

A Short Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation

This dissertation studies Gorbachev's policies vis a vis East Central Europe and the Baltic Republics, namely, the Kremlin's gradual retreat and systematic loosening of Soviet control over these regions. According to the theoretical tradition of historical institutionalism, the study explains institutional transformations in the Kremlin. Its primary added value is utilizing up to 16 000 pages-long published Russian language primary sources and integrating the findings into the existing international scholarship. The study answers the following questions: 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?

The study's central research question is, what factors influenced Gorbachev's decision to give up the Kremlin's control on East Central Europe and the Baltic Republics? Timing and sequence, alongside the phenomenon of path-dependence and contingency, played a decisive role. Gorbachev's decisions were influenced by a complex and sometimes unexpected interplay of structural and conjunctural factors which are identified, presented, and explained in the study. The sequence of the process divided into the four main phases of the Kremlin's retreat from its Western peripheries is also presented separately.

The main prism through which the Kremlin's gradual retreat is explained in the study 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. Gorbachev tried to imitate Vladimir Lenin's Brest-Litovsk treaty strategy and compromised Soviet peripheral territories to save the imperial center. Therefore, Gorbachev's *quid pro quo* was settling all issues in contention with the West and safeguarding Western support for successfully implementing Soviet domestic reforms. Thus, 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.

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 "concession and rule the rest" principle was also used in certain historical situations. Although Gorbachev was unlucky with the *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, Yakutia, etc.) had separatist demands and Gorbachev was also negotiating the return of the Kuril Islands to Japan, indicates that in exchange to 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 *concession and rule the rest* strategy, especially the post-Soviet states with the frozen and/or active regional conflicts on their territories. 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.

2. Democratization of a post-totalitarian multiethnic state that experienced totalitarianism for significant periods of time during its nearest past 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 such kind of state's democratization can create the emotional and doctrinaire political argument that 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 we think that is why the Communist Party of China abstains from its implementation.

The similar logic applies to the democratization of Russia. President Putin and his team are seemingly aware of the risks that the resuming of Gorbachev's policies might bring for them and for the country as a whole. We think that path dependency plays a vital role here. Promotion of the general democratization process in Russia can quickly put Putin's leadership and the territorial integrity of the whole federation in serious jeopardy.