and foreign policy. These two courageous fundamental reforms bore many risks, but the Kremlin's new leadership was convinced that they could get along with these challenges. Gorbachev was puzzled by the main issue: how to avoid radicalizing internal political struggle in democracy and pluralism?

The Soviet Union was a totalitarian state, and its democratization without shaking its main foundations was a task with paramount difficulty. Although Gorbachev initially used political measures only for transiting the USSR through this "thin line" between freedom and repression, it was not always possible to keep the balance. Below we will discuss the cases due to which Gorbachev's leadership is often criticized for being autocratic. These cases are the interventions of the Soviet army in Alma Ata (December 1986), Tbilisi (April 1989), Baku (January 1990), Dushanbe (February 1990), and Riga and Vilnius (January 1991). Many consider these developments as the confirmation that Gorbachev's democratism was a chimera. We think that such kind of simplistic generalization is inaccurate. The character of these developments differed from each other. In Dushanbe and Baku, the Soviet Army's intervention aimed to stop serious violations and crimes, as there were violent pogroms against Armenians; during January 1990 developments in Baku, the problem also concerned the willful destruction of the Soviet-Iranian border by insurgents.

In some cases, Gorbachev was not informed about using coercive measures, i.e., during the 9 April tragedy in Tbilisi, as noted by Kramer (Kramer, 2003b). As Chernyaev notes, in the case of Riga and Vilnius developments, Gorbachev had no direct hand, but he failed to prevent them (Chernyaev, 2000, pp. 317-330).

#### ***4.2.1.1. Gorbachev's leniency towards autocracy***

The central symbolic fact, which is often cited as the demonstration of Gorbachev's leniency towards autocracy, is the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's famous "dictatorship is coming" resignation speech on 20 December 1990 at the IVth Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union. Although in his 28 December 1990 interview with the Japanese daily newspaper "Asahi Shimbun" Gorbachev noted that the claim that Shevardnadze's resignation was a signal of Gorbachev's leniency towards autocracy was nonsense, he therefore ambiguously admitted that the reboots current leadership was experiencing were great (Gorbachev, 2013b, p. 422). These "reboots" severely altered the original path of democratization his leadership set forth, and many facts confirm that this is true. i.e., On the fourth session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 16 January 1990, Gorbachev advocated for the suspension of the Law on the Press for the coming months (Gorbachev, 2014, p. 102). In the same session, the editor of the Latvian republican newspaper "Latvijas Jaunatne" [Latvian Youth] Andrejs Cīrulis remarked that glasnost in Latvia ended on 2 January 1991. On this day, the special units of OMON seized the building of the State Publishing House. "Since then, the publication of newspapers is halted in the republic under the excuse of 'protecting party's property,'" mentioned Cīrulis (Gorbachev, 2014, p. 451). The storming of the TV tower in Vilnius by the Soviet armed forces during the night of 12-13 January 1991, which left at least 14 civilians dead and hundreds injured, was a clear demonstration of the Kremlin's autocracy. Chernyaev notes that Gorbachev had no direct hand in these events but failed to prevent them (Chernyaev, 2000, pp. 317-330). All these developments demonstrated that Gorbachev's team was deviating from the norms of established democracy deliberately, or it had no authority to take the situation under control. We think that the reality was the nexus of both. There is a reason why the end of 1990 is mainly portrayed as a breaking point in Gorbachev's politics and not and December 1986,

April 1989, January 1990, or February 1990 when the Soviet army intervened militarily in Alma Ata, Tbilisi, Baku, and Dushanbe. In the case of the 9 April Tbilisi tragedy, as Kramer notes, Gorbachev was not involved (Kramer, 2003b) - primary documents also confirm that the army had been used without informing the General Secretariat (Loginov, 2007, p. 65). Neither Politburo nor Gorbachev had any information about the 9 April tragic developments in Tbilisi. However, the Soviet Minister of Defense Dmitry Yazov (one of the members of 'GKChP' during the August 1991 coup) was aware of these developments. Gorbachev addressed him at the 20 April 1989 Politburo meeting in this way: "Dimitry Timofeevich, since today, the army must not interfere in these kinds of matters without the resolution of the Politburo" (Gorbachev, 2010a, p. 117). In his memoirs, Shevardnadze interestingly observes that if Gorbachev had not known about 9 April's intervention, it meant that the coup in the Soviet Union had already happened (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 227).

As far as the Alma Ata, Dushanbe, and Baku developments are concerned, there were massive disorders and riots before the Soviet army intervened. In Alma Ata, the crisis escalated in response to Mikhail Gorbachev's dismissal of Dinmukhamed Kunaev, the First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party - an ethnic Kazakh, and an appointment of Gennady Kolbin - an ethnic Russian. Kunaev was dismissed not due to his ethnicity but rather due to his ill manner of ruling; as Gorbachev commented on the 15 May 1986 Politburo meeting, personality cult, alongside corruption and nepotism, blossomed around him (Gorbachev, 2008c, p. 542). His dismissal caused massive riots in the city, and in response, the Soviet army and Militia intervened to normalize the situation. According to the Soviet sources, two people were killed, more than 1000 sought help from medical institutions, and 235 were hospitalized. More than 2000 people were detained. It was the first time during perestroika when the army was used against demonstrators (Loginov, 2007, p. 12). Although Kunaev's leadership and methods were unacceptable for Gorbachev, he should have noted the local public's opinion, who took Kunaev's dismissal as an assault on their nationality. Gorbachev failed to understand the complexity of the nationality question, and 1986 December developments in Alma Ata were the first broad demonstration of this fact.

The January 1990 developments in Baku were triggered based on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The demand for the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast's separation from

Azerbaijan by the ethnic Armenian population triggered a violent reaction in Azerbaijan. Multiple pogroms against Armenians were conducted, which ended up in hundreds of casualties. Besides, radical groups in Nakhichevan ASSR conducted a pogrom on the 200 km-long Soviet state border with Iran on New Year's Eve in 1989. They demanded the unification of "Northern Azerbaijan" with the country (Gorbachev, 2014, pp. 456-457). In an address at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet's meeting on 15 January 1990, Gorbachev stated that the Kremlin had been compelled to declare a state of emergency in Nagorno-Karabakh and some other regions. "Pogroms have been occurring in Baku against Armenians. The Azerbaijani side has committed serious crimes. Nagorno-Karabakh is just the given reason for committing crimes. The aim is to grasp power. We have exhausted all possible resources," stated Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 133). Accordingly, on 15 January, the Supreme Soviet Presidium of the USSR adopted a decree "On declaring a state of emergency in the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh and other regions." For helping the local forces, units from the MIA and Soviet Army were deployed in Baku, and the Soviet border defense was restricted. On 19 January, Gorbachev signed a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, declaring a state of emergency in Baku from 20 January. On the night of 19 January, the MIA and Soviet Army units arrived in Baku. According to the TASS information, the people's front combatants fired at service members, and the military returned fire. According to the city's military commandant, 83 people died that night, among them 14 soldiers and their family members (Gorbachev, 2014, pp. 456-457).

February developments in Dushanbe were triggered by the Baku crisis (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 293). Following the Baku pogrom in January 1990, thousands of Armenians left the city. They fled *inter alia* to Dushanbe, which activated a strong anti-Armenian reaction in the Tajik capital and became one of the reasons for the escalation of the crisis. During 11-14 February 1990, unsanctioned meetings took place in Dushanbe, which, according to official information, involved pogroms and arson of administrative buildings, including the Tajik Communist Party building. From 12-13 February, 24 shops, 19 household service businesses, and 25 kiosks were burgled; additionally, multiple trolleybuses, automobiles, and 22 ambulances were destroyed. On 13 February, demonstrators demanded the Tajik government's immediate resignation, along with the deportation of every Armenian from the

country.<sup>12</sup> Insurgents threw stones, broken glass, and Molotov cocktails at the soldiers attempting to make an order. According to the deputy commander of the Central Asian armed forces, Major General A. Filistovic, weapons were used only in cases of apparent attacks on military personnel. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union, 11 died (22 according to other sources), and 194 were injured, including 48 Militia personnel and three soldiers of the Interior Ministry (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 628).

As we see, the Baku and Dushanbe interventions have been dictated by the necessity to suppress crime and anarchy in the country. In contrast, in Alma Ata, Gorbachev's leadership failed to understand the complexity of the national question in Kazakhstan – on the 11 June 1987 Politburo meeting Gorbachev admitted that in Alma Ata, his leadership reacted too early, before studying the actual context of the problem (Gorbachev, 2008f, p. 95). The Kremlin could not balance the “thin line,” which separated freedom of expression and democracy from the anarchy and repression. By the end of 1990, Gorbachev's leadership displayed structural leniency towards autocracy. The straightforward demonstration of this was the January 1991 Riga and Vilnius interventions and the suspension of the general glasnost process. As Kenez remarks, the Gorbachev era ended at the end of 1990, as “from this point on, Gorbachev had no new ideas for reform” (Kenez, 2006, p. 270).

The situation Gorbachev's leadership was caught up in by the end of 1990 was very complicated. Gorbachev and his team - advocates of democratization in the country, were on the brink of total collapse. They were tempted to use non-democratic measures to retain power and save the country from falling apart. As the Soviet PM Nikolai Ryzhkov commented on the 5 November 1990 Presidential Soviet meeting, opponents of Gorbachev aimed to acquire power by destructive methods and establish a dictatorship in the country. “Through the chaos, a dictatorship will come, and it will come if we do nothing now,” he mentioned. Ryzhkov noted that he had an impression that the Soviet government was under the blockade, as the decisions taken by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR were disregarded in the whole country. “If we are going to get along with the 1991 and not fall apart [...],” he

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<sup>12</sup> Armenian IDPs migrated to Dushanbe due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and pogroms against them in Azerbaijan. After the mayhem in Dushanbe a substantial number of them had to migrate to Moscow, where their number together with the Azerbaijani IDPs from Nagorno-Karabakh, reached 60.000 by March 1990. On the other hand, the influx of Armenian and Azerbaijani IDPs in Moscow caused discontent in locals (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 654).

said, “then we need to follow the documents that have been adopted. This is our only salvation” (Gorbachev, 2013b, p. 471).

As Keylor notes, Gorbachev saw that the process of the USSR’s disintegration had gone too far. In reaction, he gradually deviated to the traditional Soviet forces such as the Army, the KGB, and the Party - the institutions whose reformation was his initial goal (Keylor, 2015, p. 657). Gorbachev contradicted his principles and chose to follow the traditional “the end justifies the means” strategy. However, this was a last resort strategy for Gorbachev, and he followed it as long as he had some hopes of saving the USSR from total collapse. Once Gorbachev’s hopes for the Soviet Union’s recreation disappeared, he peacefully gave up his power in December 1991. The peaceful breakup of the Soviet Union was the clear demonstration that the main aim of Gorbachev’s reforms was not to keep the Soviet Union together by using all possible means but initiating a peaceful transit of the society and the political system from totalitarianism to democracy. Gorbachev was unlucky in his efforts to save the USSR from falling apart. However, his policies undoubtedly created a basis for democratization in the region.

#### ***4.2.1.2. Gorbachev’s democratization policies***

The main aim Gorbachev’s leadership outlined in mid-1985 (the April Plenum) was the reformation of the Soviet Union through the path of democratization of the Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Brown had identified the five transformations under Gorbachev: “1. the dismantling of the command economy; 2. the transition from an extremely authoritarian political system to political pluralism; 3. the ending of the Cold War; 4. the abandonment of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe; and 5. the breakup of the Soviet Union” – “the ultimate unintended consequence of his actions” (Brown, 2009, p. 42). Cohen notes that Gorbachev succeeded in reforming the USSR’s official ideology, monopoly of the CPSU over politics, and the pseudo-democratic network of soviets. By 1990, Stalinist and Leninist punitive dogmas were replaced by the Western-style social democracy, which was not much different from the liberal democracy. The monopoly of the CPSU on politics and particularly of public discourse was dissolved - the censure was abolished, political organization and mass demonstrations became legal and free elections were allowed (Cohen, 2009, p. 25).



The demonstration of the Kremlin's liberalization of foreign policy was the USSR's retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republic later, and Gorbachev's initiatives to end the Cold War and the Soviet Union's involvements in regional conflicts. On the other hand, the introduction of *glasnost*, carrying out the 1989 elections and eliminating the CPSU's monopoly in March 1990, manifested the Soviet leadership's support to full-scale democratization in the country. All these initiatives aimed to transform Soviet uniformity into the pluralism of political forces and ideas, which was a task with paramount difficulty.

As Brown notes, Gorbachev's first step to introducing pluralism was a change of political discourse. "Instead of freedom meaning the recognition of (Marxist-Leninist) necessity, [the term] acquired [...] its everyday meaning of freedom from constraints or, simply, 'ordinary freedom, as established and practiced in the liberal democratic countries of the world'" (Brown, 2006, p. 322).

*Glasnost* was meant to increase government transparency in the Soviet Union, and as Kenez remarks, a "freedom to express all opinions, including hateful ones" (Kenez, 2006, p. 257).

The result of the Kremlin's toleration of diversity of opinions and ideas was the real revolution in media and art. If weeklies like *Ogonek* [Little light] and *Moskovskie Novosti* [Moscow News] were the platforms for reformist views, *Sovetskaia Rossiia* [Soviet Russia] and *Molodaiia Gvardiia* [Young Guard] were in the vanguard of Russian nationalism. As Brown notes, "in general, the circulation of newspapers and journals reached far greater heights during the perestroika period than either before or since in Russia" (Brown, 2006, p. 324). A vast diversity of ideas appeared on the everyday agenda – mainly, all kinds of opinions were tolerated and aired, which created severe turbulence in the society. However, Gorbachev's leadership hoped that the USSR could get along with this.

Besides a revolution in media, a revolution in art was also on its way. Tengiz Abuladze's anti-Stalinist Georgian film *მონანიება* ['Monanieba' - Repentance] that won 1987 Palme d'Or on the Cannes Film Festival demonstrated a real revolution in the Soviet cinematography and played a paramount role in condemning Soviet monolithism and personality cult. Long time censored literature of the authors like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Vasily Grossman, Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Brodsky,

Anatoly Rybakov, and many else's, became accessible for Soviet readers. For the first time, criticism of Marx and Lenin was legally published in the Soviet Union. Unthinkable things have been happening in the USSR, but although these many liberties were "among the most notable achievements of perestroika, [...] they contributed [...] to its ultimate undoing" (Brown, 2006, p. 325). Gorbachev underestimated the damaging effect of unleashing the freedom of expression (Tchanturia, 2019a, p. 304).

The pluralization of political space was manifested by the March 1989 elections, which led to the inflow of entirely new actors to the political arena. This was a real "revolution from above" and a breakthrough to political pluralism. By the subsequent elections of 1990 and 1991, popularly elected legislative powers and republican presidencies appeared on the political stage in all Union republics (Brown, 2006, p. 327). Hardly even the most radical anti-Gorbachevist can claim that any manipulation or electoral fraud was involved in these elections. Gorbachev's leadership put all efforts into guaranteeing the most accurate representation of people's will in politics, and the results of these elections demonstrated that this was well done.

Another crucial step in the pluralization of politics and public affairs was eliminating the CPSU's monopoly in politics by the amendment of Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution. Article 6 of the 1977 Soviet constitution stated that the CPSU was the only "leading and guiding force of the Soviet society." The Third Extraordinary Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union on 14 March 1990 amended Article 6. "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and other political parties as well as labor, youth and other public organizations and mass movements, through their representatives elected to the Councils of People's Deputies and in other forms participate in the policy-making of the Soviet state, in the management of state and public affairs," was the amended formulation of the Article. The decision to allow the amendment of Article 6 was taken on the March 1990 Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 523). "The struggle for political leadership in the framework of democratic procedures and electoral campaigns will now be one of the CPSU's primary functions," declared Gorbachev in his report at the Party Plenum on 11 March 1990 (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 405). The CPSU's political monopoly was over; the most crucial legislative step toward establishing political pluralism was taken. Little did

Gorbachev know that this very step was going to undermine the integrity of the Soviet state. As Brown notes, the “removal of the ‘leading role’ of the Communist Party took away a critical institutional pillar not only of the Soviet system but of the Union” (Brown, 2006, p. 344).

#### ***4.2.1.3. Unintended consequences of democratization***

The Kremlin’s historical retreat from East Central Europe and regional conflicts worldwide produced contradictory responses from different reactionary political groups in the USSR. If the Kremlin conservatives accused Gorbachev of treason, leaders of popular fronts pushed for separation of their respected republics and openly demanded their independence.

By March 1988, the conservative backlash against Gorbachev’s reforms became apparent as Nina Andreeva’s article - “I cannot betray my principles” appeared in *Sovetskaia Rossiia*. The article demonstrated a neo-Stalinist standpoint and became an iconic representation of the anti-reformist line. As it turned out later, at least half of the Politburo was sympathetic to this view (Brown, 2006, p. 326). On the 24 March Politburo meeting, Gorbachev asked the participants how this destructive and provocative article appeared in the newspaper. Ligachev replied that the editorial office itself had decided to publish it; Vorotnikov further noted that it had been a long time since the Politburo had given the freedom to editorial offices (Gorbachev, 2009a, pp. 129-130). Although Yakovlev’s subsequent article published in *Pravda* on 5 April rebutted Andreeva’s arguments point by point, the fact was that the significant share of the Politburo members and the Soviet population was not indifferent to the views presented there. Although unsuccessful, the 1991 August coup removed the main foundation slab of Gorbachev’s leadership and ultimately of the USSR.

On the other hand, as popular fronts understood that the Kremlin was in an apparent crisis, they mobilized power. On 3 June 1988, the “Sajūdis” movement was formed in Vilnius with the principal demand of Lithuanian separation from the Soviet Union (Loginov, 2007, p. 33). During October-November 1988, the activation of national fronts occurred in the Union republics. Demonstrators demanded national autonomy, reduced Union interests in the republics, increased likelihood of retaining national identity, preservation of national

languages, etc. (Gorbachev, 2009c, p. 555). As a result, by the end of 1988, about 60,000 informal organizations were established in the Soviet Union (Gorbachev, 2009c, p. 520).

The activation of the centrifugal process in the USSR was not merely a result of the Kremlin's apparent ongoing retreat from East Central Europe - perestroika and glasnost produced their impetus. Brown argues that glasnost "had a radicalizing effect on opinion within several of the republics," as it "brought to the surface injustices and discontent that it would have been dangerous to air earlier" (Brown, 2006, p. 344).

As an effect of the 1989 March elections and the elimination of the CPSU's leading role a year later, the long waited political and ideological pluralism had been achieved. However, the problem was that this instant achieved pluralism had a damaging effect on the society, which was used to live in totalitarianism for decades. Although the conditions of openness and pluralism were essential for generating a healthy democratic movement and constructive nationalism in the country, public discourse got extremely radicalized - that created room for all kinds of populisms and inter-ethnic hatred. This is the very problem with the democratization of multi-ethnic totalitarian states. When such kind of broad opening to new freedoms occurs, it creates dangerous turbulence in the country. Suppose the state apparatus is not strong enough to halt this destructive process by democratic measures. In that case, the situation might end up with restoring totalitarianism (or at least introducing autocracy), or the country might be driven into a severe crisis, which *inter alia*, might cause the collapse of the state (creating chances of establishing another autocracy).

Gorbachev's democratization reforms created a space for a national renaissance in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union. However, the fact is that not every nation succeeded in transiting peacefully to the new political reality. The Polish and Hungarian negotiated revolutions are the benchmarks of peaceful transit from communism to democracy. So are the peaceful revolutions of Czechoslovakia and the GDR and peaceful change in Bulgaria. Yugoslavia and Romania, unfortunately, were not lucky enough to prevail peacefully. Although the USSR's collapse was not followed by a general war, which is an outstanding achievement and a credit for it goes primarily to Mikhail Gorbachev and his team, it is hard to claim that the subsequent 1990s in the post-Soviet space were peaceful.

During the 1990s, the post-Soviet conflicts were active in Transnistria, Prigorodny district, Chechnya, Dagestan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, and Tajikistan; since the 2000s, the insurgencies still went on in Central Asia and the Caucasus. 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the ongoing war in Ukraine demonstrate that this process is still not over. Indeed, the “side effect of the collapse of the centralized state is a chain reaction of intra-national conflicts, accompanied by separatism, refugees, ethnic cleansing and genocide” (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 235). Unfortunately, the main party who should be convicted here is not merely the Kremlin, as many argue today, but the very nations and ethnicities involved. On his behalf, Gorbachev was too speedy with the introduction of pluralism. However, we should not forget that this was a pioneering and experimental project in the USSR, and no one could have foreseen in advance how high the subsequent turbulence might have been. Truly, Gorbachev’s leadership miscalculated this part. However, at least it was successful enough to grant freedom to nations, and if the outcomes of this freedom seem not quite promising for some today, the only party they should convict should be no one other, rather than themselves.

Ronald Grigor Suny notes that at the end of the 1980s, national “pasts were constructed and reconstructed” in the Soviet Union, “traditions were selected, invented, and enshrined; and even those with the greatest antiquity of pedigree became something quite different from past incarnations” (Suny: 1993, p. 160). According to Mamardashvili, the underlying reason behind the radicalization of inter-ethnic conflicts in the USSR was that the main foundation of the national identity disappeared alongside the introduction of openness to the pluralism of ideas (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 255). Maisuradze argues that the main foundation of the national identity was engineered during the Stalinist period and by Stalinism. He claims that the radical shift in Soviet nationality politics during the 1930s, when the Stalinist regime started the (re)creation of national symbols for all Soviet nations and nationalities, paved the way to establishing a new historical narrative. The new historical narrative was “national in form and socialist in content;” All the radical ideas that suddenly turned up on the political scene at the end of the 1980s in the USSR had their roots in Stalinist nationalism (Maisuradze, 2019, pp. 80-81).

Accordingly, one form of oppression was substituted by another form of it. This new form was present during the entire USSR's existence; however, what changed now was that the Kremlin's influence radically decreased, and Union republics became the main instigators of oppression. The simple formula of "Stalin and little Stalins" depicts the situation – as it seemed, not only Ulbricht, Bierut, or Rákosi were the ones who could claim this kind of title, but some leaders of the Union republics too. That is the reason why Sakharov's initiative aired on 9 June 1989 meeting of the Congress of People's Deputies, to switch to a federal-horizontal system of national territorial units by granting equal political, legal, and economic rights to everyone, the proposal which also supposed to necessitate the reconsideration of borders (Gorbachev, 2010a, p. 523), was met with general distrust from the leaderships of Union republics. Otherwise, how was it possible to settle all national questions peacefully when multiple nationalities and ethnicities claimed their statehood? - only by Stalinist measures, only by substituting one form of violence by another form of it, and the subsequent shares of titular national populations supported their national governments in this. When the Kremlin "enslaved nations" gained some freedom at the end of the 1980s and ultimately independence in the early 1990s, their reaction was hatred and aggression towards their neighbors. Perhaps, this was a natural consequence of post-totalitarian stigmas, and it will disappear as time passes. As Mamardashvili noted in 1988: "the whole process [of transformation] takes place alongside the uncertainty of a post-totalitarian society, where seemingly neutralized and blocked totalitarian structures still exist in the social and mental space" (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 245).

Since early 1988 the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict escalated in Azerbaijan, where the local Armenian population demanded separation from Azerbaijan and accession to Armenia. This demand generated radical reactionary processes in Azerbaijan. Multiple pogroms have been directed against Armenians in Sumgait (February-March 1988), Kirovabad – present-day Ganja (November 1988), and Baku (January 1990), which ended up in hundreds of casualties and forced migration of hundreds of thousands of Armenians. The numbers of Azerbaijani displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia were also legion. As a result of the Baku pogrom, thousands of Armenians migrated to Dushanbe, which created a subsequent anti-Armenian reaction in the Tajik capital. The February 1990 insurgency in Dushanbe was not developed merely on the anti-Armenian reaction basis, but the anti-governmental factor

was also dominant. However, the fact was that these developments gained momentum after the Armenian IDPs' inflow in the country (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 628).

On 23-24 May 1989, an ethnic-based insurgency broke out in the Fergana region of Uzbekistan. There were clashes between Uzbek and Meskhetian Turk youth. On 3 June, the situation was further aggravated by demands from the local Uzbek population for the deportation of the Meskhetian Turks from Uzbekistan.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the Fergana pogrom, according to information from the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, 100 people died, more than 1000 were wounded, 757 houses were burned down, and 27 public buildings and 275 automobiles were destroyed. We should note that a public demonstration in parallel to these events was organized in the Meskheta region of the Georgian SSR, where people demanded that Meskhetian Turks not be sent back to Georgia (Gorbachev, 2010c, p. 485).

A month later, on 16 June 1989, public clashes between Kazakh and North Caucasian youth (mainly Ingush and Chechen) took place in Novi Uzen (Guryevsk Oblast, Kazakhstan SSR). The situation became so critical that on 19 June, a curfew was introduced in the city (Gorbachev, 2010c, p. 485).

Since 1989 the conflicts in Georgia between Georgians and Ossetians and Georgians and Abkhazians were escalating. The ethnic Abkhaz population, who constituted 17% of the Abkhaz ASSR population, compared with 45% share of ethnic Georgians, demanded separation from the Georgian SSR and promoting the republic's status to the Union republic. On the other hand, the ethnic Ossetian population of South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast demanded the status of Autonomous Republic and more freedoms for the Ossetian ethnicity. The majority of ethnic Georgians were against tolerating any of these demands, and accordingly, subsequent developments ended up in the South Ossetia War in 1991-1992 and the war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993. Besides the inter-ethnic conflicts in Georgia, a crisis

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<sup>13</sup> The Meskhetian Turk minority had arrived on the territory of Uzbekistan as a result of the Stalinist purges in the 1940s; they had been deported from the territory of the Georgian SSR, accused of treason during World War II. On the other hand, the alienation of local Islamized Meskhetian population (who were ethnic Georgians) from the rest of ethnic Georgian population started from the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of Ottoman conquest of the territory - a significant part of the local population was Islamized; therefore, the ethnonym "Meskhetian Turk" was created, and it depicts the perception of these group from the point of view of the titular Georgian nationality.

escalated in Transnistria and Chechnya, which ended up in the Transnistria War in 1992, and two wars in Chechnya in 1994-1996 and subsequently in 1999-2000.

Although the democratization decisions Gorbachev's leadership took, in many ways, made all the above-depicted insurgencies possible, it does not make sense to accuse Gorbachev of the instigation of these developments. Gorbachev's democratization policies revealed that the Kremlin was not the only oppressor and tyrant in the USSR but the local various nationalities and ethnicities. On the other hand, this argument cannot be considered as an excuse for mistakes Gorbachev's leadership made. Suppose Gorbachev's primary aim was to transform the Soviet Union into a modern European-style federation or confederation. In that case, he should have been more cautious of the nationality question and intra-ethnic relations in the Soviet Union. His decentralization policies, democratization, and glasnost, embittered radical nationalist sentiments in the country contributed to weakening the Kremlin's legitimacy and severely disoriented the processes of economic activity. Gorbachev was hoping that "the collapse of the country will not happen if people feel some improvement in the economy" (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 34). The only party who had the pockets deep enough for assisting the Soviets in this crisis were the USSR's Cold War-time enemies in the West. Consequently, Gorbachev was gradually liberalizing the Kremlin's relations in the USSR's backyard and hoping to save and transform the Soviet imperial 'center' in exchange for compromising its periphery.

#### ***4.2.1.4. Natural and nuclear disasters***

Accidentally occurred disasters, such as natural cataclysms and catastrophes on various industrial sites, contributed to further deterioration of the Soviet economic and demographic crisis. The disasters widely known for international society are the 26 April 1986 Chernobyl accident and the 7 December 1988 Spitak earthquake in Armenia. Westad remarks that the Chernobyl disaster "contributed to the speeding up of reform in the Soviet Union" (Westad, 2017, p. 544). Besides, the financial damage caused by the Chernobyl and Spitak disasters was colossal. On his 2 December 1989 meeting with President Bush in Malta, Gorbachev noted that the financial loss of the Chernobyl catastrophe was up to 9 billion rubles. In contrast, the loss from the Spitak earthquake constituted 12-14 billion Rubles (Gorbachev,



2010d, p. 215). During his 14 July 1990 meeting with the Secretary-General of NATO Manfred Wörner, Gorbachev admitted that the losses from the Chernobyl accounted for 14 billion rubles, and these numbers were steadily rising (Gorbachev, 2012, p. 246).

The Spitak earthquake occurred on 7 December 1988 and accounted for 6.9 magnitudes (Karapetian et al., 1991, p. 1). As a result of this disaster, up to 25000 people died, and up to 700 000 people lost their homes (Armenian et al., 1997, p. 806). As Shevardnadze recalls, the Spitak earthquake revealed to the Soviet leadership how vulnerable and unprotected the Soviet state was against natural disasters, as it was unable to recover from its losses without foreign aid (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 152). The positive outcome of the earthquake in Armenia, if we can talk about any positivity while discussing this disastrous event, was the immediate unified support from all over the world to help the Soviet Union and “the world’s ancient country – Armenia, a nation with huge heritage, to recover from the tragedy” (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 152). Eduard Shevardnadze addressed the international society with the above-cited words in his press conference from New York (during Spitak earthquake Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were on their official visit to New York). As Shevardnadze notes, Spitak became a certain kind of gateway for the Soviet Union to reintegrate into the international society (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 153).

The Armenian earthquake was not the only one in the USSR during the Gorbachev era. The Racha-Java earthquake in Georgia, which occurred on 28 April 1991 and accounted for 7.0 magnitudes on the Richter scale, was the biggest ever recorded earthquake in the Caucasus (Fuenzalida et al., 1997, p. 29). According to Jibson et al., “the mainshock and several of its aftershocks caused at least 114 fatalities, injured about 1000 people and left more than 67 000 homeless” (Jibson et al., 1994, p. 963). The historical Racha region in Georgia bordered the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, and therefore victims of the earthquake were not only ethnic Georgians but ethnic Ossetians too. From Gorbachev’s 5 July 1991 address to the First Congress of People’s Deputies of North Ossetia, we can learn that only North Ossetian ASSR sheltered tens of thousands of earthquake survivors from South Ossetia (Gorbachev, 2015, p. 386).

In reviewed primary documents, besides the Chernobyl, Spitak, and Racha disasters, we were able to identify the following three notable accidents during the Gorbachev era that involved loss of human lives and damage of infrastructure and state property: 1. K-219 submarine sinking; 2. experimental chemical plant explosion near Asbest town (Sverdlovsk Oblast); 3. “Donetskugol” mine fire.

On 3 October 1986, a fire broke out on the Soviet nuclear submarine K-219 with ballistic missiles on board, about 1,000 kilometers northeast of Bermuda. Three people died. During October 3-6, the boat crew and the personnel of the approaching Soviet ships tried to ensure its unsinkability. However, despite the efforts made, on 6 October, the submarine sank at great depths. The crew was evacuated to Soviet ships. The reactor was shut off. A panel of experts in Moscow concluded that there was no radioactive contamination, and the possibility of a nuclear explosion was excluded as well (Gorbachev, 2008c, p. 581).

On 1 November 1990, at the end of a shift in the experimental chemical plant, located 15 kilometers from Asbest (Sverdlovsk Oblast), a powerful explosion occurred. The plant was producing explosives for the mining industry. According to preliminary data provided in the TASS report, six people died, and 22 were injured (Gorbachev, 2013b, p. 472). On 29 June 1991, in production association, Donetskugol’s mine - “South-Donbasskaya N1,” fire erupted from a conveyor belt. Fifty-seven people were in the fire zone, 25 were evacuated, and two were hospitalized; 32 people died (Gorbachev, 2015, p. 592).

The most significant financial, environmental, and human life loss by the above-depicted disasters and accidents were caused by the Chernobyl catastrophe and Spitak and Racha earthquakes. K-219 fire and subsequent sinking bore huge risks of radioactive contamination of the environment. Besides the material losses caused by the accidents, the Chernobyl catastrophe and the K-219 sinking had a substantial negative impact on the USSR’s international prestige, especially the Chernobyl disaster. The Chernobyl incident was not tragic and noteworthy only due to its material and human losses, notes Shevardnadze, but also because the Soviet leadership tried to hide its occurrence. “Due to ideological dogmas, tens of thousands of lives were doomed [...], everyone saw that in the USSR the human life

was absolutely unprotected” (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 153). As Shevardnadze recalls, the Chernobyl and the Spitak disasters helped the Soviet leadership to understand that the fake Soviet dogmas should have been destroyed, and sticking to telling “truth, was much more beneficial” (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 155).

On the one hand, the Chernobyl and Spitak disasters caused massive material and financial loss. The Spitak earthquake also triggered a process of the USSR’s reintegration into the international community. In both ways, these developments contributed to revealing the Kremlin’s internal vulnerability and shifting its foreign policy from the classic Brezhnevite path to the path of *new thinking*.

#### **4.2.2. External conjunctural factors**

According to Petrescu, external conjunctural factors are the influences from outside of borders, realized *inter alia* by the foreign policy instruments of foreign states or institutions (Petrescu, 2014, p. 36). Our definition of the category implies all patterns of external conjuncture that embittered the Kremlin’s domestic crisis and contributed to the emergence of Gorbachev’s concessionary policy vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. Our conceptual approach is based on our central assumption that the main incentive for the Kremlin, while deciding to liberalize its relations with the countries of East Central Europe and the Baltic republics, was settling all issues in contention with the West and stabilizing the international atmosphere. This could have provided Gorbachev with a chance to mobilize all resources to implement his reforms successfully.

External conjunctural factors that influenced the Kremlin’s concessionary policies abroad can be divided into several groups. In the first group, we include the factors that were the consequences of the traditional Brezhnevite policies, such as the USSR’s involvement in the arms race, regional conflicts, and its military presence in East Central Europe. These settings of international conjuncture Gorbachev had to deal with was the legacy of the Kremlin’s imperial policy, or as Zubok refers to it - “the powerful inertia of the revolutionary-imperial

paradigm” (Zubok, 2007, p. 341). Although leaders in the Kremlin were the ones that insisted on creating this international conjuncture, its creation had primarily internal rather than external reasons for Gorbachev’s leadership. The USSR’s increasingly declining economy desperately needed new stimulus, and its colossal imperial commitments abroad were nothing but a black hole, sucking in large shares of Soviet resources and denying the USSR a chance to recover. In that sense, the legacy of the Kremlin’s imperial politics emerged as a critical pattern of international conjuncture that was increasingly puzzling Gorbachev’s leadership and prompting him to re-evaluate Moscow’s policies abroad.

The Brezhnevite inheritance was responsible for the troubling international conjuncture the Kremlin’s new leadership inherited. However, Gorbachev’s liberal foreign policy unintentionally created a pattern of international conjuncture that further embittered the USSR’s domestic problems. This pattern was the icon of the East Central European nations’ victory against Soviet imperialism – inspiration for independence-willing Soviet nations. As Leszek Kołakowski tentatively observes, ”Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev [...] both shaped events and was shaped by them” (Kołakowski, 1999, p. 56).

In another group of external conjunctural factors, we have incorporated the influences from the Western states, such as the world-famous Reagan factor, diplomatic pressure from the Western leaders, the Vatican factor, credit risk-sensitive Western banks, nationalism-emboldening Western media, and the Soviet émigrés in Western countries. These factors directly or indirectly contributed to embittering the Kremlin’s domestic crisis and pressured Gorbachev to ease the USSR’s policy vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic region.

Another critical external conjunctural factor that substantially shaped Gorbachev’s policies were the sudden fall of crude oil prices on the world market. According to Gorbachev’s statement on the 6 September 1991 State Soviet meeting, the Soviet budget had lost about 40% of its revenue due to this circumstance (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 113). Whereas during the 1970s and the early 1980s, the USSRs consistently ramped up oil production at least partially disguised economic inefficiency, a fall in oil prices from late 1985 contributed to the acceleration of the domestic economic crisis (Brown, 2006, p. 332).

Another external conjunctural factor that we can identify, which is relatively under-researched in the Western literature, is Iran's international influence on the activation of nationalist aspirations in the Soviet Union, especially in Middle Asia and the Caucasus. Gorbachev talked about these issues during the Politburo meetings held in January and July 1986.

#### ***4.2.2.1. The Brezhnevite inheritance***

The USSR's new leadership under Gorbachev realized that the legacy of Soviet imperial politics became increasingly troubling for the country with an eroding economy. The Soviet Union's involvement in the arms race, regional conflicts worldwide, its military presence in East Central Europe, and supplying the CMEA countries with natural resources at fixed, friendly prices drained the Soviet budget. The USA spends "6 trillion dollars on weapons," noted Gorbachev on the 8 May 1987 Politburo meeting, "and are we going to set the same goal? We must end with this approach. [...] They are counting on our military exhaustion" (Gorbachev, 2008e, p. 452).

Besides the hefty arms race, the USSR's involvement in regional conflicts worldwide, especially in Afghanistan, was another black hole for the Soviet budget. On its behalf, the Reagan administration did everything to increase the price of occupation for the Soviets. As Westad notes, the U.S. assistance to the counter-revolutionary forces in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua "increased the cost of the Soviets [...] of keeping their allies in power" (Westad, 2017, p. 532).

On the 22 May 1986 Politburo meeting Gorbachev noted that the issue of Afghanistan was very acute for the Soviet Union both from internal and external points of view – the USSR's economy was suffering massive losses. Besides, Afghanistan's occupation ruins the USSR's international image and presents it as an aggressor, he said (Gorbachev, 2008c, p. 123). Member of the Politburo, Vitaly Vorotnikov, recalled that the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan was discussed at this particular Politburo meeting for the first time (Vorotnikov, 1995, p. 102). We identified that Vorotnikov's information is inaccurate.

Gorbachev talked about the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in his Political report at the XXVIIth Party Congress, which was held as early as 25 February 1986. “We would like to return to the homeland the Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan at the request of the local Afghan government,” he noted (Gorbachev, 2008b, p. 361). As the editors of *Collected Works of Gorbachev* mention, as early as the end of 1985, the Politburo decided to withdraw all Soviet troops from Afghanistan by 15 February 1989 (Gorbachev, 2008f, p. 601).

The USSR’s military presence in East Central Europe, and the supply of the CMEA states with the Soviet oil at low friendly prices, was another heavy burden for the Soviet economy. On the one hand, the net external indebtedness of these countries to the Soviet Union was growing. The foreign economic activity of these respected governments was increasingly oriented toward the West – for the USSR, this conjuncture was causing political and economic problems. Here is the case with Hungary: as the administrative director of the Hungarian National Bank E. Bakó noted in *Magyar Hírlap* newspaper, net external indebtedness of Hungary to the USSR at the beginning of 1987 was more than 9 billion USD. By the end of that year, it grew to 10.9 billion USD. As the editors of Gorbachev’s *Collected Works* note, the re-export of cheap Soviet oil by the Hungarians to the West and a noticeable decline in exports to the Soviet Union were causing severe economic problems for the Kremlin (Gorbachev, 2008e, p. 592). Similar problems existed with the other CMEA states and particularly with the Eastern Bloc countries.

The Warsaw Pact military presence in Central Europe, which by May 1987 constituted up to 3.380.000 soldiers, alongside substantial numbers of tanks, strike aircraft, antitank weapons, naval forces, operational and tactical missiles, was another hefty burden on the Soviet budget. The leadership in Kremlin’s aimed to sizably decrease its military presence there (Gorbachev, 2008f, p. 58). That is why Gorbachev’s strategy was to abandon this economically and politically unprofitable “friendship” and build new relations with the Eastern Bloc countries, which was supposed to be based on the absolute freedom in choosing the path of socio-political development. “Each of the systems will prove which one is better by the power of example, and not by the power of weapons,” noted Gorbachev in his interview with Pravda, as early as 7 April 1985 (Gorbachev, 2008a, p. 169). By July 1986, at the Politburo meeting,

he declared that the methods used in Czechoslovakia (1968) and Hungary (1956) were unsuitable for the present conjuncture. “We cannot continue the same way as it was [...]. Those methods do not serve our purposes now,” he said (Gorbachev, 2008c, p. 275). As Zubok notes, in January 1989, the Kremlin has announced the reduction of the Soviet troops in the region by 14 percent and cuts in armament production by 19 percent (Zubok, 2007, p. 322).

In all three above posed cases, the main reason for the Soviet retreat was the unbearable expenses of the USSR’s imperial policy – “the powerful inertia of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm” (Zubok, 2007, p. 341). As Weidenfeld notes, the Soviet economy appeared to be in a severe crisis, and the prices of the overstretched empire got too heavy to bear (Weidenfeld, 1999). A similar statement is posed by Kotkin, observing that each global competition requires a lot of affords and a strong economy, and the Soviet economy became increasingly fragile to bear these challenges (Kotkin, 2001). In *Ending the Cold War: Interpretations, Causation, and the Study of International Relations*, edited by Richard K. Herrmann and Richard Ned Lebow, following “five turning points” at the end of the Cold War are presented by the authors: 1. the rise of Gorbachev to power; 2. the withdrawal from regional conflicts; 3. arms control; 4. the liberation of East Central Europe; and 5. the unification of Germany (Herrmann and Lebow (eds.), 2004). We can see here how Gorbachev reshaped the international conjuncture that he inherited from the previous Soviet leadership. According to Mathew Evangelista, one of the contributing authors to the volume, Gorbachev’s July 1986 announcement on unilateral nuclear test moratorium was the first precedent when the USSR abandoned to oppose the on-site verification – this was a significant breakthrough. So was the Kremlin’s signature of the INF Treaty by agreeing to reduce Soviet missiles disproportionately, reduce Soviet conventional forces, and withdraw them from East Central Europe unilaterally (Evangelista, 2004). In his chapter, Richard Herrmann discusses Soviet withdrawals from the regional conflicts, such as Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Angola, and observes that these commitments drained the Soviet resources (Herrmann, 2004). Jacques Lévesque explains why the Kremlin agreed to allow the nations of East Central Europe to choose their political and economic system independently. The East Central European region was always highly essential for the Kremlin geopolitics.

However, when the USSR appeared on the brink of a severe economic crisis, Gorbachev, instead of following the principles of the Brezhnev Doctrine, chose the path of *new thinking*, as he hoped to secure the Western political-economic help (Lévesque, 2004). The achievement of the final settlement on the German unification and signature of the treaty with respect to Germany in September 1990 meant that Gorbachev's steps in East Central Europe were almost impossible to reverse (Davis and Wohlforth, 2004). The situation Gorbachev was caught up in was a "life-or-death fight for the survival of the Soviet Union" and when the Kremlin, for the first time since the Russian Civil War, "found itself in a situation, in which its own survival was at stake," chose to compromise its periphery for the sake of saving the imperial center (Békés, 2002, p. 245).

#### ***4.2.2.2. The Reagan factor***

The Reagan administration's hawkish politics in many ways contributed to the weakening of the Soviet stance worldwide. The White House aimed to materialize on the USSR's involvement in regional conflicts. As Westad remarks, "Reagan believed that by hitting Afghanistan and other Soviet supported regimes in Asia and Africa, he could increase the price the Soviets paid for their foreign involvements" (Westad, 2017, p. 532). In that sense the United States supported, trained, and armed the counter-revolutionary forces in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. These American efforts, on the one hand, denied the Soviet-backed left wing governments to consolidate their leadership and, on the other hand, "increased the cost of the Soviets [...] of keeping their allies in power" (Westad, 2017, p. 532).

Petrescu notes that the formation of Gorbachev's policy in East Central Europe was substantially influenced by President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) project, as it revealed the USSR's economic and military vulnerability (Petrescu, 2014, p. 36). "By stepping up military expenditure in a way the USSR would find difficult to match," observes Brown, "the Reagan administration was inviting its Soviet adversary either to 'spend itself to death' or to capitulate" (Brown, 2006, p. 336). Although Andropov's strong response aimed to hide the Soviet vulnerability to the American adversary, the Soviet leaders



felt threatened by the SDI (Kenez, 2006, p. 251). Gorbachev abandoned Andropov's weakness-hiding aggressive policy and chose to persuade Americans in the USSR's intentions to contribute to world peace. The fact that the new leadership in Moscow was ready to take the first steps in disarmament unilaterally (i.e., Gorbachev's July 1986 announcement on the unilateral nuclear test moratorium) demonstrated that the Soviet Union was troubled with armament expenses and was ready for compromises.

Even at the research stage, the SDI destabilized the strategic balance between the USSR and the USA (Gorbachev, 2008a, p. 562). As Gorbachev remarked at the Politburo meeting after returning from the Reykjavik summit, Americans intended to draw the Soviet Union into a new round of arms race to complicate the USSR's economic situation and lower the chances of its socio-economic recovery (Gorbachev, 2008d, p. 68). The Kremlin was not able to cope with the new additional military expenses; besides, the already existing military commitments of the USSR seemed legion. That is why the only path to Soviet survival seemed to make friends with the West and primarily with the USA. Gorbachev's philosophical and discursive shift to *new thinking* needed real-life confirmations. Therefore, Gorbachev announced the unilateral nuclear test moratorium in July 1986, agreed to sign INF Treaty by reducing Soviet missiles disproportionately, withdrew from East Central Europe unilaterally, and accepted significant reductions under a START treaty, while Americans expressed no commitment to the ABM treaty - ultimately creating a room for achieving the 1991 START agreement (Evangelista, 2004). President Reagan's policy was not the only cause of these changes, but its hawkish stance in many ways contributed to the Kremlin's retreat from East Central Europe. In that sense, former State Secretary George P. Shultz's view, depicting how President Reagan's hard-liner policy effectively ended the Cold War, is accurate to some extent (Shultz, 1993).

#### ***4.2.2.3. Western diplomatic pressure***

Domestic policy considerations overweighed the Kremlin's foreign policy claims, at least for the time being. Therefore, western diplomatic pressure became another substantial factor, sparking Gorbachev's retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. "Ending the

Cold War seemed like a necessary price to pay for Western credits, and access to technology – that is, for joining the modern economic community” (Kenez, 2006, p. 262). Becoming a member of the “Western club” obviously had its price. Gorbachev knew that besides the unilateral commitments to arms reduction, the price was freeing the “enslaved Eastern European nations.” Therefore, not only the verbal promises about the revocation of the Brezhnev doctrine but a practical demonstration of his new policy was needed.

In his major speech to the XIXth Conference of the CPSU on 28 June 1988, Gorbachev openly and with no ambiguity declared that the USSR would not intervene in Eastern Bloc internal affairs. “The concept of freedom of choice holds a key place in the new thinking,” he said, and “we are convinced of the universality of this principle in international relations at a time when the most important general problem has become the very survival of civilization [...] That is why the policy of force in all its forms and manifestations has become historically obsolete” (Gorbachev, 2009b, pp. 151-152).

Gorbachev gave promises for the USSR’s support to self-determination of every nation since as early as April 1985. However, the leadership in the West and East-Central Europe seriously doubted the reliability of these promises, as Gorbachev never stated categorically that the “Soviet Union would not interfere with an ally’s domestic affairs should the political transition, *horribile dictu*, result in the total abandonment of socialism and the restoration of parliamentary democracy” (Békés, 2002, p. 243).

An example demonstrating that Western leaders had doubted Gorbachev’s promises is Gorbachev-Thatcher meeting on 30 March 1987 in Moscow, where the British PM openly declared: “the Soviet Union adheres to the doctrine of world domination of communism - the doctrine of Brezhnev” (Gorbachev, 2008e, p. 568). During the same meeting, Thatcher noted that every state should be given a chance to choose the political system they prefer. “I hope that this is what will happen in Afghanistan, too,” she mentioned (Gorbachev, 2008e, p. 570). When Gorbachev summarized his meeting with Thatcher on the 8 May 1987 Politburo session, he noted that the USSR threatened her. She mentioned that we invaded Czechoslovakia, as well as Hungary and Afghanistan, he said - “anti-Soviet propaganda is also based on this.” (Gorbachev, 2008e, p. 451).

It seemed impossible to make friends with the Westerners without the practical demonstration of the Kremlin's devotion to *new thinking*. The price for a membership to the "Western club" was on the table, and Gorbachev did nothing but watch with "sympathy" the revolutionary political changes that took place in East Central Europe at the end of the 1980s (Keylor, 2015, p. 651). We cannot precisely tell, what Gorbachev felt while observing this process, was it a sympathy as Keylor notes, or something else, but what the Kremlin's inert reaction to the 1989 developments demonstrated was that Gorbachev truly was committed to *new thinking* in international affairs, at least in Europe. The same reference applies to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Gorbachev's leadership was granted membership in the "Western club" – now was the time for Westerners to settle the German question.

When we talk about the Western diplomatic pressure on Gorbachev's leadership, this primarily concerns the German question negotiations. Many politicians and scholars are involved in the debate, whether the Western diplomats and primarily the U.S. diplomats, pledged Gorbachev back in 1989, 1990, and 1991 that NATO would not expand its borders eastward. This debate is still on, and without doubt, it will acquire a new stimulus if, sometime in the future, NATO's further expansion to Eastern Europe, i.e., in Ukraine and Georgia, appears on the political agenda.

The current debate is focused on whether there was a verbal assurance from Westerners to the Soviets regarding the no-NATO enlargement. The main misunderstanding here, or a cause of the contradictory opinions, is the ambiguity of the pledge's language and its different interpretations. Mainly this ambiguity concerns Baker's "not one inch eastward" assurance, during his meeting with Gorbachev on 9 February 1990 (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 615), and Kohl's "NATO could not extend the sphere of its activity" promise, during his meeting with Gorbachev on 10 February 1990 (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 618). The central ambiguity is the exact context of not extending NATO's activity to the East – did Baker and Kohl mean the former GDR territory only, or did they mean NATO's extension to the other East Central European countries? President Bush's assurance made during the Malta Summit in 1989 that the U.S. would not "take advantage" of changes in East Central Europe (Matlock, 2014) is also subject to contradictory interpretations.

Some state that no such assurance was ever made, whereas others insist on the opposite. Nevertheless, one thing remains: even if we agree that this kind of promise was made during conversations, no binding treaty was signed concerning this matter (at least, this kind of Treaty is not unclassified). Accordingly, if there were any assurances from the Western side, they had a non-binding character. The former U.S. Ambassador Jack Matlock went even further and noted that even if there had been any formal treaty, it would have been subject to *clausula rebus sic stantibus* (a clause in international conventions that provides for the unenforceability of a treaty due to fundamentally changed circumstances). “When the Soviet Union collapsed, the ‘circumstances’ of 1989 and 1990 changed radically,” notes Matlock. His position is that the promises made from the U.S. party to Gorbachev back in 1989 during the Malta Summit on the U.S. not “taking advantage” of changes in East Central Europe, concerned only Bush and Gorbachev leaderships.” I am sure that if Bush had been re-elected and Gorbachev had remained as president of the USSR, there would have been no NATO expansion during their terms in office,” notes Matlock. He also argues that “all the discussions in 1990 regarding the expansion of NATO jurisdiction were in the context of what would happen to the territory of the GDR” (Matlock, 2014). In his 2009 *The Washington Quarterly* article, Mark Kramer supports the view that no formal, neither informal pledge concerning no-NATO enlargement to the east, beyond the territory of the former GDR was made during the 1990 negotiations (Kramer, 2009, p. 39).

We disagree that there was no verbal pledge concerning no-NATO-enlargement to the east beyond the former GDR territory. According to the editors of the National Security Archive briefing book *NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard* - Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, the declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British and French documents show “that discussions of NATO in the context of German unification negotiations in 1990 were not at all narrowly limited to the status of the East German territory,” and this is manifested “in written contemporaneous memcons and telcons at the highest levels” (Savranskaya and Blanton, 2017). Savranskaya and Blanton present the collection of these documents in their briefing book, which proves that the highest-level Western officials, such as Genscher, Kohl, Baker, Gates, Bush, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Major, Wörner, and others discussed East Central European membership in NATO as early in 1990 and through 1991. i.e., in *U.S. Embassy Bonn Confidential Cable to Secretary of State on the speech of the German Foreign*

*Minister*, it is noted that NATO should rule out “expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e., moving it closer to the Soviet borders” (Cable, 1990b). In the 6 February 1990 letter of the British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd to the British Ambassador in Bonn - Sir Christopher Mallaby, informing him about his 6 February talk with the German Foreign Minister is written: “Genscher added that when he talked about not wanting to extend NATO that applied to other states besides the GDR. The Russians must have some assurances that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next” (Telegraphic, 1990, p. 262). Savranskaya and Blanton note that the documents presented in their briefing book strengthen the view of the former CIA Director Robert Gates, who in his Miller Center interview (in 2000) as part of the George H.W. Bush oral history project, notes that “Gorbachev and others were led to believe” that NATO’s eastward expansion would not happen (Gates, 2000, p. 101).

Personally, Gorbachev rejects the view that Westerners anyhow manipulated his leadership position. i.e., in his 2014 interview with *Russia Beyond* on the question concerning Gorbachev’s position on no-NATO enlargement pledge, although he remarked that Westerners violated “the spirit of the statements and assurances made [...] in 1990,” however he noted that the official pledge concerned the former GDR territory only, which is followed today. “So do not portray Gorbachev and the then-Soviet authorities as naïve people who were wrapped around the West’s finger,” remarked Gorbachev to a journalist (*Russia Beyond*, 2014). He expresses the same view in his 2006 published memoirs - *Understanding Perestroika. Why It Is Important Now* (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 246).

From the above-depicted Gorbachev’s position, it is understandable that his leadership was led to believe that NATO’s eastward expansion beyond the former GDR was not going to happen. That is why Chernyaev and Galkin – the editors of Gorbachev Foundation’s volume on the German question, in their editorial wrote that unlikely to Chancellor Kohl, who “transferred his approach to the USSR to Russia,” some former partners humiliated themselves “with the diplomatic ‘memory loss’” (Galkin and Chernyaev, 2006, p. xxii). These partners led Gorbachev’s leadership to believe that NATO’s expansion eastward, beyond the former GDR, would not happen. By 1990, the Warsaw Pact still existed, and none of its members officially stated that they had any aspirations to join NATO, but this does not

mean that the participants of the German question negotiations did not consider the viability of this kind of scenario.

Gorbachev himself, at the press conference in Bonn on 15 June 1989, after negotiations with Chancellor Kohl, declared: “Nothing under the moon is eternal. [...] The wall can disappear as soon as the conditions that gave birth to it no longer exist. I do not see a big problem here” (Gorbachev, 2010a, pp. 505-506). In that context, not only the verbal assurances in conversations were supposed to be eternal, but the formal treaties too – if the *clausula rebus sic stantibus* applied, and no doubt that Gorbachev was well aware of this kind of scenario.

Politicians and scholars can continue this debate, and they will, but the fact is that this debate is highly politicized. The fact is that there was a cascade of verbal assurances from the Western officials to Gorbachev that if the Kremlin agreed to the settlement of German reunification and membership to NATO the way it was enshrined in the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, NATO’s expansion to the east, beyond the former GDR territory was not going to happen. The Western leadership, so as the Soviets, considered and discussed the scenario on NATO’s enlargement in East Central Europe beyond the borders of the former GDR, and the credibility of this argument can be quickly confirmed by reviewing the declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British and French documents presented in NSA’s briefing book edited by Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton.

During our investigation of Gorbachev Foundation’s archival volumes, we found the passage confirming that Gorbachev himself, as early as January 1990, considered that the GDR was falling apart from the Kremlin’s influence and most likely Poland too. This particular passage is crucial, because contrary to many views, it proves that Gorbachev did not have optimistic expectations concerning Poland as early as January 1990. The citation is from the stenogram of 26 January 1990 inner circle meeting concerning the German question in the Kremlin (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 193). According to Gorbachev, the relations with Polish people were not worsened, but Poland was a “special case” alongside the GDR. As early as January 1990, Gorbachev knew that Poland most likely would follow the GDR’s path. However, he agreed to the settlement on Germany the way it was enshrined in the Treaty, without any formal guarantees to halt NATO’s further expansion beyond the former GDR. The question arises – why?

Soviets needed budget investments derived from extensive credits, and they needed these investments as soon as possible. That is why the scenario of “bribing the Soviets out of Germany,” noted by Gates (Gates, 1995, p. 492), turned out to be efficient. Everyone knew that Gorbachev had a chronic harsh crisis at home, and he needed substantial foreign credits as soon as possible. In this context, not only the issues of German reunification or later the Baltic independence was on the table, but the issue of the Kuril Islands too. i.e., British PM Major passed on Gorbachev during their meeting on 1 September 1991 that in the case of the Kremlin’s readiness to settle the problem with the Kuril Islands, the Prime Minister of Japan, Toshiki Kaifu, would be there to help (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 40).<sup>14</sup>

The credibility of the “bribing the Soviet out of Germany” scenario can be further solidified by the following excerpt from the memorandum of conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush during their meeting at Camp David on 24 February 1990: “Kohl: Soviets will want to get something in return [if they accept reunited Germany in NATO]; Bush: you have got deep pockets” (Memorandum, 1990, p. 10). In this conversation, President Bush presented an image different from the one created by his policy of “prudence” vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Soviet Union. On the remark of the West German Chancellor that the Soviets were negotiating, but this was probably going to “end up as a matter of cash,” Bush reacted: “What worries me is talk that Germany must not stay in NATO. To hell with that. We prevailed, and they did not. We cannot let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat” (Memorandum, 1990, p. 9). We think it is hardly possible to find a more efficient demonstration of the fact that Gorbachev’s leadership was defeated in the diplomatic “war” against the Westerners, rather than the above-cited excerpt from the Bush-Kohl memcon. The same thing applies to the Baltic independence issue.

The majority of the Western states, including the USA, Canada, the UK, France, the FRG, Italy, Australia, etc. never *de-jure* recognized the annexation of the Baltic Republics by the Soviet Union; The USA, Ireland, and the Holy See, explicitly did not recognize the Soviet

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<sup>14</sup> If interested in more details of this matter, please see the minutes of the 23 January 1991 the Kremlin meeting between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Taro Nakayama and Mikhail Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 2014, pp. 123-128). Also, as Tsuyoshi Hasegawa notes in *The Northern Territories Dispute and Russo-Japanese Relations: Neither war nor peace, 1985-1998* (University of California, 1998), Gorbachev was negotiating the return of Kuril Islands to Japan (p. 374).

occupation of the Baltic states neither *de jure* nor *de facto*. As an example, we can illustrate John Major's talk with Gorbachev. During their meeting in Moscow on 5 March 1991, Major explicitly noted that politically the situation in the Baltic States was causing difficulties for the U.K. for two reasons: "firstly," mentioned Major, "we never recognized and will not recognize the inclusion of the Baltic states in the Soviet Union. Secondly, we support the Baltic aspirations for independence." The British PM expressed his hope for settlement of the issue through negotiations (Gorbachev, 2014, p. 515). The Bush-Gorbachev talk can serve as another example: in his 11 January 1991 phone conversation (on the eve of the Lithuanian crisis) with Gorbachev, President Bush reminded Gorbachev about the special U.S. position concerning the Baltic region, which was based on historical reasons (Gorbachev, 2014, p. 38).

As a result of eliminating Article 6 of the Constitution (granting the CPSU absolute monopoly) by the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet and separating the Lithuanian Communist Party from the CPSU in December 1989, the political crisis escalated in Lithuania. Gorbachev said that the ongoing process in the Baltic region was a "Soviet Caribbean Crisis" (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 120). Shortly in March 1990, Vytautas Landsbergis became the elected President of Lithuania. On 12 March, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet declared the restoration of independence based on Article 72 of the Soviet Constitution (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 75) – the probability of the Kremlin's military intervention in Lithuania rose drastically, which activated the Western diplomatic pressure on Gorbachev. As Bush Sr. notes in his memoirs, he feared a Soviet military intervention in the Baltic region and particularly in Lithuania with the leadership of communist hardliners (Bush and Scowcroft, 1998).

During his meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow, on 26 March 1990, U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy four times rephrased his question on whether Gorbachev was promising that the Kremlin would not allow a military intervention in Lithuania (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 551). Gorbachev replied that the Kremlin would not use any force in the Baltics unless the whole federation was endangered. We do our best to find a peaceful way out from this situation; however, "not always it is possible to achieve this right away," he said (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 139). Two days later, in a phone conversation with Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher



expressed her hope that Moscow would be able to abstain from the use of forceful measures in Lithuania “because this would be a big mistake,” she noted. In turn, Gorbachev highlighted that leaving the Soviet Union would be constitutionally possible, however [...] avoiding a civil conflict in the republic would require tremendous effort from the Kremlin (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 154). The Western diplomatic pressure on Gorbachev aimed to halt a highly probable Soviet intervention in the Baltic region by hinting that the Kremlin’s coercive behavior in the region would lower its future partnership with the West. As Chernyaev notes, probably the firm Western reaction to the January developments and their clear signals that further use of coercive power can significantly undermine East-West relations and jeopardize prospective economic aid further consolidated Gorbachev’s position on halting the coercive measures of the Kremlin hardliners in the Baltic region (Chernyaev, 2000, pp. 327-329).

In his conversations, Gorbachev did not promise a one hundred percent guarantee for the peaceful settlement of the Lithuanian problem - indeed, the crisis did not end without Soviet intervention. However, the priority for the Western leaders after the 1991 January events in Vilnius was to avoid further bloodshed and finally establish a peaceful *status quo*. President Bush tried to achieve this via phone conversation with Gorbachev on 18 January 1991. He expressed his full support for the peaceful settlement of the problems in the Baltic region and, as a counter-offer, promised to finalize the signing of the START Treaty (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 456). Two days later, on 20 January, the riot police attacked the Ministry of Internal Affairs building in Riga, leaving four dead (Loginov, 2007, p. 202). On 24 January, U.S. Ambassador Matlock tried to assure Gorbachev to make this intervention in the Baltics the last one by promoting a peaceful settlement of the problem. It is most important to settle the issue without hard power, Matlock mentioned, “I understand the complexity of the problem, but the Baltic people also do have their arguments.” It is worth mentioning how Matlock hinted Gorbachev to accept a concession on the Baltic issue: “since you managed to establish mutual trust with President Reagan, why is it impossible to achieve it with Landsbergis?” (Gorbachev, 2011b, p. 136). Both Gorbachev and Matlock knew at what cost the Kremlin achieved this “mutual trust” with the White House leader; what would the application of the same scenario with Gorbachev-Landsbergis relations mean than recognition of the

Lithuanian independence? In any case, the U.S. ambassador was signaling Gorbachev to accept a new concession package, and the Kremlin accepted this kind of settlement.

On 6 September 1991, when the Kremlin recognized the Baltic independence, the Soviet economy was on the brink of total bankruptcy. As Silaev (Chairman of the Committee on Operational Management of the Soviet Economy) reported on the 6 September State Soviet of the Soviet Union meeting, by bankers' assessments, the state was supposed to utterly bankrupt by 10-15 September (Gorbachev, 2018, pp. 488-489).

In early September, Gorbachev had constant meetings with the British PM Major, *inter alia* asking him to help settle credit issues with the USA and the G7 countries. The USSR needed the U.S. credit for purchasing grain and credits from the G7 for settling the Soviet budget bankruptcy issues. All these developments took place alongside the USA's and the U.K.'s recognition of the Baltic independence. On 1 September, when Major informed Gorbachev that the USA and the U.K. would recognize the Baltic independence, he also promised to work with the G7 countries to help resolve the Soviet debt issues (Gorbachev, 2018, pp. 37, 113). Five days later, the Kremlin recognized the independence of the Baltic republics. Gorbachev hoped that "the collapse of the country will not happen if people feel some improvement in the economy; and *vice versa* - if they see that the Union cannot achieve this, it will push the collapse" – he admitted this with Major during their 1 September meeting (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 34). Therefore, Gorbachev's only hope was the reinvigoration of the declining Soviet economy. Once the Westerners signaled that the price for lending money to the Soviets was the Kremlin's recognition of the Baltic independence, Gorbachev accepted the deal. Accordingly, when the Kremlin "found itself in a situation in which its own survival was at stake," it chose to compromise its periphery for the sake of saving the imperial center (Békés, 2002, p. 245).

#### ***4.2.2.4. Credit risk-sensitive Western banks***

The Western diplomats were the ones who signaled the Kremlin that they would help if Moscow settled all issues in contention with them. However, the particular institutions that

provided this “help” for the Soviets were, *inter alia*, the Western banks, and financial institutions. The Western financial institutions were part of the international conjuncture that indirectly contributed to making Gorbachev more submissive to the Western diplomatic pressures. In *Politics of Diplomacy, Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992*, Baker and DeFrank argue that in the early 1990s, Western banks became more risk-sensitive and reduced lending to the USSR (Baker and DeFrank, 1995). Major also warned Gorbachev during their 1 September 1991 meeting in Moscow when Gorbachev confessed that they needed Western credits as soon as possible to keep the information about the USSR’s financial vulnerability in secret. “If you say that you ask the lenders for a delay, then firstly the provision of new loans will stop [...]. Secondly, lending banks will stop providing funds for loans that are not fully implemented” (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 37). The reaction of the Western banks to become more risk-sensitive while lending to the USSR was logical. The USSR was not in a position to pay back the Western loans. The Western banks’ refusals made Gorbachev’s leadership more dependent on the Western states and their national banks, and therefore, the Kremlin became more submissive to Western diplomatic pressures.

#### ***4.2.2.5. Nationalism-emboldening Western media***

International media and mainly Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Voice of America, had a prominent role in instigating the chain reaction of the revolutions in East Central Europe. “By broadcasting the news about the initiation of the 1989 changes in Poland continuously, these radio stations prepared the opposition groups and the populations in neighboring countries for a similar change,” notes Petrescu (Petrescu, 2014, p. 37). According to him, there was a particular “snowballing effect” in how the East Central European revolutions unfolded. The international media contributed to the acceleration of this process.

In many ways, the Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America influenced the emboldening of nationalist sentiments not only in East Central Europe but in the Soviet Union too. The Kremlin was jamming these stations in the USSR, but their jamming to some extent was

unsuccessful in Western peripheries of the USSR (Loth, 2010, p. 518). In May 1987, as part of the general *glasnost* process, Gorbachev's leadership halted jamming Voice of America radio broadcasts into the country (New York Times, 1987).

At the Politburo meeting on 28 September 1987, the KGB Chief Chebrikov spoke about the destructive propaganda of Radio Liberty, which aimed to inspire social unrest and political crisis in the Soviet Union. He presented an excerpt from Radio Liberty's material to Politburo: "Certain tactics must be worked out, which will ensure stirring up explosive situations in the USSR. Full support must be ensured for supporting new opposition forces. We should strive to inspire feelings of dissatisfaction, passive contradiction towards the authorities, and acts of sabotage and protests in wide ranges of society." Chebrikov further noted that persons with hostile intentions, who had criminal backgrounds, some of them even having served their sentences, led these destructive forces. Their number was up to 6000, and it was still growing. He said they had announced plans to establish a full-fledged opposition, and they were disseminating papers openly (Gorbachev, 2008f, pp. 541-542).

Even though the source of the above-posed information is a person who occupied the post of the Soviet KGB Chief, not the most trustworthy position in the West, we are convinced that Chebrikov's information is correct. Even today, the editorial policies of some media outlets operating in free media environments are provocation-oriented with subjective reporting, not to mention anything about fake news. As Tchanturia and Puga illustrate in their case study of media rhetoric in Georgia and Ecuador, provocative subjective reporting jeopardizes state security by instigating social unrest (Tchanturia and Puga, 2018: 106). Although this kind of editorial policy in many ways violates journalistic ethics in mostly democratic political systems, the question of ethical correctness of such actions radically changes when these policies are applied in a totalitarian or authoritarian context. When Western media outlets aimed to suppress the system by instigating social unrest and demonstrations, they supported democratization. Besides, there is no empirical evidence to argue that they had other intentions.

Western media played a prominent role in instigating the 1989 revolutions and spreading the 1989 spirit to the Soviet Union by emboldening social unrest and passive disobedience to the Soviet regime. Therefore, it further embittered the USSR's domestic crisis and made Gorbachev more submissive to the signals from Washington and the Western European capitals. In that sense, it affected crafting Gorbachev's concessionary policies vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics.

#### ***4.2.2.6. Émigrés in the West***

Western media also played a prominent role in the confidence-building of Baltic émigrés in the West. The message aired was that if the popular Baltic mobilizations were successful enough to acquire independence and demonstrate control over the state territory, the U.S. was ready to back them and recognize their independence.

Subsequently, these émigrés, on their behalf, passed this optimism to their respected relatives in their homelands and prominently contributed to the confidence-building of their popular mobilizations. As Lieven notes, the confidence-building during the popular Baltic mobilizations to a significant extent was based on assurances from the émigré sources that the U.S. was ready to back them if their push was successful (Lieven, 1993). Matlock remarks that Americans signaled that the recognition of the Union republics' independence hinged on the demonstrated control over their states' territories (Matlock, 1995). Accordingly, the message from émigrés, which solidified Baltic nations' confidence during their popular mobilizations, was to elude the Soviet clutches somehow, and the USA was there to back them.

#### ***4.2.2.7. The Vatican factor***

"The 1978 election of a Polish Pope had a direct influence on the development of dissident stances in Poland in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s," notes Petrescu (Petrescu, 2014, p. 36). According to him, this particular factor played a considerable role in the 1989 Polish revolution. In his study of the Polish Solidarity, Timothy Garton Ash also remarks that John

Paul II had an apparent role in instigating the Polish revolution (Garton Ash, 2002). On its behalf, the revolutionary changes in Poland triggered the 1989 “snowballing effect” in East Central Europe and ultimately contributed to the collapse of Communism in the Eastern bloc (Petrescu, 2014, p. 31). Shortly this “snowball” burst into the Soviet Union and gave a massive impetus to the separatist movements there. According to Brown, the effect was particularly significant for Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (Brown, 2006, p. 346). Kenez also notes that the USSR’s primary source of separatism infection was the 1989 spirit of the East Central European revolutions. “Why should the Hungarians be allowed to have a system of their own choice, but not the Lithuanians – or the Russians, for that matter?” remarks Kenez (Kenez, 2006, p. 263). In that sense, the Vatican was one of the essential factors that instigated Soviet retreat in East Central Europe and the domestic crisis in the USSR. It made Gorbachev submissive to follow Western leaderships’ congenial scenarios regarding Germany and the Baltic republics. There were some disagreements concerning the settlement of the German question from the British and French parties. However, the U.S. and German leaders ultimately persuaded their partners in London and Paris to follow their lead.

The Vatican factor had an indirect role in spreading the separatism virus in the USSR through the “snowballing effect.” However, it also directly influenced the developments in western Ukraine, and most likely, in Lithuania. According to Nahajlo, Roman Catholicism reinforced and fed the national feeling in western Ukrainian regions of Galicia and Transcarpathia with the Poles. The Solidarity leaders supported nationalist mobilization in Ukraine by paying multiple visits and establishing contacts with the ‘anti-Soviet groups’ (Nahajlo, 1999). This “Vatican issue” in the USSR is visible from the memcons of Gorbachev’s meetings with the Holy See’s representatives. Here is what Gorbachev told the State Secretary of the Vatican Agostino Casaroli during their 13 June 1988 meeting in Gorbachev’s working cabinet in the Kremlin: “We naturally protest, when church channels are used to undermine what the people support. In this case, I do not mean our relationship with the Vatican, but attempts of such actions are also taking place” (Gorbachev, 2009b, p. 115). By this remark, Gorbachev delicately hinted to the State Secretary that although he does not particularly blame the Vatican in such actions, the Roman Catholic Church was still suspected of this kind of intention. “Since we are different, we should not fight with each other,” further noted

Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 2009b, p. 116). From the above-posed passages, it is not difficult to figure out that the two parties were somehow at war with each other. This war was demonstrated by the Vatican's efforts to feed nationalist sentiments in at least the Catholic populations of the Soviet Union. Similar discourse is noticeable in Gorbachev's talk with the Secretary of the Roman Curia Angelo Sodano during their 20 October 1989 meeting in Moscow. "Religious activity, as well as political activity, is not painless," Gorbachev noted, "there are problems in this area, and we discussed this matter with Cardinal Casaroli [...] We appeal to all religious authorities with a call to serve the pacification of passions and support perestroika with all its difficulties and complexities" (Gorbachev, 2010c, p. 265). As we see, Gorbachev signaled Archbishop Sodano that the Kremlin was asking the Vatican to support perestroika by contributing to "pacification of passions" of Soviet separatists and not doing the opposite. One and a half months later, Gorbachev visited the Vatican and met with John Paul II on 1 December 1989. Here is a relevant excerpt from their memcon: "[Gorbachev:] We would like to hope that there will be incentives from your side to ensure that ongoing processes are not exacerbated, and the existing complications are settled. We would also like to ask to resolve the issue concerning the non-coincidence of the Catholic Church structure in our country with the state borders [...]. In Lviv, the situation was aggravated to the extent that the authorities did not know what to do" (Gorbachev, 2010d, p. 185). This passage demonstrates that the Vatican was involved with the mobilization of nationalism in western Ukraine, which is noted by Nahajlo (Nahajlo, 1999).

To summarize, the Vatican factor played a prominent role in the 1989 Polish revolution (the main trigger of the 1989 chain reaction of revolutions in East Central Europe). It also influenced the mobilization of nationalists in western Ukraine. There might have been influences from the Vatican in predominantly Catholic Lithuania, but we could not find the corresponding information in the reviewed literature and primary documents. The Vatican's influences undoubtedly weakened Gorbachev's leadership and further exacerbated the Soviet multilateral crisis. It made Gorbachev's leadership more submissive to Western diplomacy. It played a role in forming Gorbachev's concessionary policy vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics.

#### ***4.2.2.8. The snowballing effect of 1989***

For the general understanding of the concept of a snowball effect, we can refer to Samuel Huntington's scholarship. In 1991 he argued that "knowledge of significant political events is increasingly transmitted almost instantaneously around the world. Hence event x in one country is increasingly capable of triggering a comparable event almost simultaneously in a different country" (Huntington, 1991, p. 33).

The very paradox of Gorbachev's policies is that, although his reforms aimed to settle the increasing vulnerability of the Soviet Union, ultimately, they further worsened the situation. As Keylor notes, "paradoxically, the severe crisis Gorbachev was facing, was further exacerbated due to the political reforms initiated under his leadership" (Keylor, 2015, p. 656). "It is one of the paradoxes of the dismantling of the Communist system that the most decisive steps in that process were taken by high-ranking members of the Communist Party, including, crucially, the highest" (Brown, 2006, p. 325). During an interview with the magazine "Time" on 22 May 1990, Gorbachev essentially admitted the paradox of his reforms: under the conditions of democratization and glasnost, he said, the process of national revival has developed, which impedes the process of perestroika [...] as it triggers separatist and selfish national tendencies (Gorbachev, 2011c, p. 82). As Alex Pravda notes, "the unintended consequences in Eastern Europe of the liberal turn in foreign policy helped catalyze centrifugal pressures within the USSR" (Pravda, 2010, p. 377).

Kramer presents his thorough examination of the influence of the East Central European revolutions on the USSR in his three-part series of articles in the *Journal of Cold War Studies*. He tells the story of how, on the one hand, 'losing' of East Central Europe and undermining the Kremlin's interests there exacerbated the crisis of Soviet political elite and on the other, how the diffusion of strategies and information from the 'outer' to the 'inner' empire contributed to strengthening the nationalist stance and ultimately to the Soviet demise (Kramer, 2005). Beissinger notes that activists in the Baltic republics and Ukraine were emboldened by the progress of nationalism movements in the Soviet outer empire. Beissinger illustrates the banners from the December 1989 Dnepropetrovsk demonstration, which read:



“the peoples of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia have said no to a communist dictatorship. The next word is ours, citizens!” (Beissinger, 2002, p. 194).

Besides the paradoxical nature of Gorbachev’s policies, we should note that had Gorbachev sided with the Brezhnev Doctrine, the outcomes of this action might have been more drastic. Nevertheless, what was the tremendous achievement of Gorbachev’s leadership was a bloodless and peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union. Sometimes the value of this very achievement is underestimated, and it should not be.

Gorbachev’s liberal policy vis-à-vis the East Central European states created an international conjuncture that further exacerbated the USSR’s domestic problems and *inter alia* contributed to the Kremlin’s retreat from the Baltic republics.

#### ***4.2.2.9. World market prices of crude oil***

The world oil market was a crucial international conjuncture, which had a substantive impact on Soviet politics. It continues to be so in the case of the modern Russian Federation. During the 1970s and the early 1980s, oil production volumes in the USSR increasingly rose, and the hard currency gained from its sails at least partially disguised Soviet economic inefficiency. However, a sudden fall in oil prices from late 1985 further accelerated the Soviet domestic economic crisis (Brown, 2006, p. 332). During 15 years, the USSR increased oil production volume from 100 billion to 170 billion Rubles (Gorbachev, 2013, p. 294). Kenez notes that the Soviet government was unlucky with the fall of crude oil prices, as oil remained a major Soviet export item – therefore, it gave a massive blow to the Soviet budget (Kenez, 2006, p. 266). As Gorbachev noted during his talk with President Bush in Malta, the total size of the Soviet budget deficit resulted from the Chernobyl and Spitalak disasters, losses from the anti-alcohol campaign, and the fall of international prices of oil (Gorbachev, 2010d, p. 215). According to Gorbachev’s comment on the State Soviet of the Soviet Union meeting held on 6 September 1991, the Soviet budget had lost about 40% of its revenue due to the decline of oil prices (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 113). The sudden deterioration of oil prices made the USSR’s economy more vulnerable and deprived it of a vital inflow of hard currency in the budget. Accordingly, Gorbachev became more dependent on Western financial

assistance, which undoubtedly influenced him to liberalize the Kremlin's policy vis-à-vis East Central Europe and the Baltic republics.

#### ***4.2.2.10. Influences from Iran***

On the 24 July 1986 Politburo meeting, Gorbachev noted that the increasing influence from Iran activated nationalist aspirations in Central Asia and the North Caucasus. There were attempts to reframe the history of the Soviet Union from religious perspectives and endeavors to inculcate ideas that would prompt the impossibility of saving national culture without Islamic traditions (Gorbachev, 2008c, p. 563). Gorbachev suggested launching a fight against anti-Soviet revelations of religious extremism by declining the religiosity in public. "Our propaganda should show what happens in Iran. It should display the ugly remnants of the bride price, self-immolation, and polygamy," he said (Gorbachev, 2008c, p. 340). Besides the general propaganda campaign, Gorbachev suggested endorse feminist movements, introduce new activities in schools, etc.

The Muslim populations in the Soviet Union were concentrated in Central Asia, North Caucasus, Azerbaijan, in some areas in Georgia and Armenia, Volga region, and some regions in Siberia. As the editors of Gorbachev's collected works note, Islam's growing influence occurred alongside the activation of nationalist sentiments, especially in Central Asia and Caucasus (Gorbachev, 2008, p. 563). Although Iran's factor played an active role in the activation of nationalist sentiments in the Soviet Muslim populations, from the reviewed materials, we cannot find any evidence that it anyhow encouraged radical Islamic terrorism. Nevertheless, the rise of Muslim intelligentsias alongside the growing nationalist stance contributed to strengthening centrifugal elements in the USSR and weakened the Kremlin's legitimacy.

Eduard Shevardnadze's meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini on 25 February 1989 in many ways had a similar character, as Gorbachev's meetings with the representatives of the Vatican and ultimately with the Pope in 1988 and 1989. Shevardnadze's visit was supposed to normalize the USSR-Iranian relations and signal Iranian authorities to "pacify" religious groups and support perestroika instead of doing the opposite. The very fact that Khomeini

agreed to meet Shevardnadze was already a significant breakthrough. As Shevardnadze notes in his memoirs, according to the Speaker of the Parliament of Iran, who shortly became the fourth President of Iran - Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, he was the “only foreigner Khomeini met [after Islamic Revolution]” - Rafsanjani told this to Shevardnadze during his visit in Tbilisi in 1995 (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 151). Shevardnadze recalls Khomeini’s short and only comment during their meeting, half of which concerned theology and not politics: “I am disappointed,” noted Khomeini, “I heard that Gorbachev is a thoughtful man. It was not a coincidence that I sent a letter to him, where the role of a human being is discussed not so much on the earth but in the kingdom of heaven. I am not interested in what happens on the earth - I look to heaven. I did not get an answer on this matter [from Gorbachev]. As far as the normalization of relations is concerned, I will support this process” (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 149). As Shevardnadze notes, he had an impression that his meeting was not a success, but surprisingly as the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati told him later, “Imam was very pleased; – how is that possible, he barely talked to me,” replied Shevardnadze; “- did not you notice? He nodded three times. Do you know what this means for us? - great respect and attention,” remarked Velayati (Shevardnadze, 2006, p. 150).

The success of the Shevardnadze-Khomeini meeting was demonstrated by Tehran’s mild and calm reaction on 31 December 1989 developments on the Soviet-Iranian border in Nakhichevan ASSR, Azerbaijan. On that day, extremists conducted a pogrom on the Nakhichevan section of the USSR-Iranian border. Electric signalization, observation towers, and border signs were destroyed. The border guards were given an ultimatum to dismantle engineering facilities within a week; otherwise, they threatened to burn them down. On the New Year in Baku, appeals about opening the border and uniting northern and southern Azerbaijan were heard at national front rallies (Gorbachev, 2014, pp. 456-457). As the Soviet Union Embassy from Iran reported, there were not even indications of acrimony. In the report, it was noted that officials in Tehran understood that their “northern neighbor” was experiencing challenges, and there were not even attempts from their side to take advantage of this situation (Gorbachev, 2011a, p. 624).

Iran’s factor in many ways contributed to the activation of nationalist aspirations in Central Asia and the Caucasus, weakened Gorbachev’s position at home, and therefore made his

policies more submissive to Western diplomatic pressures. However, since the bilateral relations were generally normalized between the two countries since early 1989, most likely, Iran's factor played only a minor role in shaping Gorbachev's policies in East Central Europe and the Baltic republics later.

## CONCLUSION

This study portrays how the complex and sometimes unexpected interplay of structural and conjunctural factors determined the Kremlin's revocation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and conditioned Moscow's gradual retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics. The historical institutionalist framework allowed us to capture how this complex interplay of multiple factors impacted the formation of the Kremlin's politics.

We summarized the existing English, Russian and German literature concerning our topic and synthesized it with our findings from newly available Soviet archival sources. Accordingly, our study's primary added value is utilizing up to 16 000 pages-long Russian language primary sources and integrating the findings into the existing international scholarship. Thoroughly compiled in-text references to archival sources with the page numbers indicated allows the reader to quickly revisit quoted and cited passages in original archival materials and utilize the findings of our study for their research.

In the conceptual chapter, we depicted some contextual clarifications for explaining Gorbachev's policies and the primary strategy and rationale behind the decision-making process in the Kremlin. The main prism through which we explain Moscow's gradual retreat from East Central Europe and the Baltic republics is Gorbachev's strive for the Soviet self-survival. The growing costs of the Soviet imperial overstretch increasingly hindered the already eroding national economy and put the existence of the whole state under serious jeopardy. The negative impact from the nuclear and natural disasters, such as the Chernobyl catastrophe and the Spitak earthquake, further embittered the Kremlin's economic vulnerability. Accordingly, an atypical situation for the Soviet state was created when domestic politics superseded the Kremlin foreign policy.

Path dependency played a decisive role in Gorbachev's new policy crafting. His team tried to imitate Vladimir Lenin's Brest-Litovsk treaty strategy and compromise Soviet peripheral territories to save the imperial center. Initially, the Kremlin liberalized its' discourse. Although Gorbachev's rhetoric was in many ways ambiguous, it became apparent that leaders in Moscow wanted to signal the whole world that the USSR was on its way to the

revocation of the Brezhnev Doctrine. Verbal assurances were followed by the Kremlin's inert reaction to the 1989 East Central European revolutions. One year later, Moscow officially accepted the reunification of Germany and the former GDR's integration to NATO. One more year later, the Kremlin *de-jure* recognized the Baltic independence. There is enough basis for arguing that Gorbachev might have been ready to compromise the Kremlin's dominance not only in East Central Europe and the Baltic republics but also in the South Caucasus and Moldova. In Chapter 2, we argue that the very imperial center the Kremlin was not ready to compromise at any price was the unity of the four Soviet nuclear republics: the RSFSR, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

Gorbachev's *quid pro quo* was settling all issues in contention with the West and safeguarding Western support for successfully implementing Soviet domestic reforms. Accordingly, the Kremlin's liberalization policies had very pragmatic reasons, and they were not necessarily derived from Gorbachev's unconditional strive for world peace and international humanism. Gorbachev's policies played a tremendous role in the peaceful resolution of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union – which was an excellent achievement for the whole world. However, the very basis of his politics was the Soviet self-survival and his unconditional strive for the recreation of the Soviet state to a modern European confederation. His strategy failed, and the Soviet Union collapsed. Contingency played a decisive role in Gorbachev's failure.

Gorbachev's response to the growing structural problems in the country was his attempt to liberalize and somewhat recreate the national economy by perestroika and transform increasingly eroding Soviet ideology by introducing *glasnost* and *new thinking*. Cardinal sociopolitical shift from the traditional Soviet monolithism to the ideological and political pluralism was supposed to initiate the new generation's "cleansing from the Bolshevik morality" and the transformation of the traditional forms of the Soviet social capital to a European type. The main unforeseen problem in this regard became the fact that "seemingly neutralized and blocked totalitarian structures still exist[ed] in the social and mental space," which resulted in the radicalization of intra-national and intra-ethnic relations (Mamardashvili, 2011, p. 245). Soviet society appeared not to be ready to accept the heresy of pluralistic freedom. Its introduction resulted in the sudden reactivation of radical ideas that

had their roots in Stalinist nationalism (Maisuradze, 2019, p. 80-81). Once the popular fronts in the Union republics sensed the weakening of the Kremlin “claws,” their primary goal became mobilizing the local nationalist discourse and acquiring independence from the Kremlin.

Besides the ideological immaturity of the Soviet society to accept the heresy of pluralistic freedom, “the perceived failure of state socialism to offer a living standard similar to that of the more advanced Western societies” played a decisive role too (Petrescu, 2014, pp. 30-34). That also indicates the not-readiness of the Soviet society for bearing the challenges of cardinal transformations. The enormously large Soviet economic organism’s liberalization could not have happened painlessly, especially during the short deadlines. Most Soviet and Western economists agreed that a radical reform of the Soviet economy was impossible without experiencing inflation and unemployment on very significant scales (Gorbachev, 2011c, p. 68). The Soviet population appeared not to be ready to bear this cost; however, paradoxically, they chose the alternative to cast away the national economies of their newly established states for decades.

Besides the immaturity of the Soviet population for accepting the challenges of vigorous reforms, Gorbachev’s leadership too, in many ways, appeared not to be ready to stay faithful to the new principles it advocated. Gorbachev’s new ideology was revoking “the ends justify the means” classical principle. However, during some episodes, when the new path’s implementation seemed impossible, the leadership in the Kremlin tried to make some painful corrections by coercive measures. Only for the sake of the Soviet state’s ultimate recreation into a modern-type European confederation was the usage of the coercive measures, which ended up in several hundreds of casualties, tolerated - was this the concept of morally permissible violence for the sake of achieving ultimate welfare? These methods had little in common with the path of ideological and spiritual “cleansing” Mahatma Gandhi outlined, the follower of which Gorbachev argues he was (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 38).

In many ways, the growing economic crisis in the USSR contributed to revoking the Kremlin’s imperial ambitions. Besides, the “glorious” imperial inheritance from the past regimes became a heavy burden to bear in the mid-1980s. Broad military presence worldwide and colossal prices of the arms race became a certain kind of black hole for the Soviet budget,

draining the resources needed for the Soviet economy's reinvigoration. The prices of maintaining the USSR's empire in East Central Europe also seemed massive. Fixed friendly prices on Soviet natural resources seemed not to serve the Kremlin's best interests now. Moscow preferred to have regular international price buyers of its natural resources worldwide, instead of the group of allied countries around, who consumed its resources at relatively low prices. Besides, the stability of the Warsaw Pact was still intact. One more factor contributing to increasing the Kremlin's economic vulnerability was the hawkish politics pursued by President Reagan. His Strategic Defense Initiative exposed the Kremlin's inability to compete for the super-power status and embittered Moscow's thirst for arms reductions.

Had the Kremlin not been puzzled by the increasing problems of the eroding national economy, it is less likely that it would have accepted to retreat from its Western peripheries, especially from the Baltic region. The very fact that the Soviet budget was on the brink of total bankruptcy by September 1991 tempted Gorbachev to accept and recognize the Baltic independence. In this manner, he tried not to put under jeopardy the prospective economic aid from the West. The Western leadership was signaling Moscow that the price of their new friendship was the Kremlin's adaptation to the non-coercive measures home and abroad. Particular emphasis besides East Central Europe was put on the Baltic republics – a region the annexation of which was never officially recognized by the West.

Gorbachev did not have many choices to follow, and besides, the growing economic crisis was not the only problem his leadership faced. Nationalism was on its rise too. Apart from the domestic factors of its aggravation, the significant stimulus was injected by nationalism-emboldening Western media, émigrés in the West, the snowballing effect from the 1989 revolutions, and the influences from the Roman Catholic Church and, to a minor extent, from the Islamic Republic of Iran. As it seemed, the official communist atheism was also suffering severe problems.

On the other hand, world market prices of crude oil dropped dramatically – the Soviet budget was losing up to 40 percent of its revenues (Gorbachev, 2018, p. 113). Alongside the gradual decrease of the USSR's solvency, private creditors in the West became increasingly risk-sensitive, ultimately lowering their lending to the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the only viable



option the Kremlin had, was to count on assistance from the Western governments and implement a foreign policy, which matched with the political interests of the Western states.

The main prism through which we can objectively evaluate and explain the ongoing regional conflicts in post-Soviet Eastern Europe is the increasing expansion of NATO in the former communist space. Moscow claims that “the spirit of the statements and assurances” made in 1989-1990 by the Westerners, which supposed not disturbing the Kremlin’s security interests in Eastern Europe, has been violated. Americans made no binding promises to the Kremlin in 1989-1990 concerning the no-NATO-enlargement to the East beyond the former GDR. The verbal promises they made concerned Bush’s and Gorbachev’s leadership only. However, Moscow’s present leadership feels that the Kremlin’s security interests became a victim of diplomatic manipulation and dishonesty. Putin’s policy signals the Western capitals’ leadership that the post-Cold War red lines between NATO and the Kremlin should not go further beyond the former Soviet Union border. The violation of this frontier will end up in a military conflict with Russia. This very circumstance makes Ukraine’s, Georgia’s, or Moldova’s NATO membership a sufficiently dangerous gambit.

We think that two policy-relevant conclusions can be derived from our research findings:

1. When global and regional powers appear in a crisis that puts at stake their existence, in a very pragmatic manner, they accept all necessary concessions for the sake of saving the imperial center - thus ensuring their self-survival. In that sense, the “divide and rule” classical principle is not the only one for great powers, but we can argue that a “make concessions and rule the rest” principle was also used in certain historical situations. Although Gorbachev was unlucky with the *make a concession and rule the rest* strategy, Vladimir Lenin accomplished it very successfully at the beginning of the XXth century. Moreover, the emergence of the Russian Federation on the ruins of the Soviet Union with no territorial losses, given that during the final years of Gorbachev’s leadership, several autonomous entities in the RSFSR (like Chechnya, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Yakutia) had separatist demands (Tchanturia, 2019a, p. 304) and Gorbachev was also negotiating the return of the Kuril Islands to Japan, indicates that in exchange for a concession of its control on the Union republics, the Kremlin preserved the very heart of its imperial center.

Besides, relatively small players in world politics can also learn something from the *make a concession and rule the rest* strategy, especially the post-Soviet states with the frozen and/or active regional conflicts on their territories. After all, politics is a pragmatic process, and it should not be confused with all kinds of nationalist sentiments – this is a very well-established circumstance, and we cannot deny it. The governments and their respective populations in Kyiv, Tbilisi, and elsewhere in the post-Soviet Eastern Europe should arm themselves with pragmatic policies and, to some extent, get ready to recognize the interests of the breakaway entities and the Russian Federation for ensuring their efficient rule on the rest of their territory (Tchanturia, 2019b, p. 106).

2. The democratization of a multi-ethnic totalitarian state is a task with paramount difficulty. In many ways, introducing new freedoms can generate radicalization of social discourse and bring the old precipitated discontent to the surface of the political stage. In these circumstances, it is questionable whether the internal strength and cohesion of a state are strong enough to sustain this kind of series of frustrations and setbacks. Therefore, there is a reasonable risk that a totalitarian multi-ethnic state's democratization can create the emotional and doctrinaire political argument which might paralyze political life and, ultimately, an entire regime. Considering the circumstances mentioned above, the democratization of the People's Republic of China bears more risks than prospects, and therefore the Communist Party of China abstains from its implementation.

The similar logic applies to the democratization of Russia. Putin's leadership is seemingly aware of the risks that resuming Gorbachev's policies might bring. We think that path dependency plays a vital role here. The Kremlin's promotion of the general democratization process can quickly put Putin's leadership and the territorial integrity of the whole federation in serious jeopardy.

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