1989: THE DRAMA OF EXPECTATIONS
Dismantling Communism
AND THE THIRTY YEARS OF THE POST-COMMUNIST ERA
On 31 May - 1 June 2019, Jurmala hosted an international conference called 1989: The Drama of Expectations: The Dismantling of Communism and 30 Years of the Post-Communist Era. It was the first large-scale event of the “30 Years of Post-Soviet Europe” project dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of one of the 20th century’s greatest events, the collapse of the Communist system and subsequent extensive economic, political and social changes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR.

The project has been spearheaded by the European Dialogue Expert Group, which is playing the leading role in its implementation, and it is supported by the Gorbachev Foundation, Friedrich Ebert and Heinrich Boell Stiftungs and the Delegation of the European Union to Russia.

The project’s objective is to rethink the experience and lessons of the post-Communist transition as seen through the eyes of today’s social sciences and to attempt to understand today’s Greater Europe and Eurasia in all the diversity of its social and political experience as largely being an outcome of this transition. We believe that such an understanding will promote a deeper and fuller perception of the challenges and crises facing Greater Europe and its individual countries today so will allow an appropriate response to them to be found.
The first stage of the project is dedicated to the year 1989 and those transition problems that became particularly visible at that stage. In both Central Europe and the former USSR, the year 1989 was the culmination of hopes for a peaceful and successful transition from the Communist dictatorship to a liberal political and economic order. Strictly speaking, this year largely shaped those expectations. Within the few months between June (Solidarity wins the elections in Poland) and December 1989, the “Communist camp” in Central Europe ceased to exist. In the USSR, 1989 saw the first contested elections since 1917. Held in April–May, these elections triggered a “political awakening” process and a political reform that moved the pillars of political power from party bodies to representative bodies. Communism seemed to be folding like a house of cards.

How do these events and their concomitant euphoria look 30 years on? What was the outcome of the stupendous ease with which Communist regimes dissipated? Do subsequent transition trajectories depend on the nature and specifics of this early stage of dismantling Communism? What can we say about the future of Greater Europe based on the thirty-year transition experience?

The conference was attended by scholars, analysts, public and political figures from Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Germany, Sweden and the UK, which made it possible to present and discuss a diverse picture of the large-scale social and political processes that have been running in the east of Europe and the north of Eurasia for the last 30 years.
Stating a new state of affairs in conceptualizing the general post-Communist trajectory was the key discussion topic. In the mid-2000s, the principal trend was to move away from the optimism of the early 1990s and from the “transitionological paradigm” that conceptualized that optimism. That paradigm was based on the assumption that all the countries of the former eastern bloc and the USSR were moving, albeit at different speeds, toward a single model to which there was essentially no alternative, that of western liberal democracy. Analysts and scholars believed that, in the 2000s, these countries split into two main groups: “A-students” that, in the general opinion, were sufficiently successful in achieving the transitional goals (primarily the Visegrad Group, the Baltic states and, to a lesser degree, Bulgaria and Romania) and “C- and F-students,” i.e., those countries where the transition failed, these primarily being the republics of the former USSR. The analysis largely focused on the success factors of the first group and on the causes of failure in the second group, particularly.

Today, in the late 2010s, the situation looks drastically different. Most countries and territories considered to be “A-students” 10-15 years ago are now either in the grip of a reverse trend, that is, of at least partial abolition of the ideals of
liberal democracy and the power in these countries is now in the hands of its vehement opponents (Hungary, Poland), or are in a state of profound frustration (Bulgaria, the Baltic states, eastern Germany). Despite their successful institutional integration into Greater Europe, these countries’ populations feel they are Europe’s remote and unsuccessful periphery, there is a powerful drain of labor force, particularly young and promising cohorts, and the population does not have resources for an economic breakthrough even though the quality of life there is by an order of magnitude below that in “grade 1” Europe.

On the other hand, many of the countries that, ten years ago, were declared to be “F-students” and subjected to a severe analysis laying bare the causes of their failure, do not currently show any inclination to “mend their ways” and believe themselves “failures”; on the contrary, they see themselves as valid examples of an alternative development model and do not view liberal democracy as a promising goal or exemplar. As one of the discussants noted, 30 years later, competition between sociopolitical development models is once again on the agenda. One might also say that those countries that, 30 years ago, served as institutional models for transition states are today attacking and rethinking their once unshakeable goals and principles. This makes the conference discussions particularly pressing and relevant.
**THE DRAMA OF EXPECTATIONS AS A DRAMA OF UNDERSTANDING**

**Georgy Satarov**, President of the INDEM Foundation (Moscow), political advisor to President Yeltsin in the 1990s, presented the talk “Drama of Post-Communist Transit as a Source of Rethinking the Transit”, which analyzed the “misunderstanding” of those processes of social change that were a source of inflated and overly optimistic expectations 30 years ago.

“It seemed that the objective was merely to abandon the train that was hurtling off the rails and take seats on one that was traveling in the right direction. What was our inspiration? Absolute and equally absolutely unconfirmed faith in the manageability of social processes. That faith was fostered by the Enlightenment and not even the tragedies of the 20th century could shake it.”

Classical legalism, i.e., belief that proper laws shape proper practices and understanding of institutions as an outcome of the legal rules was the key source of inflated expectations. “Fantastically weakly developed sociology” and a naïve conviction that public opinion sociology is capable of understanding people’s beliefs and convictions were other elements in the mix.

The “reform plans” that relied on the tenets of the “Washington consensus” reflected these approaches. Yet the failure of expectations that were transformed into proactive policies without sufficient foundation and an analysis of its sources should become and are partially becoming a springboard for developing the methodology of social knowledge. The presenter believes that this should be the goal of the present project.

**Andrei Melville**, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National Research Institute “Higher School of Economics” (Moscow) continued the methodological *Sturm und Drang* of the “non-understanding experience” in his presentation called “‘Structures’ and ‘Actors’: What Common Transit Models Don’t Explain.” Noting that the expectations of 30 years ago, including theoretical ones, relied on the limited and peculiar
experience of democratic transitions in Latin America and Southern Europe, he single out five disappointed expectations.

First: “democratization without premises”, a notion that structural restrictions are less important than the choice of correct tactics and strategies by the actors. As a result, today we see a complex picture that presents both successes of “actor strategies” and “structural revenge” (in particular, in the “authoritarian rollbacks” phenomena). The geography of structural restrictions in the spirit of Rokkan’s “conceptual map of Europe” is becoming increasingly manifest and, similarly to the “blue banana” in Europe,\(^1\) we can speak about the “pink banana” in Eurasia, i.e., about territories with fairly stable domination by authoritarian models.

The second expectation is related to the notion of modernization, i.e., the notion of inevitable political consequences of economic progress. Now we are seeing “another modernization”, modernization without democracy and, along with it, emergence of a new middle class that does not demand democracy. The third expectation is related to faith in the “proper institutional design” as the key to success. Experience shows that such a strategy might fail, generating “substitutions” instead of “institutions.” On the other hand, the opposite strategy, that is, using palliative transitional institutions, now looks entirely different and, in some instances, it has proved quite rational and even effective.

The fourth problem is that of the reforms that were implemented simultaneously with the search for solutions to the issues of state building. On the whole, an effective state should precede successful liberal reforms; however, what do we understand by the effectiveness of a state? The fight for successful statehood sometimes translates into emergence of institutions that effectively prevent rather than promote further reforms. They prove either too rigid and repressive, or they shape the “early winner” trap described by Joel Hellman, when such winners are not interested in continuing the reforms.\(^2\)

The fifth false expectation had a powerful emotional foundation: this is the assumption (typical in 1989) that authoritarianism is a thing of the past. Theories assumed that a reverse trend was possible but it was not impressive emotionally and was not seriously considered. Hybrid regimes combining democratic institutions and authoritarian practices were expected inevitably to evolve in either direction. These

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expectations were frustrated, too. The hybrids demonstrated significant stability and viability, yet they are not evolving anywhere.

During the discussion, Andrei Melville also doubted that developing a single transition theory was possible, even though many scholars had previously expended major efforts on it. Indeed, the goal-setting of the post-Communist transition itself and its place in the history of nations, states and societies proved to be radically different. Arkady Dubnov, an expert on countries of Central Asia and the CIS, drew attention to the fact that the general “transition” framework applicable to the countries of Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and even to Russia and Ukraine is a poor fit for the states of Central Asia that did not have pre-Soviet statehood and were gaining the primary elements of this precisely as republics of the USSR. On the one hand, it provided a different kind of legitimacy to the local Soviet elites while, on the other hand, the destruction of the Soviet-Communist legitimacy faced these elites with the threat of societal splits of a kind entirely different from those envisioned by standard transition theories. Post-Soviet personalist authoritarianism in those states dealt with the threat of cruel clannish and tribal conflicts capable of triggering large-scale conflicts, as happened in Tajikistan.
A DRAMA OF TYPOLOGY AND TYPOLOGY OF DRAMAS

Each new post-Communist decade introduces new and often unforeseen knowledge about the nature of post-Communist societies’ long-term trajectory and, accordingly, makes us rethink the transition typology in the context of this new knowledge.

The presentation by Andrei Ryabov, Editor-in-Chief of the World Economy and International Relations journal, called “Features of Intersystem Transformations in the Post-Soviet Space”, continued the course of intellectual critique levelled at the earlier transition concepts.

The presenter singled out the factors that had played an important role in the transition but had not been sufficiently studied. First, there is the nature of delegitimization of Communist regimes. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Baltic states, perceived the Communist regime as something introduced from the outside and they preserved the memory of resisting this regime (the uprisings of 1953 and 1956 in Eastern Germany and Hungary, of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the experience of the Solidarity trade union in Poland). This provided the basis for shaping an alternative, national and democratic value system.

In the USSR, the legitimacy of the regime was based on the deep-rooted notion of its effectiveness and economic validity. The glasnost’ policy undermined this foundation and popularized the concept of the liberal and democratic system being more efficient. This became an instrument for delegitimizing the regime. As a result, however, instead of becoming a value, democratic values became an instrument. When the transformation excesses resulted in de-valuation of these values, authoritarian values were once again thought of as acceptable as long as the social model associated with them made it possible to resolve the “public weal” problem. This served as the foundation for the “paternalist values renaissance.”

The second crucial factor is related to the nature of privatization. The post-Soviet space implemented two opposing strategies. The first was accelerated privatization of major assets. Its goals were political rather than economic: creating a proprietary class capable of preventing a restoration. The second one, on the contrary, was intended to preserve the statist nature of post-Soviet economies and entailed preservation of state-owned national assets.
Even so, in the political and economic sense, both strategies had the same result: shaping the “power-property” institution. It was this institution that began formatting the political process and determined the economic exchange as part of redistributing the three types of economic rent. Struggle for economic rent results in political processes turning cyclical: the struggle is not between various projects for the future but between various groups fighting for management of economic rent. Ultimately, politics develops a patron-client model that, coupled with systemic corruption, results in a development deficit.

**Balint Magyar**, a Central European University Professor, presented a fundamental paper “Trajectories of Post-Communist Development” continuing the topic of post-Communist transition typology. Scholarly focus primarily on political institutions results in simplified typologies that do not describe the entire range of post-Communist countries’ trajectories. In addition to the traditional “democracy-authoritarianism” axis, Balint Magyar introduces another “Weberian” axis measuring the influence of stable social structures – the axis of “patrimonialism” or “patronal politics.” It produces a triangle that allows us to build a typology of post-Soviet regimes and trace the trajectories of their evolution over three decades (see Fig. 1).

In addition to its three points (*Communist dictatorship, liberal democracy* and *patronal autocracy*), it also determines the places of intermediary forms: *patronal democracy* (paternal patronal pyramids compete for dominance), *conservative autocracy* (political power is partially monopolized but market structures are not affected by monopolization) and *market dictatorship* (the monopoly of a political party is not affected but an increasingly greater share of the economy is not administratively controlled).

**Fig. 1.**

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3 The concept of “patronality” is also developed by Henry Hale; by “patronality”, he means reproducing patronage models at both micro- and macrolevels (Hale H. E. Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective. – Cambridge University Press, 2014).
Либеральная демократия | Liberal democracy
---|---
Патрональная демократия | Patronal democracy
Патрональная автократия | Patronal autocracy
Рыночная диктатура | Market dictatorship
Коммунистическая диктатура | Communist dictatorship
Эстония | Estonia
Польша | Poland
Румыния | Romania
Грузия | Georgia
Китай | China
Македония | Macedonia
Украина | Ukraine
Молдова | Moldova
Узбекистан | Uzbekistan
Венгрия | Hungary
Россия | Russia
The triangle clearly presents both common features and differences between post-Soviet regimes in the context of these projections and allows researchers to trace their non-linear trajectories over three decades. For instance, Estonia, Poland and Hungary successfully transitioned from Communist dictatorship to liberal democracy at the first stage. Yet Poland subsequently rolled back toward conservative autocracy, while Hungary moved toward patronal democracy and then to patronal autocracy.

Another transition model is typical of states that had never been liberal democracies. Such countries as Romania, North Macedonia and Ukraine transitioned directly to patronal democracy and they are characterized by cyclical dynamics determined by particular groups striving to consolidate their dominance (to transition to patronal autocracy) and by resistance to these attempts. Yet the “color revolutions” periodically taking place there do not destroy the very principle of patronal politics. Following the “oligarchic anarchy” period, Russia transformed into a patronal democracy when Putin came to power. As for such countries as Uzbekistan, they had never even had oligarchic anarchy, with Communist dictatorship transforming directly into patronal autocracy.

In his presentation “Electoral Geography and Post-Communist Countries of the Former USSR” Kirill Rogov echoed the issues of “stable social structures” and the “conceptual (structural) map of Eurasia.” The first Soviet contested elections held 30 years ago demonstrated certain structural peculiarities of the post-Soviet space that remain relevant today. The main outcome of those elections was the numbers of the *nomenklatura* members (Party appointees) who were not elected to parliament. Despite certain important nuances, the overall picture appears quite transparent: there are the advanced Baltic states, conservative Central Asia, while the Russian Soviet Federative Social Republic represents a vivid contrast between active and “democratic” major cities and provincial voting in the “Central Asian” style.

The overall picture becomes even clearer at the 1990 republican elections. Three groups of republic can be distinguished here: those where the democratic opposition won by a landslide (the Baltic countries), those where the opposition failed to exert a significant influence on the results of the elections (Central Asian republics, Azerbaijan, Belarus) and those where the opposition received 25–55% of the seats, which was not enough to count as a victory or made it possible to form a weak coalition. This outcome largely determined the nature of the post-Soviet transition in the corresponding countries in the early 1990s. Moreover, it coincides almost exactly with the relevant typology of the post-Soviet political regimes. On the one hand, there are stable personalist authoritarian regimes (Turkmenistan,
Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia); on the other hand, there are “competitive oligarchies” (Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan). The only significant changes here are Russia, which was shaping up in the 1990s as a competitive oligarchy, but then transitioned to the first group, and Kyrgyzstan, which, on the contrary, moved from group 1 to group 2.

This picture shows that post-Soviet politics were being actively shaped before their formal transition to independence and the base distribution of powers that had taken shape within them proved to be exceedingly stable. That does not mean there is no potential for change. For instance, the seemingly fruitless struggle between various groups for dominance in several “competitive oligarchies” is evidently conducive to the institutions of parliamentary democracy maturing, as is the case in Georgia, Armenia and Moldova.

In some way, all three presentations, in a spirit of “structural revenge” as outlined by Andrei Melville, focused on explaining the transition trajectories on the basis of premises that even went beyond the horizon of the Soviet social experience proper and they moved away from the issue of the role of actors, which had been so popular in the previous transitological analytical cycle.
THE DRAMA OF EASTERN EUROPE: 
OLD NEW FAULT LINES

The problem of “Eastern Europe’s disappointment” was posited with particular urgency in Klara Geywitz’s presentation “The Long Shadow of a Divided Germany: Is there Still a Wall between Eastern and Western Germanies?” In Berlin, the results of elections to the European parliament clearly demonstrate that support for former Communist parties is concentrated in East Berlin, while support for Angela Merkel’s party is concentrated in West Berlin. The map of the electoral results is largely reminiscent of the old map of the two Germanies: the Alternative for Germany dominates in Eastern Germany, right along the border of the former German Democratic Republic, while former West Germany votes Green. Surveys show that democracy failed to convince Eastern Germans of its advantages: the share of those who doubt its effectiveness and prefer “strong leadership” is much higher there.

The wealth distribution map shows the same picture. Despite 30 years of growth, the gap in accumulated wealth is closing very slowly: wealth in the western lands is still 2.5 times greater than its average level in East Germany. If, from the point of view of Poles and Ukrainians, the living standards of East Germans seem very high, the East German themselves feel no satisfaction as they compare their situation to that in West Germany. The unemployment gap between the two parts of Germany has been closing rapidly in recent years but this progress reflects a population drain west and south, where the population is growing, rather than increasing numbers of jobs in the east.

In other words, contrary to the happy expectations and the apparent formal success of the East German transition, people who lived through the reunification of Germany learned 30 years later that they lost jobs that satisfied them and would not find them again, that their children went to seek employment in West Germany and, even if they do have a job, they will never be as rich as West Germans.

Continuing on the topic of Eastern European frustration, Maxim Trudolyubov gave a talk “Great Expectations: What People of Communist Countries Expected and Didn’t Get.”
The countries of Eastern Europe expected the transition to provide a “return to normality” (as Václav Havel put it), that is, they dreamed of ceasing to be part of a utopia. The Baltics dreamed of returning to the European map.

But the economic transformation came at a rather steep price: East European assets passed into the ownership of Western companies and freedom of movement led to a huge workforce outflow—a reduction in available jobs in some countries. This resulted in the old divide between the East and the West being replaced by a new one. In the words of Ivan Krastev and Steven Holmes, it is a divide between imitators and the imitated. This division has a political dimension: it means different attitudes to immigration, economic inequality and law. A situation of “reverse imitation” emerges, one that Viktor Orbán speaks about (“we believed that Europe was our future; today we feel that we are the future of Europe”).

But this “new rift” in Europe appears to be an exaggeration. In reality, Hungary is not some sort of “European alternative” and essentially follows the lead of the rest of the Eastern European countries. We are speaking about the competition between two models as part of the common European identity that is defined by the famous five axioms of George Steiner. And even though the transition came at a high price economically and the geographical contours of the East and the West are clearly pronounced, the unity of Europe in this sense has become stronger; the idea of Europe as seen by an outsider, a foreigner, is now felt better than before.

Arguing with both previous presenters, Ralph Fuecks from the Center for Liberal Modernity, Germany, stressed that the division between the East and West of Europe is not only about economics and wealth distribution but also about the culture and value background. Eastern Europe dreamed about regaining national identity and underwent a revolution that was not only democratic but also nationalistic in nature. Yet East Germans and East Europeans had very different expectations about the Germany and the Europe they were joining. It turned out they were entering a Europe that has to deal with mass immigration and refugee flows, multiculturalism, the gender revolution, etc. It was not the Europe East Europeans wanted to go back to. As a result, they were drawn into a divide within Europe that is cultural and political rather than “geographic.” It is a conflict between modernist and anti-modernist trends within the European community. Part of Europe, exhausted by the rapid change over the last 30 years, clamours for “stability” and “identity.” And the main question for European democracy today is how to combine openness to change and diversity with this demand for stability of identity.

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5 Steiner G. The Idea of Europe – OpenDemocracy (https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/idea-of-europe/)
NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY:
A NEW RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

New turns in the history of post-Communist countries change the retrospective understanding even of such a classic transition problem as nationalism. In previous decades, it was customary to consider the anti-Communist nationalism of East European countries the epitome of “democratic nationalism” and to point out the advantages of this “two-component” sort of mobilization that prevents divisions in the transition process. Now that nationalism is seeing a sort of renaissance in Eastern Europe, the issue takes on a different look.

This was the focus of the presentation “Nationalism as an Anti-Democratic Revanche by Adam Michnik, Editor-in-Chief of the Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza. Under a totalitarian regime, “nationalism” as a desire to lean on one’s own traditions and culture was undoubtedly a manifestation of protest. But there was also another kind of nationalism: the totalitarian nationalism of Ceaușescu, Mao Zedong and Stalin during his “fight against cosmopolitanism.” The totalitarian regime was apt to use nationalism for its own purposes. The nationalism of Milošević was a response to the crisis of the regime left over after Tito’s dictatorship in Yugoslavia. In Croatia, the response was ethnic nationalism, whose leader Franjo Tudjman had managed to try on the shoes of both a general and a nationalist dissident while the Communists were in power.

Nationalism of the new type that we see in Poland today is dangerous in that it has become a cryptonym for authoritarian and antidemocratic trends. To regain lost “identity”, this nationalism needs “enemies”, and this determines its strategies and values, its attitude to both its enemies and friends’ institutions in the international arena.
The presentation by Nikolay Mitrokhin (Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen, Germany), “Late Soviet Nationalism: Its Origination in Politics and 30 Years of Transformation”, was also devoted to the diversity of nationalisms in the late Communist era and their role in the trajectories of post-Communist transformations. As early as the late 1960s, nationalism had already been identified as a new threat to the post-Stalin model of “soft totalitarianism”, as evidenced by the note Leonid Brezhnev submitted to the Politburo in 1968. There were several factors that led to this threat taking shape and nationalism acquiring the role it came to play in the dissolution of the Soviet regime: 1) the imperial centralism characteristic of the USSR; 2) the presence of big ethnic groups in the USSR that dreamed of national statehood (which, in some cases, had been lost); 3) the existence of “national” republics and autonomies in the Soviet administrative framework with decorative features of statehood and independence, which created a potential institutional basis for actually attaining these; 4) the existence of so-called “titular nations” in the republics and autonomies – ethnic groups formally providing the name of the region; 5) the emergence of actual competition for resources (land, subsoil resources, jobs, infrastructure) within a region between the “titular nation” and other ethnic groups.

Together, these factors shaped an entire range of types of nationalism in some regions. In Moldova, for instance, in addition to Moldovan nationalism proper, there existed Romanian nationalism, Russian nationalism (representing the interests of Russians living on the territory of a given “titular nation”), Gagauz nationalism, etc. Maintaining order in the relations between ethnic groups with differing status was the job of the imperial “centre” of the Union. A weakening of its legitimacy led to manifestation of these “embedded” conflicts.

The manifestation of nationalism is initiated by elite groups and the liberalization that happened during perestroika opened the door wide for a surge of nationalist propaganda, as did the nationalists’ appeal to pressing topics such as the environment, corruption, etc. Pro-ethnic groups raised mass support in a matter of several months. These processes and the desire of the republican leadership, which consisted of members of the “titular nation”, to gain popular support created a threat to the minorities, which turned to the centre of the Union for help. But, at that stage, the centre was unable to help by political means. This led to a mobilization of minorities, greatly helped by the ease with which they obtained weapons (generally from the military that reported to the central command). As a rule, when minorities
were dissipated, they had to be assimilated as the national statehood was built up and when they lived in a compact distribution, conflict was highly likely.

These presentations and the discussion that ensued demonstrated that the topic needed further analysis. At least it was acknowledged that, under Communist regimes, nationalism could pose both as part of the opposition, anti-Communist ideology and as part of the official ideology, while anti-Communist, opposition nationalism, which aimed to build a national statehood, was losing its democratic foundations, running into the problem of ethnic minorities in this process. “Nationalism and democracy” should become one of the central themes at the next stage of this project.
DEBATES ABOUT RUSSIA: 
THE LESSONS OF LIBERALIZATION 
AND THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

In his presentation “‘Homo PostSovieticus’: What Have Former Soviet People Learned in the Past 30 Years?”, Director of the Russia Institute at King’s College London Samuel Greene countered the point raised by Georgy Satarov, saying that the expectations of the transition had never been utopian. Yet the nature of the problems and challenges that arose did prove to be different from those that had been expected. Resistance to the transition was supposed to come from the elites and, most of all, the population, which “did not want pain.” In reality, however, the population of Russian cities, for whom the social instability of the transition had proved to be an arduous ordeal, largely adapted to living in a deinstitutionalized environment.

The behavioural strategies of these people did not fit into the assumed model of “homo sovieticus”; they were not driven by a demand for “paternalism”, as expected, but, on the contrary, a forced individualism. As opposed to the model of “passive adaptation”, as described by Lev Gudkov, the strategies employed by the “post-soviet human” appear to be ones of “aggressive inaction.” These strategies are born of a combination of forced individualism and a fundamental rejection of institutional changes that would have undermined or threatened individual prosperity and security. These features remain relevant today and are manifested in mass resistance to reforms that would seem simple and technological: the reform of higher education, creation of housing cooperatives, etc. All this, in the eyes of a “post-Soviet” person, reduces individuals’ autonomy in resolving their own problems, forcing them to consider the opinions and interests of strangers. For example, the unwillingness to leave monocities stems from the fact that being looked down on in their social milieu, wanting to have the ability to surmount things that disrupt their lifecycle prove more important than hypothetical prosperity in a new place.

On the whole, however - and this was truly unexpected - the elites and bureaucrats played a more negative role in the transition process than did the
resistance put up by the general public. And we did not expect such a symphony between the interests of the masses and the corrupt, deinstitutionalized state. Just as we did not expect the return of Havel’s greengrocer, for whom demonstrating political loyalty is a convenient form of socialization. But the good news is that these phenomena do not appear to be the consequence of some ideology or commitment to authoritarian or hierarchical models of social order, but rather the result of the experience of transition and a response to it, which means that a different experience of social life will produce a different attitude.

In his presentation “Economic Reform and Democratization during Perestroika”, Professor of the European University in St. Petersburg Dmitry Travin, partly taking up Andrey Ryabov’s argument, voiced the idea that the mechanism of delegitimization of the Communist regime and democratization in the USSR was associated with the economic problems that manifested themselves in 1986-1988 and not with deeper political processes and a desire to “become Europe.”

The fall in oil prices and the failures of the first economic reform of 1987-1988, which pushed the principles of socialist self-government to the fore, led to macroeconomic imbalance that undermined the legitimacy of power. At the same time, the Soviet establishment was not ready for drastic and painful measures, such as a radical price reform. These “scissors” within the framework of the existing political system increased the likelihood of a 1964-style coup. From this point of view, the political reform of 1988-1990 was not so much a mechanism for broad democratization as an attempt to transform the political system, the purpose being to remove Mikhail Gorbachev from control of party structures, strengthen his “non-partisan” legitimacy and invest him with a new set of powers (by first making him Chairman of the Supreme Council and then President of the USSR).

As a result, on the one hand, society was really quick to “yield” some of the gains of democratization when it turned out that it did not solve the “sausage problem.” At the same time, the history of Russian transition clearly demonstrates one of the widely discussed points of historical sociology: the most important social changes do not occur as a consequence of “reform plans” but as unintended consequences of these plans. Although the development of events did not have the expected consequences, we still got a completely different society from what it was 30 years ago.
In this sense, the widespread pessimism in assessing the results of Russia’s transition, which is characteristic of many studies, particularly comparative ones, leaves outside the scope of its analysis a significant part of the social reality that characterizes modern Russian society, Dmitry Travin noted. Reasoning about an “aggressively inactive” post-Soviet person runs counter to the obvious dynamism present in modern Russian society, despite the failure and regression of its political institutions. Looking at the social reality of today’s Russia, we actually see very different groups: extremely active groups, responding to new, mobile institutions (primarily the institutions of the market economy) and “inactive aggression”, which is a reaction to the rigid and destructive institutions primarily characteristic of the political system.

Going further into the subject of non-canonical models and unintended consequences in his presentation “The First Congress of People’s Deputies in the Political History of the USSR/Russia”, Professor of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” Nikolay Petrov pointed out, among other things, that the “three-column” election procedure – from territorial districts, national-territorial districts and public organizations – which was sharply criticized in 1989 as “undemocratic”, contributed significantly to representation of “the educated class”, the intelligentsia, which played a key role in forming the first legal “democratic opposition.”

The first elections not only revealed the geographical differentiation of the electoral space but also contributed to this, creating islands of democratization and local democratic traditions. This differentiation, although partially preserved, is now significantly different. Back then, it was almost entirely determined by the distinction between the city and the village; today the intraregional differentiation is less pronounced, so the “granularity” of electoral geography has changed.

The Politburo’s interpretation of the defeat of a number of first secretaries in the first election was completely incorrect. The logic was that the “bad leaders” had lost, so they should be replaced by “good” ones. In reality, the defeat was not determined by the features of a given first secretary, but by the level of political activity in their constituency. Similarly, elections were won not by the best leaders who were supported because they responded to demand from below, but by those who had the resources to restrain social activity, suppress initiative and preserve the
situation in the region. In places where social activity was high, the protest voting scenario played out: people did not vote for specific “positive programmes”, but rather against “the nomenklatura” (Party appointees). As a result, the election mechanism did not work as it was supposed to but, to a large considerable extent, worked in the opposite way. This inverse logic of semi-authoritarian elections still works today during regional elections in Russia, which essentially constitute a one-man race. The best results of a governor in the elections indicate absence of social dynamics.

The first elections and the Congress of People’s Deputies contributed hugely to the process of mass politicization: millions of people watched Congress live so got personally involved in public politics, which was their most important historical role. At the same time, for a number of reasons, Congress did not play a decisive role in shaping the new political elite, primarily the public political elite, which forms the representative power and party infrastructure.

The last point was challenged by the next presenter, Sergey Tsyplyaev, who was a People’s Deputy and a Member of the Supreme Council of the USSR in 1989-1991. The political reform of 1989-1990 and the election of people’s deputies of the USSR and then the RSFSR marked the departure of the political elite born in the 1920-30s and the coming of the next generation, those born in the 1940-50s, and many people’s deputies remained in the political elite, holding various positions in the executive branch.

Even so, the design of Congress and the political architecture created was not viable. Congress acted not as an organ of legislative power and representative democracy, but as a “supreme authority”, a body discharging the duties of the people. It was originally conceived as an instrument of “controlled democracy” but, with the developing crisis, controllability was lost. In that situation, the conflict embedded in the structure of this sovereignty was inevitable, as soon became apparent in the history of the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies, which was created on the same model. The main “political agenda” also shifted: while the agenda of the First Union Congress focused on political reform, democratization and formation of a new system of power, after that the central issue was the struggle for the sovereignization of the republics.
The key problem of Russia’s transition, according to the speaker, was the inferiority of the political culture of the educated and governing class. The intelligentsia was not able to provide examples of democratic institutions, which led to reproduction of the leader model everywhere and to leaders at all levels being irremovable.

In the discussion of the reports, the participants repeatedly returned to the need to rethink the political heritage of perestroika. Despite its actual results having been the opposite of the stated goals (the complete dismantling of Communism instead of a “renewed socialism”), it was here that the foundations were laid of a new, post-totalitarian political culture. Grigory Yavlinsky, founder of the Yabloko party, pointed this out, stressing particularly the role of Gorbachev’s glasnost policy as a fundamental enabler of the social and political dynamics of the next decades. As a result, the ill-guided economic strategies of the Russian government in the 1990s undermined democracy and democratic values and this, in turn, led to freedom of speech being curtailed, Yavlinsky believes. But it was the glasnost policy that opened the window of opportunity that the Russian elites were unable to use.

Executive Director of the Gorbachev Foundation Olga Zdravomyslova also noted that it was precisely those elements of the new political culture and new political ideologies formed during the perestroika period that made it possible to dismantle the Communist system in the USSR and Eastern Europe in a generally peaceful manner, which did not appear to be the inevitable and even the most likely scenario. Continuing the topic of “unintended consequences” raised by Dmitry Travin, Georgy Satarov said that policies that have unintended but positive consequences are generally policies of “not doing” something, policies that lift restrictions – in other words, liberalization policies, which open up a certain range of opportunities for self-regulatory processes.
In his remarks on the reports and especially addressing the report by Balint Magyar, Ralph Fuecks noted that the nature of a big group of post-Soviet states is determined by the model in which a single institution of power and property is formed. Moreover, this model looks and presents itself today not as a deviation on the road to liberal democracy but as a competitive alternative to it. And the competition between different models is back on the agenda again today, as it was thirty years ago. The intermixture and unity of political power and market power is the key to understanding this type of regime, determining not only their internal order but also foreign policy aspirations, which has not yet been sufficiently discussed.

China is the leader in this new global competition, says Ralph Fuecks. Unlike Russia, which today looks like a more aggressive opponent to the West but does not, in reality, have a successful economic strategy and is a rent economy, China presents a much more serious challenge, successfully combining totalitarian control and the dynamism of an innovative economy, offering a recipe for prosperity and stability without democracy as an alternative to liberal democracy.

In fact, this turned out to be one of the central themes in the whole discussion, linking its various parts - the “disappointment in Eastern Europe”, rethinking the typology of post-Communist regimes and the role of nationalism in the transition process and the gaps in social knowledge as a source of high expectations.

The central topics of the Russian part of the discussion were, first, the debate about the rigidity and immobility of social and political structures, on the one hand, and the ongoing processes of social modernization, on the other; second, reflection on the legacy of the period of initial liberalization associated with the name of Mikhail Gorbachev and its contribution to the history of Russian politics.

Overall, as Arkady Dubnov noted in the concluding remarks, a key aspect of studying transition is the fact that the transition - the long transition - is still going on and its new turns are changing our ideas about the significance of certain forks that took place at its previous stages. Developing this idea, Evgeny Gontmakher, Member of the Coordinating Board of the European Dialogue Expert Group,
suggested taking “a glimpse into the future of transition” – which means we should pay attention to the new political generation that is emerging in Eastern Europe and in the ex-USSR countries, primarily Ukraine and Russia, and is already entering and will completely enter the stage in the next decade.

Besides the fact that it has no ties to the Communist past, which still shapes the conceptual framework of many current leaders, it puts forward a different system of value priorities associated with its experience and the environment in which this generation took shape, including the information environment. Among these value priorities are those of self-esteem, dignity, justice and rejection of hierarchies and “vertical” relations of subordination. In Poland and Hungary, the old elite clings to power using populist, conservative and archaic slogans, mobilizing around themselves those who saw the later years of Communism and the most difficult phases of the transition. But this elite’s departure is inevitable and the next generation will promote new dominant values and new agenda, casting away the experience and slogans of its predecessors.

So, in general, the conference showed that the problems of the post-Communist transition, first, need to be rethought in the context of the new historical turns and social processes that characterize its new stages and, second, constitute, to a large extent, the key to a proper understanding of these processes and the related challenges facing Greater Europe and the post-Soviet countries. Unlike the previous stage of understanding the transition, which relied on “normative” ideas about its expected “correct” results, the new stage is much more focused on actual social practices than on formal institutions. By analysing them, we can achieve a more realistic understanding and explanation of the nature of post-Communist societies and political regimes and build multidimensional typologies explaining the non-linear dynamics of their post-Communist trajectories. We need to pay particular attention to and deeply rethink the problems of “nationalism and democracy”, regional diversity and diversity of identities, which could be the focus of discussion at the next stage of this project. The transition goes on but it is now not just the history of post-Communist countries but also part of the overall history of Greater Europe.