

R.H. SIMONYAN

HOW THE SOVIET UNION COULD BE PRESERVED (BALTIC ANGLE)

Renald H. SIMONYAN, Dr. Sci. (Sociol.), Chef Researcher, Center for European Studies, MGIMO University, Moscow, Russia (sim@isras.ru).

Abstract. *The historical experience of the world's first socialist state and the reasons for its collapse is a fundamental problem not only in Russian, but also in foreign social studies. In the context of the globalization of the economy and the emergence of regional forms of association of states, one of which is the EU, the experience of the USSR is in demand: the integration of states that differ in socio-cultural characteristics, common patterns are inherent. The EU is solving the same systemic problems and experiencing the same difficulties as the USSR. This is due to the diversity of the countries that make up the unions, and the uneven development of their countries. The article substantiates the role of the subjective factor, including the ability of managers to use the experience of the most developed countries, the understanding of which is the basis for overall development. In the USSR, these are the Baltic republics, the population of which most acutely felt the need for radical reforms. The article examines the proposals prepared in this region for the country's recovery from the crisis and the attempts made to encourage the leadership of the USSR to reform, the rejection of which led to the collapse of the country.*

Keywords: *crisis of centralization • the largest catastrophe of the twentieth century • the subjective factor of the historical process*

DOI: 10.31857/S013216250016784-5

This article is a translation of: Симонян Р.Х. Как можно было сохранить Советский Союз (Балтийский ракурс) // *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniia*. 2021. No 8: 62–71. DOI: 10.31857/S013216250014595-7

The potential for a socio-economic development of the USSR. By the 1980s the possibilities of extensive development of the national economy of the USSR were completely exhausted. The Soviet economy entered a period of protracted crisis, and in 1983, for the first time in the post-war period, even according to official data, there was no GDP growth [National Economy..., 1984: 43]. The model of centralized directive and distribution state management had outlived itself. The viciousness of the current system of a ruling of the national economy had become obvious for almost all segments of the population. The Soviet Union needed a radical modernization, the necessary resources were available for this.

First, the USSR had the richest human capital. Today, no one disputes that the main wealth of any state, the main condition and source of modernization is its human capital, by the beginning of "perestroika", the USSR had it in full. The Soviet education system was considered one of the best in the world, and its high quality even today, many years later, is not disputed by anyone in the world. The USSR had a number of scientific schools, including one of the best in the world school mathematics¹. The leading Soviet universities formed highly qualified specialists, many of whom are also now working in Western scientific centers².

¹ Many of its representatives are now working abroad: M. Gromov, winner of the Abel Prize, which is considered the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in mathematics; V. Voevodsky, winner of the John Fields Prize, the highest prize of the International Congress of Mathematicians; D. Kazhdan, winner of the Campe de Ferrier Prize, who was elected a member of the US National Academy of Sciences a year after emigrating from Russia, and many others. Leading Soviet physicists also work abroad, including K. Novoselov and A. Geim, who became Nobel laureates there.

² After the collapse of the USSR, the American Silicon Valley began to speak Russian, as graduates of Soviet universities rushed there. In the USA, they are considered the best programmers and developers of

The population of the USSR was one of the most educated in the world; the country, according to foreign sociological services, was considered as "nation of most reading people".

Secondly, despite the emerging lag behind the advanced countries, by the mid-1980s the USSR had a developed industrial and technical base: out of 45 macro-technologies, which allow the global production of high-tech products, in 23 the Soviet Union occupied the first places (space and aviation technology, nuclear power, instrumentation, biochemistry, etc.) or was among the leaders [Petrakov, 2005: 188]. The USSR was ahead in computing technology of Europeans and Americans in a number of directions³. The "closed" cities, where scientific research was carried out and high – tech products were produced, stood surrounded by a dense network of Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Gorki, Saratov, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk. Another indicator of the high technical level of the country is the presence of its own machine tool industry: only 18 countries had their own production of machine tools, among them our country always occupied the 2nd or 3rd places. The of military production is another indicator of the country's high scientific and technical base: the USSR ranked as second in the world in terms of arms exports.

Thirdly, the USSR had unique natural resources the world's largest zone of "chernozems" and about 30% of the world's proven mineral reserves (practically the entire periodic table) and energy resources with 3.2% of the world's population. There were no states in the world, which had such significant treasures of the subsoil.

Fourth, it is the energy of the population, the spiritual uplift that had engulfed almost all residents of the country. The readiness of the people, accustomed to trials, to new difficulties for the sake of turning the country into a modern prosperous state was universal. It is appropriate to recall Lenin's thesis that "an idea that has mastered the masses becomes a material force."

We should also mention the favorable international conditions. After the end of the Cold War, the world (primarily European) public looked at the USSR with the hope of its return to the rank of developed democratic countries. What other additional conditions were needed for a modernization breakthrough? Moreover, the experience of introducing market methods into the socialist economy were also already.

In March 1985, when Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the successful adaptation of market mechanisms to the planned economy had been going on in communist China for 7 years. And this is despite the fact that the bulk of the population of the USSR was not semi – literate peasants from rice fields, but educated people. This emphasized Gorbachev's advantage over Deng Xiaoping, the last one was the most successful reformers of our time, who began to implement reforms in incomparably more difficult conditions⁴, when famine was raging in many provinces of China. However, 2 years (!) after the intro-

computer technology. Only in California about 60 thousand immigrants from the USSR work mathematicians, physicists, chemists, biologists, biophysicists, semiotics, linguists, engineers, programmers. According to one of the leading Soviet bacteriologists K. Alibekov, who left for the United States in 2004, by the beginning of 2012, about 800 thousand Soviet scientists were working in various countries of the world, including more than 70 thousand from the defense industries (Arguments and Facts. 2012. No. 21. p. 9).

³ The Americans do not dispute the superiority of the Soviet computer either. K. Diefendorff in the article "Russians are coming" admitted that the Russians created such computers 15 years earlier than their Western counterparts. K. Diefendorf was the developer of one of the first Western superscalar processors [Diefendorff, 1999: 36].

⁴ At the end of the 1970s after 15 years of the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Great Cultural Revolution" China was in a deep depression. The economic devastation was supplemented by educational and intellectual as higher educational institutions in China were closed during 10 years, tens of thousands of specialists were repressed, engineering, technical and scientific personnel were physically exterminated or exiled to villages. According to the Dutch historian F. Dikötter the author of the book "Mao's Great Famine", the "Big Leap" alone claimed the lives of at least 45 million people [Dikötter, 2013: 74]. Deng Xiaoping himself was twice repressed. By the way, in the mid-1920s, during the period of the NEP, Deng Xiaoping studied in Moscow in the University of the Working People of the East and was fond of the "market" ideas of N. Bukharin, whose book "The Economy of the Transition Period" he often cited.

duction of self-supporting relations in agriculture, China began to export a food to the USSR. Against this background, the success of the upcoming reforms in the USSR was not in doubt.

There was another example of our neighbors in addition to China as the northern European countries, social-democratic governments of which managed to find a balance between the basic values of the society as freedom and justice. It was in this region which back in the 1930s, as the first socio-political phenomenon appeared in Europe, it is the "social state" (in Soviet lexicon "Swedish socialism"). We are talking about a system of relations that best corresponds to human nature itself as a desire for freedom and personal success (in a market economy for a wealth).

The access to the knowledge of the forms of organization of social life that appeared in the 1980s in the countries of Western Europe played the role of a powerful impulse to carry out social transformations. The USSR had a region where these forms operated relatively recently (only 40–45 years ago), this is the Baltic republics. The desire for cardinal changes was common to the population of all the Union republics, but in the Baltic States it was not only more acute than in other regions of the country, but also distinguished by constructiveness. Many analysts paid attention to the modernization mood of the population in the Baltic republics. The English historian A. Brown wrote: "When residents of the Baltic States compare their standard of living with their neighbors, they look not at the "third world" states neighboring the republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, but at the prosperous Finns and Scandinavians, imagining themselves in their place" [Brown, 1989: 27].

In the Baltic republics, primarily in Estonia and Latvia, economic life was traditionally determined by the Protestant work ethic and the work ethic of the Russian Old Believers, who made up a significant proportion of the Baltic population since the end of the XVII century. The role of this factor in the economy was manifested during the development of capitalism in Russia in the late XIX – early XX centuries: Riga was the third center of industry and science after Moscow and St. Petersburg, there were factories for the production of the first Russian electric motors, cars, and airplanes. In the Soviet Union, goods and services produced in the Baltic States have always been in high demand.

In the USSR, Estonia was the only republic whose population could see the "world of capitalism" every day. It was possible to watch Finnish TV programs since 1965 in this republic, which was interesting for both Estonians and Russians⁵: 5 "It was like a window to the world was opened," the head of the department wrote. the ideological department of the Central Committee of the KPE M. Titma. – We saw how different it is from the one in which we live" [Titma, 1989: 33]. But Finland was not a rich country by European standards at that time. The constituent regions of the USSR were extremely diverse: natural, economic, social, demographic, historical and cultural, including the degree of readiness for social modernization [Simonyan, 2002: 31]. The population of the Baltic States (like Moscow and Leningrad) had the highest proportion of intellectuals (in Estonia-32.7%) [National Economy..., 1990: 609], it was a social group with increased reflection and especially acutely reacting to what is happening.

The leaders of the USSR skillfully used the advantages of the Baltic States, which since the 1960s were a permanent testing ground for a number of economic experiments, technical and organizational innovations, testing new methods of managing the economic mechanism. The Baltic experience of implementing self-financing in the construction, local and food industries and household services, which began in 1986 in Estonia, had already shown a high economic effect [Economic..., 1988]. Therefore, it is not surprising that this region, along with Moscow and Leningrad, turned out to be the leader of the "perestroika" processes in the USSR. This is

⁵ According to the 1989 census, Estonians made up 61.5% of the population of the republic, Tallinn-47.2%.

confirmed, for example, by a four-day visit Gorbachev in February 1987 to Latvia and Estonia⁶, full of meetings with the labor collectives of enterprises and research institutes.

1988 as time of peak of hopes about "perestroika". The situation in the economy at the beginning of "perestroika" was so obvious that it no longer made sense to seriously criticize the overcentralized state management in the economy. There were no more "professional economic secrets" for the public for a long time: huge resources were used extremely inefficiently in the country, and sometimes simply criminally. The air of change was felt in the social atmosphere. "Thousands of excited people walked around Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk and other large and small cities, they were eager for decisive actions to reform the country" [Lyubarsky, 1988: 31]. The enthusiasm that engulfed the population was most noticeable in the west part of the country: "The political transformations that began in the USSR, especially in 1988, swept Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania like a whirlwind" [Weide-man, 2008: 77]. At the same time, the ethnic factor was not paramount: Russian – speakers (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, etc.) made up the majority in many cities of the Baltic region, especially the labor collectives of large industrial enterprises, which leaders were mainly representatives of non – titular ethnic groups.

The fact that the Baltic locomotive was "under steam" to lead the country out of the economic impasse was an undoubted trump card of the initiators of "perestroika". "However, time passed," Gorbachev's adviser A. Grachev testifies – "and the changes announced from the rostrum of the congress and promised to society did not occur" [Grachev, 2001: 156]. Gorbachev's assistant A. Chernyaev will then write about the substitution of real actions with streams of words: "Every year Gorbachev rushes more and more, attaching special importance to words: he convinces, shames, calls, conjures, admonishes, agitates, threatens, and all this was in vain. All words... words... words" [Chernyaev, 1997: 59].

A Russian proverb says: "They are waiting for the promised three years." For reforms, three years are expected, this was 1988, in which they were finally supposed to begin and because of weighty reason, it was economic problems. The consumer market was finally destroyed in the country, the supply of essential goods to the population was transferred to the card system. Member of the Presidential Council O. Latsis describing the political atmosphere of 1988 focuses on "disappointment in perestroika, during which Gorbachev's activity in real achievements was increasingly inferior to his activity in delivering instructive speeches" [Latsis, 2001: 224]. Thinking people in the country asked the question: what else should be done to encourage the Center to take active action?

Realizing the need for some decisive step, Gorbachev announced the convening of an All-Union Party Conference. This decision inspired the public of the country. In the Baltic States, the general mood could be expressed in words: "Moscow begins to re-form". In those days, in an editorial article, the journal of the USSR Academy of Sciences "Economic Sciences" wrote: "Our joint efforts as both of the Center and of local officials should be aimed at scrapping the stagnant, too bureaucratic system. This requires the efforts of the republics, coordinated joint actions to ensure genuine self-financing" (1988, No. 4. p. 4).

The concepts of republican self-financing proposed by the Baltic republics were not something fundamentally new. These ideas were in line with the theoretical developments prepared by Soviet market economists, starting with the "Kosygin" reforms and, above all, the works of their ideologist E. Lieberman. In the 1980s economic development became the dominant subject in scientific and economic discourse. As the first step towards the introduction of market mechanisms into the socialist economy, it was supposed to take one of the central places in the decisions of the XIX Party Conference, which opened on June 28, 1988. The hopes of the Soviet people for changes were fueled by the fact that for the first time a party event of this level was broadcast on the All-Union television.

⁶ After N. Khrushchev's visit to Riga in June 1959, this was the first visit of the head of the USSR to the Baltic States.

The presence of the “Baltic locomotive” was confirmed by the Estonian delegation as the only one that came to Moscow with a specific action program. The program, supported by all the grassroots organizations of the Communists of this republic, did not contain anything beyond the scope of the tasks of “perestroika”. It outlined not only the urgent tasks of overcoming the systemic crisis, but also the methods of solving these ones as a regional economic plan, a new election law, the development of self-government, the development of the Union Treaty, the creation of a Constitutional Court, a mechanism for distributing rights and powers and a system of interaction between the Center and the republics.

The content of the program of the Estonian delegation could be, at least, a good basis for discussing measures for the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, which have already begun to be implemented in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. However, then leadership of the USSR did not understand the real state of affairs in the country, so the KPI program was rejected as too revolutionary and premature. The section on regional self-financing appeared in the resolution only after the insistent demands of the conference delegate, honored Inventor of the USSR B. Mironov, who represented the Tallinn plant named after Kalinin.

The fact that the Central Committee of the CPSU felt a threat to its position in this program is not the fault of the Communists of Estonia, but the misfortune of the leaders of the USSR, who did not understand at that time that they were offered a real chance of saving the state that had entered a political and economic impasse. Opening the CPSU conference, its general secretary first expresses deep regret that “during the three years of perestroika, the party has not achieved revolutionary transformations”, and then rejects the program of the Estonian Communists as “too revolutionary” [Materials..., 1988: 17, 129]. In this cognitive dissonance of the leader is the drama of a great state. The Center had demonstrated that, despite its claims, it no longer determines events, but is increasingly lagging behind their development.

The Soviet people watched as the over-centralized economy entered deeper and deeper into a comatose state. They not only observed, but also put forward initiatives, forming them into powerful movements in support of reforms. The strength of these “grassroots” initiatives was that they came on behalf of not only public, but also leading scientific organizations. “Now, to a certain extent, the proposals that, having been adopted, hardly led to the collapse of the USSR have been forgotten, both the Gorbachev followers and their initiators do not like to remember them, for well – known reasons. This refers to the concepts of economic sovereignty, republican self-financing, put forward in Estonia and supported in other Baltic republics. Unfortunately, these proposals were categorically rejected... In Moscow, the foremen of perestroika listened only to themselves” [Toshchenko, 2003: 17–18].

Two years later, the fate of a more radical program of transition to market relations, where self – financing as the first step has already lost its validity, turned out to be the same – “500 days”, prepared by a group of authoritative market economists (S. Shatalin, G. Yavlinsky, N. Petrakov, O. Bogomolov, etc.). In accordance with this program, it was supposed to neutralize the ruble overhang, free up prices and put the country on the rails of a market economy, commercializing economy. The core of the program was privatization: since the state had all the property, and the people had money, it was envisaged to exchange one for another. Moreover, privatization was supposed to begin with small assets as shops, public catering and household services, etc., with a gradual transition to industrial enterprises, as was already done in the socialist countries of Europe⁷.

The program “500 days” was adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Gorbachev, who energetically supported the “500 days” and even widely informed the world community, then retreated under the pressure of the military-industrial lobby, which saw it as a threat to its interests. “It seemed that a decisive step in the economy would finally be taken. After all, the President could not help but see that the gap between political and economic transformations

⁷ Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Slovenia were already starting the second stage of privatization, and the USSR was stuck discussing issues of self-supporting relations between enterprises and regions.

is becoming extremely dangerous for the country. And at the most dramatic moment of the choice, when literally everything depended on the President, the civil courage of one person would have saved the "500 days" program at the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, we did not see this courage" [Sobchak, 1991: 267].

Replacing actions with declarations led to the fact that Gorbachev and his perestroika lived a separate life. At the same time, the speeds were different: Gorbachev moved slowly, leading combinations to neutralize the conservatives, issuing convincing documents on the need for reforms, and perestroika moved quickly, thereby "acceleration", with the slogan of which his leadership of the country began. Any historical moment, and even more so a turning point, is immanent by various scenarios of development. "I personally believe in randomness in history, that is, in the will of man," wrote academician D. Likhachev. Therefore, such questions as "what awaits us in the future?" they don't make sense. We are waiting for what we will do ourselves, because there are no such laws that would lead us along a strictly defined path in history" [Likhachev, 2007: 3]. In the new history, the subjective factor – the will of the political leader – plays a decisive role. There are many examples when overdue reforms were missed due to a weak leader, there are also the opposite ones, when the presence of a strong personality compensated for the lack of objective conditions for revolutionary changes⁸. 8 "Even if the efforts of social actors in the historical process lead to unexpected consequences, they do not cease to be the product of their actions" [Yadov, 2001: 14].

In the economic crisis that began in the 1980s in the USSR, much depended on the personal qualities of the head of state: "The meeting of the first secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Parties of the Union Republics and regional party committees, held for the first time in July 1989, showed how theoretically blind and disconnected from reality Gorbachev and the highest party activists were" [Onikov, 1996: 84]. The multinational nature of the country required from its leader, if not understanding, then at least a respectful attitude to this sphere of society. "It seems that Gorbachev had to see a lot and think about a lot. After all, he himself came from the North Caucasus. But subsequent events showed that he understood national relations the worst and made the most serious mistakes in this area" [Latsis, 2001: 206]. His incompetence in understanding and evaluating the processes taking place in the country was reflected in sociological studies. In August 1989, VTsIOM conducted a survey of the USSR population on national relations based on the All-Union sample. The respondents' answers to the question "What threatens good relations between peoples?" showed that even among the Russian-speaking residents of the Baltic States, the majority of respondents (53.2%) associated the main danger directly with the policy of the Center [Levada, 1990: 182].

Attempts to encourage Gorbachev to reform. Due to the rapidly deteriorating situation and the lack of real efforts by the Center to improve it, the party leadership of the Union republics found themselves in a difficult situation, as nationalists became more active in the conditions of the deepening economic crisis. The leaders of the republics understood that they were politically doomed if they failed to confirm their national character. The specific role of the Communist Parties of the Baltic republics at that time was to preserve themselves as a political force that could defend the interests of the republics in a dialogue with the Center. But Gorbachev seemed to have deliberately tried to prevent them from holding power, his actions and rhetoric only strengthened positions of nationalists. "The discussion in the Central Committee of the CPSU was characteristic. The Estonians were begging: make some concession to us, at least a step towards us, so that we can show our people that we are considered... But Gorbachev spoke to them in an imperative tone just without knocking his fist on the table" [Brutents, 2005: 394].

⁸ One of the main organizers of the October revolution L. Trotsky in his book asks the question "If Lenin had not reached Russia in April 1917? (which, in his opinion, was very likely) and, answering it, makes a categorical conclusion: "If there had been no Lenin, there would have been no October" [Trotsky, 1990: 332].

The position between the hammer and the anvil forced V. Väläs, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Estonia, takes the initiative. It was decided to convene an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the SSR on November 16 1988 to consider proposals received after the XIX party conference, the leitmotif of which was the adoption of a new Union Treaty. 262 out of 280 deputies voted in favor of the resolution "On the Union Treaty," no one voted against it. The Declaration of Sovereignty of the Republic, adopted by a majority of 258 votes, established: "Sovereignty of the Estonian SSR means that it owns the highest power in its territory in the person of its highest governing bodies. Accordingly, the status of a republic within the USSR must be determined by the Union Treaty.

The effectiveness of the Estonian demarche was reflected in Gorbachev's speech on November 29, 1988 at the session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he agreed on the legality of the urgent issues faced by Estonia and the need to resolve them:

"The next stage of political transformation will be related to the harmonization of relations between the USSR Union and its constituent republics. At this stage, the status of the republics, the expansion of their rights in political, socio-economic and cultural life will be considered⁹"

Estonia's campaign went. Although the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR abolished the declaration of sovereignty of the ESSR, the Center reacted promptly: the Commission of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the division of powers between the Center and the Union Republics ("Tarazevich Commission¹⁰"), which operated from December 1988 to May 1989, was established. Within its framework, a working group was formed to prepare materials for the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee on the renewal of the Union and the development of federal relations. In addition to deputies and employees of the Supreme Soviet apparatus, 17 scientists were included, mostly civil lawyers, three economists and two sociologists, specialists in the Baltics (together with the author, the group included Deputy Director of the Institute of Sociology of the USSR Academy of Sciences V. Mansurov).

The meetings mainly focused on a new Union Treaty, which should record the competences of the Center and the republics. Deputies of the Baltic republics¹¹ justified the expediency in the Union Department of those powers that could not be exercised at the level of the republics: financial system, energy, air, sea and rail transport, state security, border protection, armed forces, defense industry, foreign policy. The rest of the spheres – economy, construction, agriculture, health, culture, household services – were proposed to be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Union Republics. This was the very decentralization that the USSR has repeatedly tried to implement. Of course, this initiative was supposed to come from Moscow. Especially since the flow of letters to the CPSU Central Committee with proposals for division of powers between the Center and the republics increased [Simonyan, 2011]. The public of the Baltic republics at that moment still hoped that their reasonable proposals for the reform of the economy and federalism would interest the Center.

Six years later, Gorbachev publicly admits the rightness of these proposals in his memoirs in the section on the Baltics: "... belated explanations..., this delay did loss precious time..." etc. [Gorbachev, 1995: 512, 513, 514, 517, 518].

Because of their professional activities, sociologists which conducted research in the republics focused much better than other social scientists in the disintegration processes taking place in the country. This made it possible to make convincing arguments for the adoption of a recommendation in the final document of the commission to the leadership of the USSR to sign a new Union Treaty. The main opponents of this position were persons of the Legal department of the

⁹ Izvestia. 1988. November 30. P. 2.

¹⁰ Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR G. Tarazevich is then Chairman of the Commission of the Council of Nationalities on National Policy and Interethnic Relations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

¹¹ Academician R. Kukaine, Director of the Riga Institute of Microbiology, Minister of Culture of Lithuania L. Shepetis, head of the Tartu Horse S. Rike are all communists, deputies of the Supreme Soviets of their republics.

Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, they defended a thesis: "There is a Constitution of the USSR and no new treaty is needed." Sociologists' arguments were particularly disliked by the deputy head of the department P.I. Sedugin, whose efforts to improve the content of the final document turned out this document to be dull and almost useless.

Three years later, I met P.I. Sedugin in the State Duma and couldn't hold myself and asked: "Pyotr Ivanovich, have you now seen that in 1989 a new Union Treaty proposed by the Balots should have been signed?" He replied that "it's not as important as I or the members of our working group thought then, it's important, as Gorbachev thought then, and therefore whatever recommendations we made, this couldn't change his position." That is, until the last moment, there was a hardware tradition of giving management only those proposals that fully meet his expectations. This episode accurately characterizes the consciousness and psychological attitudes of the party-state nomenclature of that period. "In the Spring of 1989, it was not yet clear what future Estonia and the Soviet Union were going on," Estonian Minister of Culture Y. Allik. – Although Moscow chose Yeltsin as its representative at the Congress of People's Deputies, power in Estonia was still quite firmly in the hands of Vālas, and in the Kremlin – in Gorbachev's hands" [Allik, 2000: 145]. Describing the events on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, American Sovietologist R. Garthoff, who met with almost all leading central and Republican figures during "perestroika" years, also emphasizes that in 1989 "only a very small part of politicians, even in the Baltic republics, called for independence. And the issue of compromise solutions was still open" [Garthoff, 1993: 395].

For our country, the situation in the late 1980s is a typical historical fork. And one of the most real opportunities to hinder centrifugal trends was to sign a new Union Treaty. What obvious benefits flowed from it?

First, by signing this document, the leaders of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia would legitimize their presence in the USSR. This would automatically entail a change in the position of the West, which never recognized their legal inclusion in the USSR in 1940. Thus, the most painful, most vulnerable issue of the the Soviet Union was closed¹².

Secondly, it was an initiative of the Baltic republics, which was undoubtedly a winning and tactical, and strategic moment for the Baltic republics at the time, and even more so for the Center.

Thirdly, by signing such a document and transferring economic, cultural and education issues to the jurisdiction of the republics (which their representatives insisted on in the Tarazevich Commission), the Union leadership would relieve tension within these republics and knock the trump cards out of the hands of local national radicals and separatists.

Fourthly, there would be a real opportunity to meet the expectations of the population and finally start, practically, not in words, implementing economic reforms, and in the most prepared region of the country for this purpose.

So, in this time, the USSR had an unusually favorable socio-political situation for both the transition to the market and the development of state federalism. However, the refusal to sign a new Union Treaty in 1989 put an end to both the reformation and the rescue of the USSR. Next step was the agony of the great power.

¹² It is necessary to note the ancestral feature of the Balts, which distinguishes them from their eastern neighbors as obligation, respect for the document. For the modern Russian mentality, these are categories, most often not too revered. Although for people whose generations have lived in the conditions of constant deception on the part of the state, this is probably forgivable. Therefore, sometimes you can hear something like "would leave anyway" about the Baltic states. I always remember this characteristic judgment when I meet with open hostility and even aggression expressed by modern young politicians of the Baltic republics to those persons which made up the Soviet political elite of these countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s: "After all, they wanted to sign a new Union Treaty. If they had achieved this, we would now be not in the EU, but in the USSR." This, of course, is not forgiven.

REFERENCES

- Allik Y. (2000) In memory of the Spiritual Father. *Tallinn*. 2000. No. 19–20: 132–154. (In Russ.) Brown A. (1989) *Rainbow Colors of Perestroika*. Riga. *Atmoda*. No. 3: 15–27. (In Russ.)
- Brutenz K. (2005) *Unfulfilled: Not Indifferent Notes on Perestroika*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. (In Russ.)
- Chernyaev A. (1997) *Diaries of the Assistant to the President*. Moscow: Terra. (In Russ.) Diefendorff K. (1999) Russians are Coming. *Microprocessor Report*. No. 2: 28–39.
- Dikötter F. (2013) *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962*. Hong Kong: Open Edition.
- Economic Mechanism in the Sphere of Consumer Services: The Experience of the Estonian SSR*. (1988) Moscow: Ekonomika. (In Russ.)
- Garthoff R.L. (1993) *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Gorbachev M. (1995) *Life and Reforms*. Moscow: Novosti. (In Russ.)
- Grachev A. (2001) *Gorbachev: The Man Who Wanted What was Best...* Moscow: Vagrius. (In Russ.) Latsis O. (2001) *Carefully Planned Suicide*. Moscow: Moscow School of Political Studies. (In Russ.) Levada Yu. (1990) *There is an Opinion: The Results of the Sociological Survey*. Moscow: Progress. (In Russ.)
- Likhachev D. (2007) Conscience is a Guarantee of Freedom. *Vremya zhit' vmeste* [Time to Live Together]. No. 1: 3–5. (In Russ.)
- Lyubarsky K. (1988) Waiting for a Change. *Novoe vremya* [New Time]. No. 24: 29–31. (In Russ.)
- Materials of the 19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU*. (1988) Moscow: Politizdat. (In Russ.)
- National Economy of the USSR in 1983: Statistical Yearbook*. (1984) Moscow: Finansy i statistika. (In Russ.)
- Onikov L. (1996) *CPSU: Anatomy of Disintegration*. Moscow: Respublika. (In Russ.)
- Petrakov N. (2005) *Innovative Way of Development for the New Russia*. Moscow: Nauka. (In Russ.)
- Simonyan R. (2002) The Baltic Countries and the Collapse of the USSR (On Some Myths and Stereotypes of Mass Consciousness). *Voprosy istorii*. No. 12: 28–39. (In Russ.)
- Simonyan R. (2011) The Subjective in the Historical Process. *Voprosy filosofii*. No. 3: 12–23. (In Russ.)
- Sobchak A. (1991) *Walking into Power: The Story of Parliament's Birth*. Moscow: Novosti. (In Russ.)
- Titma M. (1989) *Estonia: What's going on here?* Tallinn: Periodika. (In Russ.)
- Toshchenko Zh. (2003) *Ethnocracy: History and Modernity (Sociological Essays)*. Moscow: ROSSPEN. (In Russ.)
- Trotsky L. (1990) *On the History of the Russian Revolution*. Moscow: Politizdat. (In Russ.)
- Weidemann R. (2008) A Quarter of a Century of Our Modern History (1982–2007). *Vyshgorod*. No. 1–2: 68–83. (In Russ.)
- Yadov V. (2001) And yet the Mind Can Understand Russia. In: *Russia: Transforming Society*. Moscow: KANON-Press-Ts. (In Russ.)