

THE WEST: LOOK FROM THE USSR

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The topic of my report is the smaller part of that enormous, practically uncoverable theme which is called "Russia and West" and which was subject to numerous researches by Russian and foreign historians. Somehow even this smaller part called "The West: look from the USSR" and whose framework is restricted with seven decades of the Soviet history cannot be completely covered in a short report. That's why I'm going to give priority to analysing the formal, propagandistic approach.

Maybe it will seem unusual, but launching the report I'd like to mention the conception of R. Teen, American politologist. He states that Russians always looked at the West "with hatred and love". According to the professor, the intents of westernization were undertaken several times in the Russian history but had always been interrupted. The last interruption he considers to be the October revolution of 1917, which put an end to the process of convergence with the West initiated by Peter the Great at the turn of the XVII-XVIII centuries.¹

Despite all the deficiencies of this theory it boasts a lot of rationale. First, Russia realised itself linked with the West by historical destiny. And second, as something different, special, possessing its "own way". Obviously the two trends exist nowadays, too. When the former dominated, "image of partner" gained ground in mass conscience. The latter trend, the trend of opposing the West, forms "image of enemy".

1. From October revolution to mid-1960s.

The October revolution initiated the war against "the old world". Somehow this definition, "the old world", didn't refer to the West in the whole. It referred only to the bourgeoisie and its state and political institutions. "The front line" didn't coincide with the national borders; it divided the partisans of "the new" and "the old" regimes both in the West and in Russia.

If the complex of "enemy surroundings" was coming into being it didn't turn into a national stereotype at once thanks to very strong international psychology of proletariat looking not only to the support of "the class ally in the West" but to "the world revolution", too.

Only when the expectations for "the world revolution" were not justified did the "image of enemy" towards the West begin rising in the mass conscience. The situation in the country harassed by seven years of war and two revolutions contributed a lot. "The wild exploitation reducing people to semianimal state, bacchanalia of red tape, epidemic of governmental terror against its own people, dehumanization of public relations", Mikhail Osmakov, Soviet historian describes

it.² It's clear that such an atmosphere was a good soil for creating an "image of enemy".

Forming stereotypes at that period of time was accompanied and complemented with the rise of so called "Messiah sentiments". Human history offers many examples of similar sentiments. It's enough to recall the Roman Empire with its claim for hegemony; the Catholic Church which inspired the crusades to turn peoples into the "true faith". It was Nicholas Berdyaev, great Russian philosopher, who said that the "Messiah sentiments" of the Russian people had a permanent willingness to sacrifice itself for the sake of a great idea. Therefore the herds of "exclusive historical predestination to liberate all the peoples from slavery" found beneficial soil and became one more point in opposing the West.

The crucial stage in forming an "image of enemy" was the late 1920-s and 1930-s. The complex of "enemy surroundings" gradually transformed into a psychology of "besieged fortress". The thesis about a sharpening class struggle put forward by Stalin made a great contribution to this. It was hammered into heads that the capitalist West was trying to overthrow the Soviet State by any means including military power and subversion from inside. The atmosphere of suspiciousness, psychosis of "spymania", horror and denunciation deformed the public conscience. This enabled Stalin to unleash repression against any heterodox. And the latter was a way represented as a western "agent". "Be on guard! The enemy doesn't sleep! He may be behind you!" cried the headlines and posters in the late 1930-s.

It's clear that only a unanimity within society can have this "image of the enemy" occupy lasting positions. This kind of total unanimity was cultivated by means of an all-embracing propaganda campaign. The state control over mass conscience assisted the stereotypes which penetrated deeper and deeper into life and drove "image of enemy" to grotesque limits. "Sharks of imperialism", "Western watchdogs" showed their "feline grin" from the pages of newspapers and magazines. On the cinema screens the West was depicted either as a rich scoundrel with thin moustache and stick permanently intriguing against the positive characters (usually modest, laborious people) and always losing (e.g. film "Circus"), or as an insidious "agent-spy" which penetrates into the USSR, kills people, blows up factories, etc. (e.g. film "Permit into Life"). This kind of stereotype filled up not only day-to-day speech; but scientific language, too, lost its primary, original picturesqueness and became part of a widely accepted image of the West.

Alongside with "the Messiah sentiments", elements of "superiority complex" come into being via propaganda. Everything Soviet is announced to be the best, every thing socialist, progressive. And visa versa, any values created in the capitalist society are declared to be "reactionary", "vicious", "antihumane". Blasting the bourgeois society became the duty of every Soviet citizen. Stet Scientific theories and works of the western researchers (e. g. in the field of genetics or cybernetics) were proclaimed "idealistic", therefore, alien to the his-

torical materialism of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin. the USSR paid and still pays a huge price for this: colossal backwardness in many fields of science and know-how, particularly, in information technology.

I'd like to mention about the following, too. The notion "enemy" happened to embrace not only the adversaries of socialism, but its natural allies, in particular the West-european social-democrats, called by Stalin "the worst enemies of working class, bribed by bourgeoisie". Now we realise the very split between communists and social-democrats considerably facilitated Nazi's coming into power which in the long run brought about the World War II.

After the victory over the fascist Germany there was a rare possibility to start deeper collaboration among the allies. Whether this was possible or not will be analysed by historians. But the West is also responsible for trampling under foot the first sprouts of mutual understanding and provisional retreat from "image of enemy". Winston Churchill's speech in Fulton in 1946 launched "the cold war" period. Obtaining nuclear weapons by the US was perceived as a new menace. Opposing the West was restored.

The time of Stalin is the key period in forming the "image of enemy" towards the West. Thus the official antiwestern propaganda flourishing under Brezhnev was deeply rooted in that time.

Khrushchev's "thaw" (1953-1964) improved the moral situation in the soviet society and introduced "pluralism of opinion" to some extent. Denouncing Stalin's cult of personality, beginning active contacts with the West made it possible to deaden many belligerent and most odious features of "image of enemy". The political realism gave the green light for mutual comprehension. But deepening "cold war", "arms race", missile and space competition, overwhelming western superiority in the nuclear weapons and "Cuban crisis" strengthened this "image of enemy". The attitude towards the West was expressed in the notorious phrase of the Soviet leader Khrushchev: "We will bury you!"

2. "Stagnation period" (1964-1985)

Under Brezhnev (sometimes this period is called "years of stagnation") the mass conscience and "image of enemy" underwent interesting changes. "Image of enemy", having lost the most "canibalistic" features, obtained a kind of stability.

Even the 1970-s, marked with advancing detente and searching for the common language between the two systems, couldn't drastically change "image of enemy" in the Soviet propaganda. The willingness of the West to initiate the détente was regarded not as the good will action but as a forced move of "defeated foe", "acknowledging western weakness". That's why the West and the East didn't overcome the wall of "ideological Incompatibility". The Soviet leadership declared its aspiration for the disarmament and economic cooperation. But in the field of ideology it proclaimed "irreconcilable struggle regardless of the developments in the world".

The battle between ideologies entered the decisive phase. It's all clear that the major efforts of the Soviet propaganda were focused on two principle directions: close criticizing the bourgeois society and apologetics of the Soviet system values.

The above mentioned "Messiah sentiments" gradually transformed into the thesis about allegedly special exclusiveness of the Soviet system. It was proclaimed to be the universal model for other countries: the most humane, progressive, just, providing the highest productivity, the best living standards, etc.

The more intensively this dogma was supported year by year the more obvious was the failure in carrying out the promises it contained: The dogma couldn't compete with the developed capitalist countries. That's why the necessity of maintaining the blind faith resulted in the self-isolation of the Soviet society and in impetuous blasting of the West.

The Western society was represented in black, "frightening" tones. From school (and I could witness it personally) it was embedded into minds that capitalism was a dying system which had no future, whose all sides of life (economy, politics, culture) were in deep crisis.

The leading motive in covering the state of the western economy were "preponderance of monopolies", runaway inflation, permanent crises, thousands of people fired daily. Considerable criticism was directed against the military and industrial complex. It was intensively inspired that the western economy couldn't be but militarized that resulted in the developing arms race. The fact that the same military and industrial complex existed in the USSR was kept under cover. It was widely declared that the arms race was promoted by the West which, foreboding its inevitable end, was trying to destroy the USSR by means of weapons.

The beginning economic deficiencies in the USSR was explained by the Soviet propaganda by the necessity "to maintain the country's defensive potential at a required level". That hit two targets: the West not only was declared as the initiator of the arms race but also was to blame for decreasing live standards of the Soviet people. No one thought and dared to explain it by the ineffectiveness of the "plan economy".

Another leading motive of depicting the West was as follows: "the society of violence". The growing criminality, narcomania, prostitution were declared "specific features" organic only to the capitalist society. Even such human calamity as AIDS at first was completely ignored in the USSR. "In our morally healthy society there are no dopers, no prostitution, no homosexuals – that's why there will be no AIDS", – boasted the Soviet propaganda, desmille "the plague of the XX century" as "purely western disease". This resulted in an absolute unreadiness of the soviet medical care system after HIV was detected in the country. And only perestroika helped us know that those "groups of risk" exist in the USSR, too.

The political system of the capitalist countries was characterized as "pseudo-democratic" and serving to "fat cats" interests only. No doubt, to depict the

bourgeois parliamentarism only in positive colours means to ignore plenty of deficiencies such as corruption, lobbyism, etc. But in the Soviet science and propaganda there was a solid tradition which reduced the task of scientists and journalists only to portraying members of Western parliaments as "puppets of The Big Capital".

Last, the problem of "human rights" became the object of general disapproval and derision. The Western model was categorically rejected as "false and giving no guarantees of social and economic rights" such as right to labour, right to housing, right to free medical care and secondary and high instruction, etc. Therefore the Soviet people were made to believe that in the Western society people couldn't be confident about their future: they could be fired, they could become homeless, without medical care, not able to offer good instruction to their children, if they hadn't enough money.

No doubt, many of these features were absolutely right. But the fact is that the authors who covered the subject, on purpose or semi-consciously, kept aside the other, positive features of the western society. And the picture was one-sided, incomplete, disfigured.

The administrative and bureaucratic system sharply responded to any kind of deviation of the given pattern. Even the objective and unbiased analysis of bourgeois theories and values could be qualified as "intention to impose the bourgeois ideology" or as "ideological subversion". That's why under the pressure of the red tape control journalists improved not their professional qualities but self-preserving instincts.

It brought about a surprising phenomenon – the public opinion mistrusted sources of information. As a result we could observe an original double structure. Stereotypes captured ideology, propaganda, the formal layer of science. But day-to-day, informal conscience mainly preserved its independence from stereotypes. Sometimes shallow and to some extent exaggerated impressions of people who visited one of the western countries were more trusted in informal situation than the story and analysis of an experienced journalist. But in formal contacts people didn't run the risk of deviating from widely accepted patterns and stereotypes.

Vain and useless were the propaganda attempts to outlaw different phenomena of the western culture, to portray them as something "alien to the ideals of socialism". Jeans and Pepsi, jazz and rock music, Walt Disney films and westerns were severely criticized but nevertheless they found the way to become integral ineluctable part of our life.

Now it's practically impossible to imagine that even "The Beatles" were black-listed due to ... their long hair that was depicted as "moral dissoluteness", alien to the Soviet youth; and that bulldozers served as a quite effective mean to "combat" the abstract art. The West was furiously tomahawked for "intensively advertising those features of the bourgeois mode of life which can be regarded

attractive from the egoistic viewpoint, to provoke "longing of consumption", to catch the young soviet generation in the trap of Western outlook".³

In this connection I'd like to offer one example. In an American exhibition in Moscow, dedicated to the 200-th anniversary of the U.S., the only technical exhibit was a car, not very expensive, but very attractive and well-designed. Well, anyone could have rejoiced that the American firms produce such perfect and accessible cars and wish the Soviet autoindustry to catch up with them as soon as possible. But the propaganda perceived it differently. Let me offer you a quotation from the book released in 1983: "At the exhibition the car was presented... with the definite end - to create a favorable impression about the mode of life in the modern America, its technical progress. This show could influence in a certain way the conscience and behaviour of the Soviet people and provoke a "longing of consumption".⁴

I believe this fact of portraying an exhibit as all but "ideological subversion" doesn't need comment on.

Therefore, the main features of the West's image were schematization, simplification, on-sidedness. At the same time creating this image required stressing directly or indirectly advantages of socialism.

The desire to continue creating and cultivating the atmosphere of "besieged fortress", stereotypes reproducing "image of enemy" deprived the society the real ground for defining development, and caused it to fall into the world of illusions, reading to the verge of real dangers. "The iron curtain", self-isolation of the Soviet society, triggered off a huge falling behind the leading capitalist countries in technology and economy. The mountains of weapons stockpiled both in the East and the West made the world approach nuclear precipice. It couldn't be long. The time has come for changes.

3. The time of Perestroika

The proclamation of "the new political thinking" and declaring the priority of the human values instead of the class values signified a rejection of the ideological war and proposal to the West to initiate the dialogue. "The cold war" period is about to be over. The West no more is announced to be "enemy number one". The time of the joint actions to solve the global problems has come. Values of West and East were proclaimed the common property of the civilization. "Image of enemy" is being gradually ousted with "image of partner".

But things cannot change overnight. "Image of enemy" was cultivated during the decades and it would be naive to hope that it would be destroyed and buried during two-three years. That's why we have got to consider perestroika in the USSR not as changes per se but as a possibility for changes, a good soil for them. And only time will see whether this possibility was used or missed.

Nevertheless the refusal from the confrontation couldn't but provoke some changes in the Soviet attitude towards the West. What are they?

Covering the Western phenomena becomes more thoughtful, more objective. Now in the Soviet press we notice more intents to dig at the very core of events and problems. Onesided, black-or-white assessments are rare. Many notions and phenomena regarded for a long period of time as "negative" suddenly turned into "positive". For example, economic competition. Formerly it was portrayed as "the pitiless law of jungle", "the brightest testimony of viciousness of the capitalist system". Now it is considered to be one of the major economic spurs which enabled the West to succeed. Moreover, competition seems to become a part of the Soviet economy. The conception of "market socialism" is being widely discussed, cooperatives are supposed to compete with the state-owned firms, joint ventures bring western capitals as well as some features of the western economy and are considered to help stabilize the Soviet economy.

One more example. Pluralism of political life was always regarded in the USSR as "pseudodemocracy" camouflaging the power of The Big Capital. And vice versa, the mono-party, in fact totalitarian system in the Soviet Union was proclaimed as "truly popular". The consequences of this monopoly and uncontrolled power are the common knowledge. And now despite the Communist party still firmly holding the reins, the real pluralism is on the agenda of democratization in the USSR. It is comprehensible that the experience of western democracies and traditions of parliamentarism are subject to great interest and thoroughful study in the East.

Somehow it is quite clear that it will take much time to see the pluralism as an organic part of the political life. Now we can see only the pluralism of opinion. But even this proves a certain shift in the mass conscience. Even in the upper echelons of power, the group notorious for its "unanimity", we can observe a wide spectrum of opinions: from ever-lasting critics to appraisals of the western model.

Thematics of covering the life behind the "iron curtain" have undergone substantial changes lately. Previously journalists were supposed to exist in the vicious circle of some determined subjects such as unemployment, social contrasts, corruption, "pseudodemocracy", etc. It is enough to remember the traditional newspaper headings: "Their morals", "In the world of profit" and so on, which practically disappeared from the press after some loud revelations of abusing power, corruption in the USSR were published.

Literally within a short period the West became "fashionable" in the Soviet press, if I can so put it. The ideological "brain-wash" about the "wild West" was ousted with the direct transmissions from American and West-european cities; the very notion of "the West" stopped being injurious. Nowadays the Soviet people can discover the other, previously hidden side of the western society, can see its day-to-day life: shops, clinics, working and rest conditions, social security system, abundance of all kind of goods and services, etc. And mostly the leading motive of the coverage is following: the West now has many great achievements and the USSR should learn and borrow many of them.

The very language of journalism has substantially altered. Previously the journalist work practically boiled down to composing some clichés and stock phrases in description of the West. Now the language becomes more intelligent, more businesslike and more friendly. E. g., the stories practically are disposed of the fake "awareness" which was inherent in the Soviet press and was supposed to hide the lack of logic and arguments. The expressions like "somebody in the West", "some aggressive imperialist circles", etc. now are rare in news media, and objectively this contributes to eroding "image of enemy".

One of the most important changes introduced with perestroika is the different attitude to the western assessments of soviet developments. Only some years ago any kind of criticism directed against the USSR was undoubtedly evaluated as "ideological subversion" or as "impotent maliciousness". The very word "sovietologist" meaning "specialist studying the problems of the Soviet Union" was all but accusative and abusive. Sure, among the sovietologists there were people who did not take pains to investigate the problems of the USSR objectively and only blackened and slandered every Soviet move and aspect of life. But the fact is that they were equaled by many scrupulous and dutiful researchers who then impartially analysed the situation and the prospects of the soviet Union and prevented many troubles and bitter problems the country faces nowadays. Now we can observe the rejection of the biased attitude towards sovietologists and even notice attempts to make use of some of their ideas to streamline the USSR.

Perestroika enabled us to obtain a new, sophisticated vision of the world and, in particular, of the West. Previously, for decades the outlooks on the both sides of "the iron curtain" were determined by factors of rivalry and confrontation. The Soviet Union first of all sized up the scales of menace proceeding from the West, and assessed its potential above all through the prism of competition and only then from the viewpoint of possible cooperation.

Now thanks to some drastic changes in our life and conscience we have defined new priorities. The Soviet Union tends to look at the West through the prism of the mankind's interests which can be provided and secured only with the collective efforts. And without the East-West collaboration all these efforts are doomed to be fruitless and in vain.

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