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INTRODUCTION TO EURASIAN STUDIES

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Textbook

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    This textbook provides an introduction to Eurasian Studies. As the book is designed for undergraduate students, it delivers an overview of political developments in Eurasia. The study primarily addresses Eurasianism as a geopolitical concept to familiarize students with the region they are projected to deal with. Subsequently, it concentrates on the last years of the Soviet Union to elucidate the conditions under which modern Eurasia as a geopolitical space was shaped. Eventually, the book details a number of former Soviet republics, in particular the Russian Federation, to probe into the developments that take place in Eurasia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

Introduction to Eurasian Studies is written as a textbook for the bachelor's specialty 291 «International relations, public communications, and regional studies»

Codes	Competencies
C4	To introduce the primary features of the Eurasian region and the patterns of interaction of the main players in the Eurasian space.

The main purpose of studying Eurasian space is to uncover its significance in world politics. In this light, this work aims:

First - to analyze the concept of Eurasia by revealing the relationship between geography and politics;

Second - to disclose the impact of the global power(s) on former Soviet countries by scrutinizing their domestic politics.

In this regard, the major learning outcomes of the textbook will be as follows:

Codes	Competencies
1	Mapping the commencement of Eurasia as a geopolitical space to take into account overall historical developments in the region;
2	Exploring the main driving force behind conceptualizing Eurasianism;
3	Developing a variety of understandings of modern Eurasia and its changing dynamics;
4	Identifying the disintegration process of the Soviet Union to achieve a better understanding of foreign policy orientations of former Soviet republics;
5	Understanding *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* reforms and the purpose of Gorbachev administration in implementing those reforms;
6	Analyzing main reasons behind the failure of Gorbachev's reforms;
7	Revealing under what circumstances the Russian Federation

		was established and the effectiveness of Boris Yeltsin administration in the early 1990s;
8		Understanding the main political developments in the Russian Federation between 1994 and 1999;
9		Analyzing the rise of Vladimir Putin and consolidation of 'super-presidentialism' in the Russian Federation;
10		Enlightening Russian foreign policy in the context of the rise of Vladimir Putin;
11		Describing the historical background of the Baltic states that paved the way for the formulation of their distinctive features among other Soviet republics;
12		Understanding the independence movement in Estonia and the re-establishment of the Republic of Estonia;
13		Realizing the independence movement in Latvia and the reaction of the Soviet government;
14		Exploring the similarities between Estonia and Latvia in the state-building process;
15		Examining the biggest threat perceived by the Baltic states in the aftermath of regaining their independence and the solutions they developed against it;
16		Portraying the independence movement in Belarus and the factors that prevented the advancement of democracy in the country;
17		Understanding the consolidation process of the Lukashenko administration in Belarus;
18		Analyzing the sovereignty movement and its central motivation in Moldova;
19		Evaluation of the consequences of pro-Romanian politics in Moldova in the early 1990s;
20		Detailing the independence movement and state-building process in Ukraine.

The textbook is intended for the acquisition of the above-mentioned knowledge and skills by candidates for a bachelor's degree in the specialty 291 «International relations, public communications, and regional studies».

The textbook consists of five main chapters, each of which contains a reader's guide, learning outcomes, an introduction, the main text with several subheadings, and questions for self-control.

The first chapter sheds light on the emergence of Eurasia as a geopolitical region and the concept of Eurasianism. Subsequently, the second chapter concentrates on the birth of modern Eurasia by elaborating on the collapse of the Soviet Union before detailing several post-Soviet republics. In the third chapter, the textbook outlines the major political developments in the Russian Federation since the declaration of independence. The fourth chapter examines in detail each of the three Baltic states, unveiling their distinctive features among other former Soviet republics. Following the Baltic states, the final chapter throws light on the political landscape of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine respectively. The textbook does not include the South Caucasus and Central Asian regions, however, it is intended to be added in the upcoming editions or published as a separate volume.

The reader's guide at the beginning of the chapters introduces the gist of the topics and formulate the training objectives that are tested with the questions for self-control at the end of the chapters.

The author hopes this textbook will equip students with the basics of the political order in Eurasia and prepare them to probe the region further.

CHAPTER I

EURASIA AND EURASIANISM

Reader's Guide

Geography plays an indispensable role in the political, economic, and cultural development of world society. To a large extent, it determines the formation of the political structure of the countries located in certain regions. Furthermore, geography is frequently used by global powers for political purposes to justify their expansionist intentions. Therefore, this part of the book will shed light on the concept of Eurasia by concentrating on the relationship between geography and geopolitical understanding.

Taxonomy of the theme and learning outcomes:

1. An overview of the commencement of Eurasia as a geopolitical space to take into account overall historical developments in the region.
2. Understanding the conditions that set the stage for the development of Eurasianism as an ideology.
3. Exploring the main driving force behind conceptualizing Eurasianism.
4. Evaluation of the establishment of the Soviet Union and its meaning for the early Eurasianists.
5. Examining resurface of the Eurasianists in the wake of the Soviet Union and their main arguments.
6. Analyzing the significance of Eurasia in relation to the Heartland Theory.

7. Developing a variety of understandings of modern Eurasia and its changing dynamics.

Eurasianism as a Russian Geopolitical School

As it is known, the Old World consists of three continents which are Asia, Europe, and Africa. In turn, Eurasia is an ambiguous region that combines Asia and Europe. It should be added that Eurasia does not cover the Asian and European continents entirely, but partially. Besides, it is not utterly clear which regions of Asian and European continents are or should be included in Eurasia. To elucidate the concept of Eurasia, it is essential to examine how and under what conditions Eurasia has become the subject of geopolitical studies.

Eurasianism has had a special place in Russian intellectual trends since the early twentieth century. To put it roughly, Eurasianism is another concept in the same vein as Slavophilism, Pan-Slavism, or Asianism that aims to form a basis for imperial goals. In essence, a well-known scholar Marlene Laruelle argues that Eurasianism as a philosophical and political current emerged in parallel with the Western intellectual movement in the interwar period. [1, p. 16] As a reaction to the Western political, economic, and cultural advancement Eurasianism originated among the Russian emigres of the 1920s-1930s. The main idea of Eurasianism is that Russian civilization belongs neither to European nor to Asian civilizations, but to Eurasia. Originally developing in the 1920s, the movement supported the Bolshevik revolution but did not declare that it aimed to introduce communism. However, they viewed the Soviet Union as a step on the path to creating a new national identity that would reflect the unique nature of Russia's geopolitical identity. [1, p. 18]

Core representatives of the early Eurasian movement are Russian intellectuals such as the famous linguist Nikolai S. Trubetskoi, musician, philosopher, music writer, and aesthetic critic Petr P. Suvchinskii, the religious thinker Georgii V. Florovsky, and the geographer and economist Petr Nikolaevich Savitskii. [2, p. 1-2] These intellectuals were the Russian emigres among the others who immigrated to the West mostly towards the end of the Russian Empire and during the Civil War that took place between 1917-1922. In essence, Eurasianists wished to see Russia as a part of the West world. However, when the Bolsheviks defeated the Whites and consolidated their power in Russia the Eurasianists in the West began to conceptualize the political culture of Russia. Being sure of the impossibility of the reproducibility of the Western political system in Russia, Eurasianists sought to highlight the distinctiveness of Russians and thereby argued that the Russian state has its idiosyncratic features that neither belong to Europe nor Asia but Eurasia. [1, p. 19]

The Eurasianists draw attention to multiple civilizations in human history rather than a unique pattern of the West imposed on the rest of the world. They mostly underscore the impact of geographical space on shaping the political, economic, and cultural development of each society. For Eurasianists, the complexity of the landscape on earth produces multiple patterns of civilization that should be evaluated in its own logic. [3, p. 19] In other words, the Eurasian school criticizes the European-centered lifestyle which insists on the unique model of progress. According to the Eurasianists' viewpoint, Europe has developed its culture within a particular time and space which is irreplicable. Therefore, they point out, Russian political, economic, and cultural environment must be assessed not through European or Asian but Eurasian lenses which contain characteristics of both continents but belongs to neither of them.

Neo-Eurasianism

Before recounting the Neo-Eurasianist currents, it is worth mentioning Lev Gumilev, an ethnographer, philosopher, and historian who chronologically is the link between classical Eurasianism (the 1920s-1930s) and Neo-Eurasianism which appeared after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. [1, p. 19] Gumilev believed that the folks living in Eurasia shared a common destiny. Their unity was based on the historical Turkic-Slavic alliance and their rejection of the Western unilinear model of progress that has been imposed on the rest of the world.

Building his philosophy on the Darwinist framework, Gumilev alleges that the fittest ethnos survives, just like any other living being in nature. Additionally, he believed that the collectivity of the ethnos is superior to their individuality which constitutes the main reason behind the decline of the liberal societies in the West. For Gumilev, ethnic groups are categorized by their sizes: The smallest groups are named as the sub-ethnos which are followed by the ethnos, then comes the greater super-ethnos, and eventually, the meta-ethnos which is the biggest ethnic entity. [4, p. 57-58]

According to Gumilev, there were eight different super-ethnoi in Russia: "the Russian, the steppic, the circumpolar, the Tatar-Muslim, the European, the Buddhist, the Byzantine (or Caucasian Christian), and the Jewish." [4, p. 59] He claims that Russia has managed to unite these super-ethnic groups. In this sense, Gumilev pays special attention to the convergence of the Russians and the Eurasian steppe nomads. Gumilev believed that Russians as super-ethnos experienced three major stages in history that are the Kievan Rus', domination of Tatar, and the rise of Muscovy. However, for the author, Russia had betrayed its Eurasian characteristic under the Romanov reign (17th -19th centuries) by attempting to Europeanize its folk. [4, p. 59]

In short, Lev Gumilev underlines Turkic-Slavic historical alliance in Eurasia. Gumilev believed that these two super-ethnoi perfectly complete each other. Moreover, the author indicates that both of these super-ethnicities refuse to be assimilated by the Western unilinear pattern of development. In this respect, Gumilev states that Russia needs to realize its Eurasianist imperial destiny and must save the rest of the world from the monopoly of Western universalism. [1, p. 81-82]

As stated earlier, although Eurasianists did not favor communist ideology in Russia, they preferred to roll with the punch of the establishment of the Soviet Union for the sake of its embracement of Eurasia and forming an alternative civilization to the Western one. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union caused the Eurasian movement to revive under the name of 'Neo-Eurasianism'.

Due to the decline of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, reformulation of the Union's political and economic structures became inevitable. When Mikhail Gorbachev's reformation policy - under the principles of Perestroika (reconstructing) and Glasnost (openness) - failed to reformulate the political and economic structures of the Soviet Union the seventy years of the communist regime ceased to exist in Eurasia. In the early 1990s, Russians believed that their newly established state would become part of the Western world as soon as it embraced democratic values and transitioned to the market economy. However, the painful transition to a market economy and the failure of democracy to be consolidated in Russia caused disappointment among Russians. Additionally, the Russians felt humiliated following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which paved the way for a unipolar world system in which the United States emerged as the sole superpower.

Under these circumstances, Neo-Eurasianism reappeared as an ideology that refused the West-centered world order. By aiming to reconstruct the imperial past on a narrative level (it was impossible on the political level) Neo-Eurasianists based their ideology on the intellectual framework of the emigres which were the founding father of Eurasianism and on the philosophy of Lev Gumilev. In this sense, Marlene Laruelle emphasizes that Neo-Eurasianism appeared as a restoration movement rather than an independent intellectual current. [1, p. 83]

In essence, Neo-Eurasianists are opposed not to globalization, but the unilinear universalism led by the West. From this point of view, they claim that their approach proposes a new paradigm that promotes multiculturalism, multipolar world order, and ethnic identity rather than the globalization monopolized by the West. [4, p. 60] Neo-Eurasianists draw attention to the post-bipolar world order within the context of the civilizational worldview. Referring to the 'post-modern' values they mainly remark the alternative globalization (alter-globalization). [1, p. 83]

One of the main leading academic figures of the Neo-Eurasianist movement is Aleksander Panarin (1940-2003). Following the intellectual framework of the founders of Eurasianism, Panarin also emphasizes the distinctiveness of Russia in terms of geographical location which imposed an imperial destiny on it. Panarin not only sought to naturalize the imperial regime in Russia but also introduced imperial rule as an alter-globalization process. For him, a revival of Russia as an imperial power in Eurasia will allow to save humanity from the US-led globalization and to enjoy alternative civilization. [1, p. 84] According to Panarin, the Russian pattern of civilization promises a multicultural world order in which different peoples, cultures, and traditions coexist peacefully. He also points out that China introduces another model of civilization to the West's

unilinear progress. Panarin claims that alternative civilizations such as Russia or China are the solution to overcome the Western-centered world order. [4, p. 70]

Another critical academic figure among Neo-Eurasianist thinkers is Aleksandr Dugin (1962). While Dugin embraced the foundations of the intellectual current of Eurasianism he went further by forming a more radical version of Neo-Eurasianism. According to Paolo Pizzolo, Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism can be considered as 'orthodox' Neo-Eurasianist doctrine which is more anti-Western, anti-globalist, and anti-liberalist than other Eurasianist thinkers. [4, p. 71-72] Apart from his academic works, Dugin is frequently involved in the political landscape of the Russian Federation. He even led the establishment of the Eurasian Political Party in 2002 which set the stage for forming International Eurasian Movement in 2003. [3, p. 28] In short, Eurasianism and geopolitics, which have their origins in the classical intellectual currents of Eurasianism, are the terms Dugin most frequently referenced in his works.

Significance of Eurasia: The Heartland Theory

The geopolitical importance of Eurasia has been the subject of many academic studies. The Heartland Theory is the most frequently used geopolitical model in explaining the importance of Eurasia. Basically, the theory emphasizes the superiority of land-based power over sea-based power. Sir Halford John Mackinder (1861 - 1947) who is considered one of the founding fathers of geopolitics and geostrategy, was a British geopolitician. 'Heartland' was conceptualized primarily by Mackinder under the name of 'The Geographic Pivot of History' in 1904. However, he redefined the 'pivot area' as 'heartland' in an article entitled 'Democratic Ideal and Reality' in 1919. [5, p. 33] According to Mackinder, Heartland which is also called the Pivot Area includes roughly most of Russia and Central Asia. In his article named "The Round

World and the Winning of the Peace" Mackinder describes the territory of Heartland as: "The Heartland is the northern part and the interior of Euro-Asia. It extends from the Arctic coast down to the central deserts, and has as its western limits the broad isthmus between the Baltic and the Black Seas." [6, p. 597]

For Mackinder, the Heartland is the natural power center due to historical and geopolitical reasons. Additionally, he describes two territories which are 'inner crescent' and 'outer crescent'. The first one includes Eurasian coastal regions where the most intensive civilizations take place. Mackinder portrays civilizational developments in South, Southwest, and East Asia, and Europe as evidence of the potential power of the 'inner crescent'. The second area (outer crescent) comprises South and North America, Britain, Southern Africa, Japan, and Australasia. According to Mackinder, these regions are geographically and culturally unfamiliar to the Heartland. [7, p. 85] Historically, the author alleges, the Heartland is the most dynamic area that is mainly populated by Turkic tribes. Mackinder claims that the constant inroads of those tribes forced Europe to unite. In this sense, for him, historical processes that took place in the Heartland became a driving force behind the rise of the Western civilizations. [7, p. 86]

In short, Mackinder asserts that the power which controls the Heartland will rule not only Eurasia but the whole world. In his work, 'Democratic Ideal and Reality', Mackinder famously stated:

> *Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:*
> *Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:*
> *Who rules the World-Island commands the World.* [8, p. 106]

It is no wonder that Mackinder's Heartland Theory appeared when the naval power of the United Kingdom (UK), which was the dominant naval power since the 15th century, was in decline. Observing the weakening of the UK as a naval

power, Mackinder developed his theory as a foreign policy guide. For him, the UK could restore its power if controls the land between Germany and Central Siberia. Mackinder argued that Britain had the opportunity to use the rich natural resources in the region by dominating the Heartland, which could eventually pave the way for Britain to become a global power. [5, p. 33]

In this respect, it should be underlined the resemblance between Heartland Theory and Russian School Eurasianism. The most obvious similarity between these two currents lies in the fact that both ideologies attempt to justify imperial ambitions. The only difference is that while Heartland Theory was developed in the context of imperial ambitions of Great Britain (in general the West) Eurasianism serves the expansionist foreign policy of Russia. According to Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava, both currents exclude the interests of the countries located in the area of Heartland or Eurasia. They argue that leaving these countries out of the picture constitutes the limitations of these ideologies. [7, p. 23]   Referring to the theoretical framework of Eurasianism, Ismailov and Papava claim that Russia is unable to dominate the post-Soviet space. They state:

> This is not only because other 'players,' who also appeared in this space, have much more economic, informational, and military resources; but primarily because the Russian elite is not interested in ensuring and strengthening the state sovereignty of the former Soviet republics. [7, p. 104]

For the authors, Russia's modern foreign policy towards the South Caucasian countries is not formulated based upon mutual understanding where both sides could benefit but upon the unilateral interests of Russia. Ismailov and Papava argue that it is equally difficult for Russia to restore dominance in Central Asia. In this context, they draw attention to how the Central Asian countries maximize their interests due to the competition of foreign powers in the region. [7, p. 104]

It should be added that Russian foreign policy is not different either towards Eastern European countries such as Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Among these countries, the war in Ukraine particularly demonstrates that modern Russian foreign policy is not built on the 'soft power' but on the 'hard power' to keep the post-Soviet republics under its influence. As Ismailov and Papava have stated, Russia is trying to regain its influence in the post-Soviet republics by aiming to weaken their sovereignties, which in turn composes the main obstacle for Russia to become the dominant actor in these countries.

In this regard, Abbott Gleason points out that there is no monotonic Eurasia anymore. For him, the term 'Eurasia' has become nothing more than an easy way of describing what had been the territory of the Soviet Union. Gleason emphasizes that the post-Soviet republics are already following different foreign policy trajectories, with the consolidation of different political systems. Therefore, the author claims that it is no longer convenient to study Eurasia as a *sui generis* region. [9, p. 26-32] Moreover, Gleason describes Russia as a weakening power in the region and argues that Russia could only serve as China's junior partner, let alone restore its imperial power in the region. [9, p. 31] Therefore, it should be taken into account that Eurasia does not possess a uniform structure, and thereby the countries in the region should be studied separately in order to reach a better understanding of Eurasia.

Questions for Self-control

1. What are the main factors that set the stage for the development of Eurasianism as an ideology?

2. What was the meaning of the establishment of the Soviet Union for early Eurasianists?

3. What are the main arguments of the Eurasianists who were resurfaced in

the wake of the Soviet Union?

4. What is the Heartland Theory and why does Eurasia matter for it?

5. How to understand modern Eurasia in the context of the changing dynamics of international relations?

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THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Reader's Guide

It is beyond the main purpose of this book to provide detailed research on the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it is necessary to highlight the major developments that have laid the groundwork for ending the seventy-year-old Union. In this respect, this chapter briefly throws light on the distinctive features of Gorbachev's tenure that triggered the reshaping of the political order in Eurasia. To this end, it is first paid attention to the policy of 'perestroika' (restructuring) and 'glasnost' (openness/transparency). Subsequently, the consequences of this policy are unveiled.

Taxonomy of the theme and learning outcomes:

1. Considering the factors that paved the way for launching 'way-out' reforms in the Soviet Union.
2. Understanding *Perestroika* and *glasnost* reforms and the purpose of Gorbachev administration in implementing these reforms.
3. Analyzing the main reasons behind the failure of Gorbachev's reforms.
4. Evaluation of the consequences of the *perestroika* and *glasnost* reforms.

The Developments Towards the Disintegration

Although the reduction of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1988–1991) to certain factors provides us with an inadequate explanation, it would not be wrong to state that the disintegration process stemmed mainly from the internal dynamics of the Union. The collapse of the Union began due to the growing unrest in the Soviet republics and was accelerated by the constant political and incumbency conflicts between these republics and the central government. Ultimately, the Union ceased to exist when the three republics (Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) declared the termination of the Soviet Union on 8 December 1991 which paved the way for the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This declaration was accompanied by the Alma-Ata Protocol on 21 December 1991, according to which the eight former Soviet republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) joined the CIS. The only exception was Georgia which did not join the CIS while the Baltic states refused to sign the declaration fearing that their sovereignty might be restricted.

On 25 December 1991, the leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) Mikhail Gorbachev resigned and the next day, on 26 December 1991, the Council of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR officially recognized the independence of the republics of the USSR and thereby the termination of the Union. As a result of the collapse of the USSR, fifteen Soviet republics gained their independence.

Having said that, it is still necessary to enlighten the process that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev, the youngest member of the Politburo (54 years old), was elected Secretary-General by the Politburo on 11 March 1985. As soon as Gorbachev took office, his first goal was to revive the

collapsing Soviet economy. However, as the general secretary, he realized that fundamental reforms in political and social structures were required to obviate the collapse of the economy. For this reason, the reforms started with the changes of senior officials of the Brezhnev era, which would hinder political and economic reforms. Nevertheless, Gorbachev began to implement economic measures in a traditional way, rather than initiating fundamental reforms. In his report on the Soviet economy in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev stated: "We are forced to invest the necessary means in national defense … in the face of the aggressive policy and the threat of imperialism, it is impossible to allow its military superiority over us." [1, p. 109] This report was a clear indication that Gorbachev did not fully comprehend the magnitude of the economic danger when he came to power.

As a traditional method, Gorbachev also attempted to improve quality primarily by reinforcing discipline and strengthening decentralization in decision-making. In order to achieve this, new bureaucratic institutions were formed to monitor and evaluate the process. Besides, the Gorbachev administration, which estimated that the main source of the economic crisis was the lack of discipline, launched a new campaign against alcoholism. Alcoholism had been indicated as one of the main causes of increased infant mortality, reduced life expectancy, increased crime rates, and decreased labor productivity in the Union. However, these measures taken to overcome the structural challenges of the Soviet economy were obviously too superficial and unrealistic. In fact, fighting against alcoholism, far from boosting it, worsened the economy. When the campaign was initiated people began to consume home brewing alcohol (samogon). Since the vodka revenues consisted significant volume of the state budget, consumption of home-brewed alcohol negatively affected the budget. Eventually, the war against alcoholism did not increase discipline let alone

contribute to the revival of the economy. Peter Kenez portraits the situation as: "Gorbachev and his comrades were determined to carry out changes within the system, but it was the system itself that was the source of the trouble." [2, p. 249] Under these circumstances, the changes in the Soviet Union began to take place under two terms, *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, which are being clarified in the following sections.

Perestroika

Perestroika is a general name for reforms and the new ideology of the Soviet party leadership, used to denote large and ambiguous changes in the economic and political structure of the USSR. It was initiated by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. Perestroika is frequently referred to be one of the main reasons for the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which paved the way for the end of the Cold War.

The goal of the reforms was the democratization of the socio-political and economic system that had developed in the USSR. The process was much more complicated in reality but Gorbachev and his colleagues were hesitant: On the one hand, they became aware of the magnitude of the problems facing the Union and therefore they realized the inevitability of change, but on the other hand, they continued to believe in the superiority of the political and social structures of their state. Thus, they were trying to find a middle ground. For example, they were aiming to maintain a planned, state-owned economy, but to combine this with the advantages of the market economy. Likewise, they aimed to improve public life by allowing people to express their thoughts freely, but in doing so they wanted to be sure that communist beliefs were not violated. Besides, they

sought to reorganize the political structure by democratizing it while being sure that the guiding role of the party to be continued. [2, p. 258]

By the end of 1986 and early 1987, Gorbachev and his associates came to the conclusion that the situation in the country could not be changed by administrative measures, and thereby there was a need to reform the system in the spirit of democratic socialism. This move was mainly facilitated by two blows to the Soviet economy in 1986 as a result of the sharp fall in oil prices and the Chernobyl disaster. The new era started with the plenary session of the CPSU Central Committee (27-28 January 1987), and a radical restructuring of the economic management came to the fore at the meeting. The plenum was characterized as the beginning of large-scale reforms in all spheres of the Soviet Union. At the June 1987 Plenum, Gorbachev introduced the Law on State Enterprises. The law stated that public enterprises were free to determine the level of production in compliance with the demands of the consumers. [3, p. 285] Following the State Enterprise Law, another economic reform was introduced, which was even more at odds with the Soviet economic system. The Law on Cooperatives, which came into force in May 1988, was perhaps the most radical early economic reform of the Gorbachev administration. This law was critical because it allowed private ownership of businesses in many sectors such as manufacturing, services, and foreign trade for the first time since 1928. [3, p. 161] Under this law, cooperative restaurants, manufacturers, and shops became widespread in the Soviet economy. Nevertheless, the new law could not prevent the collapse of the economy.

Although attempts to revitalize the economy were not sufficient, one of Gorbachev's most important achievements was to reorganize the relations between the Soviet Union and the West during the Perestroika. Concerning his reforms, Gorbachev stressed: "an essential part of perestroika was new foreign

policy thinking, which encompassed both universal values and nuclear disarmament, and freedom of choice". [4]   Of course, Gorbachev's intention to improve relations with the USA and European countries did not merely stem from his more open-minded or 'liberal' characteristics. Economic reforms were causing the reduction of military expenditures and therefore the Soviet Union was not able to maintain the arms race against the West. Hence, a friendly international arena was the most required international order from Moscow's point of view. Moreover, the acquisition of advanced technology from the West was an indispensable factor for the Soviet industry. In essence, Soviet foreign policy was formulated on the class struggle and thereby it perceived international relations as a zero-sum game. According to this understanding, the interests of socialist and capitalist systems were conflictual in the sense that whatever harmed one system definitely benefited the other one. Yet Gorbachev sought to change this perception with a famous phrase: Our common European home. [5, p. 659] By this, the General Secretary meant that two systems can co-exist and work together for their mutual benefit.

In short, when Gorbachev came to power, the economic structure of the Soviet Union was no longer sustainable, and serious reforms were required to prevent economic collapse. Perestroika was therefore initiated as an attempt to overcome economic stagnation by constructing a reliable and efficient mechanism to accelerate social progress and economic growth. However, Gorbachev's initiative proved to be too insufficient to revive the country's stagnant economy. By 1990, the Soviet government was unable to manage the economy and was no longer in control. In addition, with the strengthening of regional autonomy, local governments began to reduce the taxes they transferred to the central government, which led to a decrease in tax revenues. [2, p. 267]

Glasnost

Another term associated with Gorbachev's period and the collapse of the Soviet Union is Glasnost. Although the origin of the use of Glasnost goes back to the nineteenth-century Russian imperial time, the term was mostly popularized during the governance of Gorbachev. Even before becoming the General Secretary of the CPSU, Gorbachev delivered a speech that mentioned the necessity of Glasnost in the Soviet Union. On 10 December 1984, Gorbachev stated:

> Glasnost is an integral aspect of socialist democracy and a norm of all public life. Extensive, timely, and candid information is an indication of trust in people and of respect for their intelligence, feelings, and ability to comprehend various events on their own…Glasnost in the work of Party and state agencies is an effective means of combating bureaucratic distortions and obliges people to take a more thoughtful approach to…the rectification of shortcomings and deficiencies. [6, p. 43-44]

After becoming General Secretary of the CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev and his advisers began to talk about Glasnost at the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February 1986. They adopted the term Glasnost as a political slogan, along with the abovementioned term, Perestroika. Basically, Glasnost meant promoting openness and transparency in the activities of government institutions in the Soviet Union. Within the framework of this political understanding, the Soviet citizens were allowed to openly discuss problems and possible solutions in the political, economic, and cultural structures of their states. Gorbachev encouraged public criticism of the Soviet leaders and allowed mass media to expose their activities. He aimed to draw people's attention to certain shortcomings, weaknesses, and gaps in the existing system of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev was projecting to emancipate the Soviet people from the oppression they were subjected to during the Stalinist and even post-Stalinist period within the framework of the 'Leninist norms' that were promising openness and honesty. According to Brian McNair, the Glasnost can be defined under the headings of *criticism*, *access*, and *socialist pluralism* which were also the main sources of the Leninist ideology. [6, p. 44] Criticism was a crucial objective for finding a constructive solution to the decaying structure of the Soviet Union. Along with the publication of optimistic news about the advantages of the socialist system, media had been particularly encouraged to engage in criticizing the Soviet elites, institutions, and economy. To this end, the right to access information was a vital issue for the mass media. The right to information roughly meant free and unlimited access to non-confidential documents and materials that could facilitate the participation of the Soviet people in the political and administrative decision-making process. The final component of Glasnost was socialist pluralism, which Gorbachev sought to integrate into the structure of the Soviet Union. In essence, socialist pluralism was a central concept in Lenin's interpretation of Socialism. Writing in 1900, Lenin pointed out: "We do not reject polemics between comrades, but, on the contrary, are prepared to give them considerable space in our columns." [6, p. 75]   However, Bolshevism developed towards dictatorship and Communist Party suppressed different voices not only out of the Party but even within the Party. In this respect, Gorbachev attempted to implement radical reforms to consolidate the socialism that Lenin had projected.

Consequences of the Gorbachev's Reforms

Gorbachev's reforms, usually clustered under the headings of Perestroika and Glasnost, had a tremendous impact on the social, economic, and political structure of the Soviet Union. Regarding the Gorbachev administration, scholars

frequently refer to those reforms concerning their contribution to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although it is very difficult to answer the question of whether Gorbachev had not undertaken radical changes in the system of the Soviet Union, would the Union dissolve in the same way, it would not be mistaken to express that the initiation of Perestroika and Glasnost directly contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Obviously, Glasnost paved the way not only to criticize the economic performance of the Soviet Union but also set the perfect stage for republics, particularly the Baltic states, to question their historical relations with Moscow. As known, the Baltic states and the western part of Ukraine were incorporated into the USSR in the aftermath of the Second World War. Since these republics enjoyed sovereignty in the inter-war period, they resented losing their independence and being ruled by Moscow. In this regard, Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians began to highlight their sovereign past right after the introduction of Glasnost. They were afraid of being assimilated or eliminated as nations after becoming part of the Soviet Union. For the Baltic states, Glasnost facilitated questioning the Stalin era when their hundreds of thousands of intelligentsia had been deported to Siberia. It was therefore an invaluable process to allow people to freely express their thoughts and broadcast them via mass media. Nevertheless, easing the right to freedom of speech in the Soviet Union was not enough for the separation of any republic from the Union. According to Peter Kenez, independence movements have always been strong in the Baltic countries, but the factor that people could not resist was the Soviet tanks. [2, p. 261]   Therefore, the unwillingness of Gorbachev's government to move Soviet tanks to the Baltic states played a decisive role in snowballing independence movements in these states.

Along with the Glasnost which accelerated the nationalist and thereby independence movements, the role of Perestroika must be taken into consideration while explaining the secession of the Baltic states. The Gorbachev administration was eager to redefine the relations between the republics of the USSR and the central government where the former would have great independence from the latter with the exception of the defense sector and foreign policy. In this context, a draft union treaty was already prepared at the end of 1990. By this move, Gorbachev's government intended to counterwork the independence movements of the Baltic states and the growing influence of Boris Yeltsin (Russian nationalism). [7, p. 60-61] The referendum proposal on the union treaty was formally submitted by Gorbachev on 17 December 1990 and was approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union on 24 December 1990. On 17 March 1991, citizens of the Soviet Union were asked whether they wanted the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to be preserved as a federation in which all republics are equal and human rights and freedom of expression are guaranteed.

The Baltic states, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia refused to participate in the referendum in order to make their desire clear for full independence. The remaining nine republics participated in the referendum. The result of the referendum was affirmative (80 percent). The referendum enabled Gorbachev to form the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics. In this sense, he scheduled a formal establishment of the union by signing the union treaty with the leaders of the nine republics on 20 August 1991. However, before this treaty was signed in Moscow, groups opposing Gorbachev's reforms staged a coup to protect the Soviet Union. Although the putschists were successful in deactivating Gorbachev's reforms, paradoxically they set the stage for the birth of the Republic of Russia at the expense of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In

brief, after the independence declaration of Lithuania on 11 March 1990, the remaining Soviet republics declared their sovereignty one after another.

In addition to the independence movements, the Perestroika and Glasnost reforms fueled a range of inter-ethnic conflicts in the territory of the USSR, many of which still exist. The first manifestation of tension during the Perestroika and Glasnost period was the events in Yakutia. In spring 1986, clashes took place in Yakutsk between groups of young people of Russian nationality and Sakha students at the Yakutsk State University. As a result of the harsh intervention of the police several Sakha girls were wounded, and this incident attracted thousands of Sakha students to street demonstrations. This was the first remarkable demonstration that broke out in the Soviet Union under the Gorbachev government before the clashes erupted between youth and police in Kazakhstan on 16 December 1986. [8, p. 109]

The conflicts in Georgia and Azerbaijan were the most noticeable among the other inter-ethnic conflicts that took place at the end of the Soviet Union. The separatist movements of the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians led to wars in Georgia in the early 1990s, which still have not been resolved. The other conflict which led to an inter-state war occurred in Nagorno Karabakh which was an autonomous region within the territory of Azerbaijan. The war was triggered on 20 February 1988 when the regional council of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) accepted an application addressing the Supreme Soviets of Azerbaijan and Armenia, expressing its desire to secede from Azerbaijan to join Armenia. In addition, on 12 July 1988, the regional council of the NKAR declared the unification of the region with Armenia. On 18 July 1988, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR considered the decision of the NKAR regional council as a violation of Article 78 of the Soviet constitution. [9, p. 50-51] Despite the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the

USSR, war broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1991 and as a result, Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts were occupied by Armenia. [10]

In short, the Perestroika and Glasnost policy of Gorbachev triggered tremendous changes in the Soviet Union. The first major impact of the Gorbachev era was that it played a key role in the termination of the Soviet Union. Fifteen countries gained independence as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union and changed the geopolitical structure of the Eastern Bloc. Moreover, the end of the Soviet Union led to several inter-ethnic and inter-state wars that are still very dynamic.

Questions for Self-control

1. What factors played a vital role in initiating unconventional reforms in the Soviet Union?

2. Describe Perestroika and Glasnost reforms and the purpose of the Gorbachev administration in implementing these reforms.

3. What were the main reasons behind the failure of Gorbachev's reforms?

4. What were the eventual consequences of the Perestroika and Glasnost reforms?

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10. The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended on 10 November 2020, when the Azerbaijani Army liberated its occupied territories after 44 days of the war. In addition, Russia managed to deploy its peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh at the end of the war.

POST-SOVIET RUSSIA: FROM LIBERAL ILLUSION TO PRESENT POLITICS

Reader's Guide

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a watershed in modern world history that allowed the (re)establishment of fifteen independent states. Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms under the headings of Perestroika and Glasnost were the main reason which led to the termination of seventy years old communist regime in Eurasia. Apparently, Gorbachev did not aim to dissolve the Soviet Union but instead, he believed that the system of the Union was no longer sustainable. Therefore, reforms were inevitable for the restructuring of the system, which was falling behind day after day in comparison with the Western world. Whether the Soviet Union could have endured longer without Gorbachev's reforms is still a matter of debate in the academic field, but it was clear that the Soviet Union needed radical reforms to compete with the West. In this sense, radical reforms also did not help the Russian Federation (successor to the Soviet Union) to become a democratic republic with a competitive market economy in Boris Yeltsin's period. This chapter compendiously maps the post-Soviet Russia from the independence to the present.

Taxonomy of the theme and learning outcomes:

1. Recalling under what circumstances the Russian Federation was established and the effectiveness of Boris Yeltsin's administration in the

The Rise of Yeltsin

On 29 May 1990, Boris N. Yeltsin was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In essence, Yeltsin was in line with Gorbachev in terms of supporting the reforms. However, different from Gorbachev, he was demanding more autonomy for the RSFSR within the Union in comparison to the other republics. As soon as Yeltsin became president, he began to strive to transform the RSFSR into a democratic constitutional state. Nonetheless, he envisioned this new state as part of the liberalized Soviet Union. Hence, the Congress of People's Deputies adopted the Declaration on State Sovereignty of the RSFSR on 12 June 1990, proclaiming the priority of republican laws over the Union laws, but at the same time confirmed Russia's intention to remain part of the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, this move initiated a prolonged conflict between the RSFSR leader, Yeltsin, and the head of the central government, Gorbachev.

At the 28th Congress of the CPSU in July 1990, Yeltsin left the Communist Party, and then, a gradual decommunization commenced in the RSFSR. On 15 December 1990, amendments were made to the Constitution of the RSFSR of 1978, according to which references to socialism were excluded and the right to

private property was enshrined. As Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, Yeltsin persuaded the Russian parliament to form a presidential post that could be elected directly by the citizens of the Russian republic. The proposed presidential post, along with the referendum on the future of the Soviet Union, was scheduled to be voted on 17 March 1991. As a result of the referendum, the majority of the population of the Russian Federation voted in favor of preserving the USSR. Besides, the post of President of the RSFSR was also approved by the citizens. [1, p. 630]

The first presidential election in the RSFSR was held on 12 June 1991, as a result of which Boris N. Yeltsin became President of the RSFSR. After the election, the main slogans of the president were the fight against the privileges of the nomenklatura [2] and the maintenance of Russia's sovereignty within the Soviet Union. On 10 July 1991, Boris N. Yeltsin took an oath of loyalty to the people of Russia and the Russian Constitution and took office as President of the RSFSR. Yeltsin had gained immense power after the presidential elections, although his power was not yet at its peak. As noted, a referendum to determine the future of the Soviet Union was held on 17 March 1991, and the results were affirmative for the Union's protection. Based on the results of the referendum, the central government authorized a working group to develop a project on the new union, called the 'Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics' as a soft, decentralized version of the USSR. The final version of the 'Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States' was published on 27 June 1991, by emphasizing the sovereignty of each republic as:

> Each republic, which is a party to the treaty, is a sovereign state. The Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics (USSR) is a sovereign, federative, democratic state, formed as a result of the unification of equal republics and exercising state power within the bounds of the powers with which the parties to the treaty voluntarily invest it. [3, p. 93]

It was noted that the union agreement was going to be signed on 20 August 1991. Nevertheless, the signing of the treaty was thwarted by the conservative wing of high-ranking officials from the Soviet government, who on 18 August 1991, created the State Committee on the State of Emergency and declared that the Gorbachev was unable to fulfill the duties of President of the USSR for health reasons. On the same day, the committee representatives arrived in Crimea, where Gorbachev's vacation residence was located, to demand Gorbachev to sign a declaration on handing power to the Emergency Committee. When Gorbachev refused to sign the declaration, he with his family were placed under house arrest. [4, p. 156]

Soviet soldiers and tanks entered Moscow on August 19. The leadership of the RSFSR, headed by President Yeltsin, urged Russian citizens to resist the Emergency Committee and thereby to the coup attempt. Following the three-day confrontation within the Soviet leadership, which formed the Emergency Committee, and the leadership of the RSFSR headed by the President of the RSFSR Yeltsin, it became clear that the army would not carry out the orders of the committee. Faced with the protests and resistance of the citizens and the changing sides of some military units, the State Committee on the State of Emergency had no choice but to withdraw soldiers and tanks from Moscow on 21 August. [1, p. 636] On 22 August 1991, the putschists were arrested, and the leadership of the RSFSR, President Yeltsin, and the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR were victorious. On 24 August 1991, Gorbachev resigned as General Secretary of the CPSU, and at the end of the month, the Russian parliament dissolved the CPSU. [5] Gorbachev's power declined sharply and ended when he announced his resignation from the presidency of the USSR on 25 December 1991.

Since Yeltsin gained full power in Russia after the August 1991 coup attempt, he began to implement radical economic reforms. On 28 October 1991, Boris N. Yeltsin proclaimed a program of radical economic reforms, the goal of which was the transition to a market economy starting from 1 January 1992. In November 1991, Boris Yeltsin established a reform government in Russia, and Yegor Gaidar was appointed as one of the main figures responsible for economic reforms. Influenced by Western consultants, liberal economist Gaidar and other young economists initiated radical reforms in the name of liberalization and stabilization, commonly known as "shock therapy". The program specifically aimed at the liberalization of prices. [6, p. 23] Shock therapy aimed at increasing the efficiency of citizens in the economic field by freeing the Russian economy from the centrist structure of the Soviet economic system. Moreover, it aimed to create the foundation for a self-sustaining market system by ending controls on prices and cutting state subsidies to agriculture and industry. [1, p. 646]

In 1992, simultaneously with the liberalization of domestic prices, foreign trade was liberalized. Under the conditions of low export tariffs and poor customs control, the sale of some raw materials had become super profitable. Another consequence of the liberalization of trade was the flow of cheap imported consumer goods into the Russian market. This development caused the collapse of the domestic light industry. In summer 1992, a privatization program was launched and moved forward rapidly. State firms were transformed into joint-stock companies and coupons were issued to facilitate citizens to buy shares. However, these shares were bought mainly by in-house managers and employees of companies, not by ordinary citizens. [7, p. 25] In practice, managers continued to control most businesses, the property began to accumulate in fewer people, and these developments enabled organized crime 'mafias' to gain an increasing influence in the economy. A sharp rise in poverty

and social inequality came into view in the country. With the onset of the reforms, terrible inflation (hyperinflation) also ensued, which made millions of savings meaningless and devalued the wages and pensions of the elderly.

Undoubtedly, the heaviest burden of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the implemented reforms was on the citizens. A historian Nicholas V. Riasanovsky portraits the conditions as: "Citizens, with good reason, complained that reform was all shock and no therapy." [1, p. 647] For many scholars, shock therapy was a catastrophic policy that radical reformists carried out in the Russian Federation. Economists from the Russian Academy of Sciences reported:

> Confronted with the failure of their economic policy, the initiators of "shock therapy" did not draw the appropriate lessons, but stubbornly insisted that their policy must be continued. This only worsened the situation and placed new burdens [on] the population. In an attempt to cover up the fiasco, the reformers in power sought to misinform public opinion, distorting the real situation and the real living conditions of the people. [8, p. 44]

Unsurprisingly, economic desperation in the early 1990s which was worsened by the implementation of shock therapy reflected on the political landscape of the Russian Federation. Boris Yeltsin increasingly was being criticized in line with the economic conditions of the country. First, Vice President Aleksandr V. Rutskoi criticized the radical reforms in February 1992. Blaming Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and his economic advisers, Rutskoi compared the reform government method with the Bolshevik strategy of *revolution at any price*. Moreover, he called the execution of shock therapy 'economic genocide'. [9] Towards the end of 1992, the Gaidar/Yeltsin government was criticized more than ever by the Supreme Soviet and the Russian Congress of People's Deputies. Simultaneously, Yeltsin was seeking more power to maintain the radical reforms in the country. He was concerned about losing his special power. In fact, Yeltsin was possessing power beyond the limits of the constitution which was approved

by the legislative body to allow him to carry out the reforms. Therefore, for Yeltsin, parliamentary approval was necessary for new decrees to be issued. However, the Congress of People's Deputies of Russia and the Supreme Soviet deputies refused to adopt a new constitution proposed by the president to expand his sphere of influence.

In response, Yeltsin accused the parliament of obstructing reforms and proposed a referendum to end the stalemate. Tensions escalated once again in March, despite the agreement reached between the parliament and the Yeltsin government to hold a referendum in April 1993. The power rivalry seemed to be ended when the parliament approved its own version of the referendum. In the referendum, Russian citizens were asked the following questions:

- Do you trust the President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin?
- Do you approve of the social and economic policy implemented by the President of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Russian Federation since 1992?
- Do you consider it necessary to hold early elections of the President of the Russian Federation?
- Do you consider it essential to hold early elections of the People's Deputies of the Russian Federation? [10, p. 4]

The referendum results were satisfying for Boris Yeltsin that 59 percent of voters affirmed their trust in the president. In general, except for the early presidential election, citizens approved the rest of the questions asked in the referendum. After getting the citizens' support, Yeltsin began to work on a draft constitution that would guarantee his power over the legislative body. In contrast, the parliament was also preparing a draft constitution to constrain presidential power. On 21 September 1993, Yeltsin issued a decree 'On Phased Constitutional Reform in the Russian Federation', which ordered the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation to cease

their activities. The decree announced that the referendum for the new constitution would be held in December 1993.

The next day, parliament adopted a resolution on the termination of the powers of President Yeltsin and appointed Vice President Rutskoi as acting president. Additionally, the deputies barricaded themselves in the White House which led to mass demonstrations in Moscow to defend the deputies. [1, p. 649-650] On 28 September, the first bloody clash took place in Moscow between special police and anti-Yeltsin activists. On October 3, Rutskoy and Khasbulatov with the supporters of the Supreme Soviet attempted to seize the Moscow City Hall and storm the Ostankino television center. On the following day, Yeltsin ordered military troops to bomb the White House with tanks and arrest the rebels. More than a hundred people died as a result of the bombardment. Following the October Constitutional Crisis, Yeltsin began to consolidate his power. To that end, the referendum on a new constitution and parliamentary elections were scheduled to be held in December 1993. The new constitution strengthened the authority of the president which Yeltsin desired to obtain for a long time, was approved in the referendum. Having the right to dissolve Congress the new constitution was a stunning victory of Yeltsin over the legislature.

Yeltsin Presidency between 1994-1999

After the Constitutional Crisis that ended with the bombing of the White House, Russia faced an even greater disaster, the Chechen War, in 1994. The war took place between the Russian troops and the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI) in Chechnya to take control of the territory of Chechnya. Essentially, Chechnya declared its independence during the coup attempt in August 1991, when the republics of the Soviet Union declared their independence one after another. Dzhokhar Dudayev, a general in the USSR air

force, became the leader of the CRI. Although Chechnya became de-facto independent, it was not recognized as a state by any country including Russia. In essence, the governance system of the CRI turned out to be extremely ineffective and the territory rapidly became a base for criminal activities in the period 1991-1994. An anti-Dudayev opposition was formed in the northern regions of Chechnya which was not controlled by the Dudayev's forces in 1993 and launched an armed struggle against the Dudayev regime. The anti-Dudayev group declared Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation and thus implicitly gained the support of Moscow. In summer 1994, hostilities unfolded in Chechnya between the troops loyal to Dudayev and the opposition forces of the Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic. In November 1994, opposition forces tried to seize the city of Grozny, but Dudayev's forces prevented this attempt. The forces of the belligerents were approximately equal, and neither of them was able to gain the upper hand in the struggle.

On 11 December, Boris Yeltsin issued a decree on measures to ensure law, order, and public safety on the territory of the Chechen Republic. On the same day, 40,000 Russian soldiers were sent to Chechnya. [1, p. 650] Underestimating the Chechens' military readiness and fighting skills, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev pledged an easy victory in a very short time. After a bloody fight in early 1995, the federal troops took control of the plains of Chechnya. However, after a surprise attack by the separatists on Grozny, Russia was obliged to sign a peace agreement called Khasavyurt accords on 31 August 1996, as a result of which federal troops withdrew from Chechnya. The agreement was signed by the representatives of Russia and Chechen forces, Alexander Lebed, and Aslan Maskhadov, respectively. On 12 May 1997, the peace treaty officially was signed by newly elected Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow. Chechens acquired de facto independence

by gaining control over the entire territory of Chechnya, but their future relationship with the Russian Federation remained uncertain.

On the political stage, Yeltsin was blamed for the defeat of the Russian army by Chechen forces. Although nationalist groups supported Russia's military intervention in Chechnya, the appalling performance of their armies was embarrassing for them. The popularity of Yeltsin, who was only supported by the nationalists and communists in the war against Chechens, was further diminished by the defeat. In contrast, Chechens proved their fighting skills in an asymmetric war by surprise attacks on the conventional Russian army.

Although Yeltsin managed to get the approval of a new constitution that enriched the power of the president (described as super-presidentialism) [7, p. 28] in the referendum he could not gain full control over the State Duma. In the Duma elections in 1995, the performance of reformers gathered around Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin declined, while the communists and nationalists increased their seats in the State Duma. The communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, who had already proven his strength in the parliamentary elections in 1995, emerged as Yeltsin's main opponent in the 1996 presidential election. The Russian democrats and the West were now worried that Zyuganov would prevail, and therefore communism would return to Russia. Although the results of the election polls were not in his favor compared to Zyuganov, Yeltsin had no intention of giving up.

Throughout the election campaign, Yeltsin portrayed himself as a candidate for stability, peace, order, progress while depicting his opponent as the communist who would restore communism and thus hinder Russia from becoming part of the civilized world. Controlling the mass media, government succeed in denigrating Zyuganov. Moreover, fearing the return of communists to power, staggeringly wealthy oligarchs such as Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky

invested millions of dollars in Yeltsin's campaign. In brief, Boris Yeltsin managed to defeat the communist leader Gennady Zyuganov in two rounds. In the first round, none of the candidates achieved the majority of votes. Yeltsin obtained 35.3 percent of the votes while Zyuganov followed him with 32 percent. In the second round, these two candidates competed, and Yeltsin won with 53.8% of votes against Zyuganov, who received 40.3% support. [11, p. 124]

Meanwhile, indebtedness in the country was constantly increasing, the population was getting poorer, crime rates were becoming more widespread, and besides, the government was unable to collect most of the taxes. Encouraged by the election results, Yeltsin began to blame the government for its ineffectiveness and even fired several ministries and deputies who were close to Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. In February 1998, he again fired a number of ministers including Chernomyrdin. Sergei Kiriyenko, an economist, was approved by the State Duma as a new prime minister. However, the decline of oil prices in the world market in 1998 worsened the economic conditions in Russia. Yeltsin continued to lose his popularity day by day. Amid the economic crisis in the country, Kiriyenko was removed from his post as prime minister and replaced by foreign minister Evgenii Primakov. Finding him too independent, Yeltsin dismissed Primakov a month later and replaced him with the former head of the interior ministry, Sergei Stepashin. Within months, when the second war was about to take place in Chechnya, Yeltsin replaced Stepashin with the relatively unfamiliar KGB officer, Vladimir Putin. In his New Year's speech on 31 December 1999, Yeltsin announced his resignation from the presidency and appointed Putin as acting president of the Russian Federation. Hence, a new era has started in the political landscape of Russia.

Putin's Era in Russia

In connection with Boris Yeltsin's resignation at the end of 1999, an early presidential election in Russia was scheduled for 26 March 2000 by the Federation Council on 5 January 2000. Obtaining 53 percent of the votes in the first round Vladimir Putin won the March 2000 presidential election and became the second president of the Russian Federation. Observing the state's weakness Putin wrote that the main problem of Russia in the 1990s was its vulnerability to oligarchs and separatists in Chechnya. At the end of 1999, he portrayed the condition as: "Russians are alarmed by the obvious weakening of state power…the public looks forward to a certain restoration of the guiding and regulating rule of the state." [1, p. 660] He believed that the war in Chechnya would determine the future of Russia. For him, Russia's second defeat against the Chechens would further weaken the state and the people's faith in the state would be lost. Therefore, Putin began to reinstate state power in Chechnya.

In August 1999, there was an invasion of Dagestan by Chechen separatists led by Shamil Basayev. Russian troops, with the support of Dagestani forces, drove Chechen militants back to Chechnya. In late September, federal troops launched a military operation in Chechnya. By March 2000, they had taken Grozny and destroyed the main militant groups, taking control of the territory of Chechnya. In April 2000, Russia announced that large-scale hostilities in Chechnya had ended. In July 2000, Akhmat Kadyrov, a pro-Kremlin Chechen leader, was appointed as acting head of Chechnya. [12] Organized armed resistance to the federal authorities in Chechnya ceased in spring 2000, but in subsequent years protracted guerrilla attacks continued. Akhmad Kadyrov was killed in a terrorist attack in 2004. Since December 2005, his son Ramzan Kadyrov has been the most influential pro-Kremlin leader in Chechnya.

The separatists carried out a number of terrorist attacks on several Russian cities, including Moscow. Among them, the attack on a Moscow theater in 2002; the attack of suicide bombers at a rock concert in 2003; a bomb blast at near Red Square in 2003, and the Moscow metro in 2004 were the most dreadful. The second Chechen war, like the first, was strongly criticized by the Western media, and Russia was accused of bombing civilians. However, after the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the outbreak of the war on terror, the West and Russia started to support each other in the fight against terrorism.

Despite the terrorist attacks, Putin's popularity continued to grow. In addition to the counter-terrorism operation in Chechnya, he was simultaneously fighting the oligarchs, to restore the state power. In this respect, Putin managed to eliminate a large number of influential oligarchs, such as Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who allegedly owned a large number of state assets unlawfully in the course of the privatization process. In fact, according to many scientists, Putin was specifically targeting oligarchs who were opposed to him. He was trying to suppress the voices of the opposition by dominating the mass media owned by the oligarchs. However, the Russian people were mainly behind Putin and they were supporting his governance. This was reflected in the 2004 presidential election, where he received 71% of the votes. Obviously, Putin's rise would have been very difficult without Russia's economic growth that began towards the end of 1999. Rising oil prices in the world market paved the way for rapid economic growth in Russia. In 2000-2008, the Russian economy consistently experienced a GDP growth of around 6 to 7 percent annually.

In December 2007, Dmitry Medvedev was nominated as a candidate for President of the Russian Federation from the United Russia party as the successor of Vladimir Putin since he had no right to be elected third time

according to the constitution. In March 2008, presidential elections were held in Russia, in which Dmitry Medvedev won with 70% of the vote. The day after his inauguration, Medvedev appointed Putin as prime minister. Medvedev's period was mostly remembered by the war in South Ossetia in August 2008 which set the stage for Russian intervention and ended with the recognition of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states by the Russian Federation.

In March 2012, Putin was elected president of Russia for the third time. This time, Dmitry Medvedev was appointed as prime minister of the Russian Federation. Putin's third term of presidency was remembered mostly by the illegal annexation of Crimea in early 2014 and the economic crisis at the end of 2014. This was caused by a sharp decline in prices of energy resources which constitutes a significant part of Russia's budget revenues, as well as by the introduction of economic sanctions against Russia in connection with the illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine.

In March 2018, Putin was elected president of Russia for the fourth term, with a record 76.69 percent of votes, and Dmitry Medvedev remained prime minister. In brief, Putin commenced the period of *stability* in Russian politics as he promised and restored state power. However, he was able to 'restore stability and the state power' in Russian Federation at the expense of forming his own understanding of democracy rather than the Western-style democracy. Most Western analysts describe democracy in Russia as a *managed democracy* where the system creates its own opposition. Nevertheless, the Putin government opted for the term *sovereign democracy*, which means that democracy varies depending on the specific characteristics and traditions of each country and therefore the West has no right to criticize the political landscape of the Russian Federation.

Foreign Policy of Russia

In the literature, scholars have widely accepted that at least three main schools of thought are dominant in shaping the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. These schools are grouped under the headings of Liberals, Balancers, and Nationalists. Liberals, also known as pro-Western, advocate major reforms in Russia's political structure and thus in its foreign policy by using Western democracies as templates for progress. In this respect, pro-Western liberals encourage close ties with the United States and European Union. Their ultimate goal is to integrate Russia with the Western world and make Russia an integral part of Western civilization.

Balancers, also known as centrists or realists, promote an independent foreign policy rather than one which is dominated by the West. The balancers try to preserve Russia's own foreign policy path in global politics. Balancers do not completely reject Western models and tend to obtain 'necessary' experiences from the West. Their perspectives are historically in line with the modernization concept of Russia initiated by Peter the Great. They understand that the advanced technology of the West is indispensable for Russia to restore its status of great power in world politics.

According to Andrew C. Kuchins and Igor A. Zevelev, the main difference between pro-Westerns and the centrists is derived from the following facts: For liberals, Russia can achieve its great power status without harming the interest of the West. In other terms, they claim that two parties can coexist. Contrary to the liberals' viewpoint, balancers argue that the West should not overplay its role in the international arena and must not try to restrict the foreign policy path of Russia. [12, p. 150]

Nationalists, also called Slavophils, consider Russia to have a special mission in international affairs. They claim that Russia's role is to integrate post-Soviet countries into a Russian-led organization. Slavophiles emphasized that Russian civilization originated from the Slavic Orthodox communitarian culture is alien to Western civilization. In this sense, they highlight the unique characteristics of the Russian tradition. Slavophils, who attach importance to ethnicity, argue that Russia's duty is to unite Slavs in the near abroad with Russia. They stress that Russia should bring ethnic Russian communities and other Eastern Slavs together and should build a new state. In other words, they promote the idea of reunification of Russia, Belarus, certain parts of Ukraine, and northern Kazakhstan where ethnic Russians are dominant.

At the beginning of the 1990s when liberals were dominant in Russia's political system, Russian foreign policy seemed more pro-Western. Between 1990 and 1996, the Russian foreign minister was Andrei Kozyrev, known as a liberal internationalist. However, even during Kozyrev's period, Russian foreign policy began to shift from a liberal perspective to a more realist one. This U-turn in Russian foreign policy was mainly due to the perception of NATO's eastward expansion. In this scheme, NATO's operation in Bosnia in 1995 warned Russian authorities. In September 1995, Yeltsin stated: "NATO expansion would mean the return of 'the flames of war' to Europe." [13, p. 10]

Although Russian foreign policy has already shown some signs of the centrist approach mentioned above, its direction became crystal clear with the new foreign ministry in 1996. In early 1996, President Yeltsin dismissed 'liberal' and 'too-Western' Kozyrev and replaced him with Yevgeny Primakov, who had a reputation of being strong as well as a moderate statesman. Yevgeny Primakov's takeover of the post of Ministry of Foreign Affairs is regarded as the beginning of the centrist approach to foreign policy. To emphasize Primakov's influence in

Russian foreign policy, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov stated: "The moment he took over the Russian Foreign Ministry heralded a dramatic turn of Russia's foreign policy. Russia left the path our Western partners had tried to make it follow after the breakup of the Soviet Union and embarked on a track of its own." [14] He described the principles of Russian foreign policy during the Primakov period as the 'Primakov Doctrine'.

Russian foreign policy followed the main principles of the Primakov Doctrine in Putin's presidency. As mentioned earlier, as soon as Putin came to power, he stated that Russia needs a strong state and consolidation of society. In the international arena, Putin began to increasingly criticize the US foreign policy, especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. In the aftermath of the Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet space, Russia's conflict with the West has been more revitalized than ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the second half of the 2000s, Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed his dissatisfaction with the Western domination of world politics in his public speeches. At the Munich Security Policy Conference in 2007, Putin accused the United States of using almost uncontrolled force in the international arena. In general, President Putin stated that a unipolar model for the modern world was not only unacceptable but actually impossible. [15]

Simultaneously with rejecting the unipolar international order dominated by the United States, Russia also began to increase its influence in its immediate periphery. This intention particularly has been shown during Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008. In Ukraine, Russia illegally annexed Crimea as a reaction to the overthrow of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych in 2014. Moreover, the Kremlin was involved in the destabilization of eastern Ukraine to restrain Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policy. In short, essentially starting in 1996, Russia began to seek a new foreign policy path to avoid the risks of the

growing influence of the West perceived by Moscow. Russia embraced the multipolar world order during Putin's presidency and portraited itself as one of the major actors in global politics.

<div align="center">*Questions for Self-control*</div>

1. Under what conditions was the Russian Federation formed, and to what extent was the rule of Boris Yeltsin effective?

2. Explain the main political developments in the Russian Federation between 1994 and 1999.

3. Under what circumstances did Vladimir Putin come to power and how did he manage to consolidate his presidency?

4. Evaluate the overall foreign policy directions of the Russian Federation since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

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CHAPTER 4

THE BALTIC STATES: FROM COMMUNISM TO THE WEST WORLD

Reader's Guide

The Baltic states were the Soviet republics most aspiring to secede from the USSR and were, therefore, most active in taking advantage of Gorbachev's reforms. This chapter first briefly enlightens the historical background of the Baltic states. Afterward, it details each of the Baltic states since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This chapter helps to understand the peculiarity of the Baltic states among other Soviet republics in the consolidation of democracies.

Taxonomy of the theme and learning outcomes:

1. Recalling the historical background of the Baltic states that paved the way for the formulation of their distinctive features among other Soviet republics.
2. Understanding the independence movement in Estonia and the re-establishment of the Republic of Estonia.
3. Analyzing the main challenges faced during the state-building process in Estonia in the early 1990s.
4. Realizing the independence movement in Latvia and the reaction of the Soviet government.
5. Exploring the similarities between Estonia and Latvia in the state-building process.

6. Evaluation of the independence movement in Lithuania and the reaction of the Soviet government.

7. Examining the biggest threat perceived by the Baltic states in the aftermath of regaining their independence and the solutions they developed against it.

A Brief History of the Baltic States

Baltic is a geopolitical term typically used to refer to three countries on the east coast of the Baltic Sea. These countries are composed of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Baltic states had distinctive political culture among the other republics of the Soviet Union which came to the fore in the course of the collapse of the USSR. Undoubtedly, their political characteristics are derived from the historical developments of the region. As known, pagan peoples on the east coast of the Baltic Sea became targets of the Baltic Crusades, also known as Northern Crusaders, in the 13th century. Essentially, Germans comprised the majority of these crusaders. The Baltic Germans had a significant influence in Estonia and Latvia until the first half of the 20th century while Lithuania had a brief experience of independence before coming under the influence of the Poles. As a result of the Russian-Swedish Treaty of Nystad (1721) in the aftermath of the Great Northern War (1700-1721), the Baltic states were ceded to the Russian Empire.

Going into the historical details of the Baltic states is actually beyond the main purpose of this chapter, but in order to grasp the distinctive features of the political culture in the Baltic states, it is necessary to briefly mention the period of national awakening in the region. In this regard, the Baltic Germans played an

indispensable role in initiating the enlightenment period in the Baltic region. Not surprisingly, the enlightenment process occurred first in Latvia and Estonia where Germans were influential even under the rule of the Russian Empire. In Latvia, the Baltic Germans established the Latvian Literary Society in Riga in 1824, and subsequently, they founded the Estonian Learned Society in Dorpat in 1838. A similar society, called the Lithuanian Literary Society, was founded in Tilsit a few decades later by German scholars in 1879. The activities of these societies had been coupled with the increasing influence of communication, particularly the rapid spread of newspapers in the 19th century. [1, p. 76] Under these circumstances, many civil societies from agricultural associations to musical bands flourished across the Baltic region.

The rise of civil societies in the Baltic region eventually led to the emergence of national movements as people began to identify themselves more with ethnic motifs rather than religious connotations. The national activists began to seek glorious past or construct tales to underscore the originality of their nations in the course of romantic nationalism. [1, p. 77] Nationalist movements grew in the Baltic states towards the end of the 19th century. In the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1905, those movements already started searching for ways to declare independence from the Russian Empire. In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Baltic states declared independence in February 1918. However, Germans occupied Estonia and Latvia in 1918 while Lithuania was already under the control of the German army since 1915. In contrast, the Entente forces wished to see neither Germans nor the Bolsheviks in the Baltic states and therefore favored the independence of these countries. [1, p. 99] Nevertheless, they had to fight against Soviet Russia for gaining their independence. In January 1921, all Baltic states became a member of the League of Nations.

During the interwar period, which was later referred to as the first independence, the Baltic states experienced political turmoil mainly due to the Great Depression in the late 1920s. Prior to the Second World War, each of the three Baltic states experienced authoritarian leadership that came to power as a result of a bloodless coup. In December 1926, Antanas Smetona in Lithuania, in March 1934, Konstantin Päts in Estonia, and in May 1934 Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia took the reins. In 1939, Europe divided into Soviet and German spheres of influence with a backroom protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In accordance with the pact, Soviet leadership forced Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to grant them the right to deploy military forces in these countries following the invasion of eastern Poland by the Soviet Army in September 1939. Right after the ultimatum demanding the right to establish a military base, the Red Army invaded the Baltic states and established pro-Soviet administrations in the region. The new governments were formed under the pressure of the Soviet Union and the newly elected parliaments, which were composed solely of communists, were formally asked to join the Soviet Union in August 1940. The new entities became the Lithuanian, Estonian, and Latvian Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Soviet Union's invasion of the Baltic states ended with another invasion. The region was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1941. Initially, the arrival of German troops in the area was welcomed by the Baltic people, who thought that the Soviet occupation would end, and they could regain their independence. However, the euphoria in the Baltic states came to an end soon when Nazi Germany established a new civil administration called the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. In the course of the German occupation mass killings of the Jewish communities took place in the region. More than 90 percent of the remained Jewish community (many of them fled into the USSR) was wiped out by Nazi Germany. [2, p. 60-66] The occupation endured until late 1944 when the Baltic

states were reinvaded by the Soviet Union. The countries remained under Soviet rule until the disintegration of the USSR.

Estonia

On 8 May 1990, the Supreme Council of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, chaired by Arnold Rüütel, unilaterally declared its renewed sovereignty under the name of the Republic of Estonia, which it was able to enforce in 1991. On the eve of the signing of the Treaty of Union, which was Gorbachev's last move to preserve the Soviet Union, a coup attempt took place in Moscow on 19 August 1991. In the course of the coup, Soviet troops were also sent to Estonia to overthrow pro-independence formations in Tallin (in March 1991, the independence referendum was already held in Estonia). The coup failed on 21 August, and Estonia had the opportunity to regain its independence. Estonia's declaration of independence was quickly recognized by many Western countries as well as by Russia under Boris Yeltsin. [3, p. 245] The Soviet Union recognized Estonia's independence on 6 September and Estonia was admitted to the United Nations on 17 September 1991. [4, p. 238]

In the aftermath of the restoration of independence, Estonia was preoccupied with the adoption of a new constitution. However, the country had to cope with the citizenship problem before holding a referendum on the constitution. Therefore, citizenship law became the hottest topic in the political landscape of Estonia in the early 1990s. The debate on the citizenship law was mainly taking place between two groups: The Citizens' Committee Movement also known as Restorationists and the Popular Front. These groups, which emerged during the struggle for independence, had different approaches to getting rid of the Soviet legacy. In this sense, the Popular Front advocated a gradual transition from the Soviet system to independence, while the Restorationists favored immediate

independence of Estonia without any adherence to the Soviet Union. According to the Restorationists, Estonia had been an occupied country since 1940, and therefore the new Estonia should have been a continuation of the pre-WWII republic. [5, p. 65] One of the leaders of the Popular front, Marju Lauristin stated that Russian speakers in Estonia were occupiers in the eyes of the Restorationists because many of them immigrated to Estonia during the occupation. [5, p. 65]

Nevertheless, both of these groups agreed that the non-Estonians who immigrated to Estonia during the occupation might involve in the Estonian political landscape though Restorationists were demanding proficiency in the Estonian language from those immigrants as a condition to become Estonian citizens. The disagreement between the Popular Front and the Restorationists ended in favor of the latter. In February 1992, the Citizenship Law of 1938 was restored in Estonia which granted automatic Estonian citizenship to those who had Estonian passports before June 1940 and to their descendants. Proficiency in Estonian and an oath of loyalty to Estonia became compulsory conditions to apply for Estonian citizenship for the immigrants who were constituted mainly by Russian speakers. [3, p. 246-247]

As a result of the Citizenship Law, 32 percent of the Estonian population turned out to be 'aliens' without any citizenship. The Estonian law on citizenship was strongly condemned by international actors, particularly by the Russian Federation. Under the pressure from the international community (especially in relation to the negotiations for the EU membership) Estonia began to modify its citizenship law. In comparison with 32 percent in 1992, stateless residents in Estonia declined to 12 percent in 2004. [5, p. 66]

The constitution was approved by the Estonian citizens with 91.2 percent 'Yes', in the referendum held in June 1992. [6, p. 309] Under the constitution, Estonia

adopted a parliamentary system with a president as head of the state along with a government led by a prime minister. The unicameral parliament (Riigikogu) became the supreme body of state authority. The parliament negotiates and approves laws proposed by the prime minister. On 20 September 1992, the first presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Estonia. Lennart Meri, an outstanding writer, polyglot, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs won the presidential election. 32-year-old historian Mart Laar became prime minister. The new government, led by Laar, immediately embarked on radical reforms, namely the liberalization and privatization of the economy. In other words, Laar's cabinet also applied *shock therapy* in the economy. At the beginning of 1992, the situation was so dire that the Estonian population suffered from cold and hunger which was accompanied by massive inflation and mass unemployment in the country. While rapid privatization was taking place, the role of the state in the social sphere and the economy decreased significantly. Although the first half of the 1990s witnessed a sharp decline in GDP, the economy started to grow again in Estonia after 1995. It was mainly Finnish and Swedish companies that made early investments in Estonia and contributed to economic reconstruction. Even more than Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia has become the 'Baltic Tiger', the term which is used to describe the fast economic growth of the Baltic states. [7, p. 1-2]

Since the restoration of independence, Russian troops in Estonian territory have been one of the main controversial issues in Estonia's political scene. After more than three years of negotiations, the agreement on the final withdrawal of the Russian troops remaining in the country was signed in Moscow in July 1994 by Estonia's President Lennart Meri and Russian President Boris Yeltsin and implemented by the end of August. The withdrawal of Russian forces was a core security issue in Estonia because Estonians were afraid of the Russian foreign policy concept of 1993 which was reemphasizing the Russian interests in its

neighboring countries. In addition, the rise of the far-right groups in Russia, where the nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky's party prevailed in the December 1993 parliamentary elections, alarmed Estonian leaders. In such circumstances, reaching an agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops was a vital issue for Estonia not only to end more than 50 years of Russian occupation but also to accelerate the process of integration into the Western world.

In the ensuing years, Estonia turned completely to the West and joined both the EU and NATO in 2004. Initially, large parts of the Estonian population were somewhat skeptical of the EU. After their experience in the Soviet Union, they feared any association that could pose a threat to their young independent state. However, a positive EU image was soon flourished in the country. On 1 January 2011, Euro replaced the Estonian Kroon and since then the country has been part of the European Monetary Union. Although Estonia has benefited greatly from European support, joining the EU has not only provided benefits to the country. The population is steadily declining, especially young Estonians taking the opportunity to leave the country. The primary reasons for leaving the country are considered to be the prosperity gap and the better job opportunities in the other European countries.

Joining NATO was crucial for Estonia to ensure the country's security against any threat from the Russian Federation. In addition to membership in the European Union, the military alliance was supposed to guarantee permanent independence. As mentioned earlier, Estonia had been a victim of Russian imperialism throughout history. Political tensions with Moscow always remind of military actions for Estonians. The fear particularly increased after the illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014. In the Estonian district of Ida-Viru in the northeast of the country and on the border with Russia, Estonians of Russian ethnicity form the majority. Estonian elites are concerned that a Russian

invasion of this region could occur as a result of a referendum similar to the one in Crimea. In this sense, being under the umbrella of NATO is indispensable for national security.

Latvia

A few days after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence (on 7 May 1990) one of the leaders of the Latvian Popular Front, Ivars Godmanis was elected Prime Minister at the Supreme Council to form a new government. At that meeting, Godmanis presented his vision and directions of the new government as reformulating relations with the Russian SFSR; cooperation with the Baltic states and other republics of the former USSR; preservation of the republic's property; development of a market economy, etc. The principles laid down by Godmanis became the basis of the newly formed government policy in the following years.

However, unlike Estonia, the independence movement in Latvia led to Soviet military intervention. In January 1991, a military intervention took place in Latvia to restore the USSR's jurisdiction. On 1 January, the OMON (special police unit of the city of Riga) units occupied the Press House and prevented printing publications supporting Latvia's independence. International Workers' Front which was found as a counterweight to the Latvian People's Front demanded the resignation of Ivars Godmanis' government. On 20 January, the OMON units occupied the building of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia. [8, p. 40] These attempts paved the way for building barricades in the streets to achieve the full restoration of Latvia's independence. The last attempt of the USSR to subjugate Latvia militarily occurred in the course of the August Coup in Moscow. However, as previously stated, this initiative also failed to prevent the restoration of the independence of Latvia. On

24 August, the President of the Russian SFSR Boris Yeltsin signed a decree "On the Recognition of the State Independence of the Republic of Latvia", and on 2 September, the United States announced its intention to re-establish diplomatic relations with Latvia. On 6 September, the USSR finally adopted a decision on the recognition of the independence of the Republic of Latvia. On 17 September, Latvia became a full member of the United Nations.

With a few modernizations, Latvia re-enacted its 1922 constitution in July 1993, which meant that the new state was a continuation of the pre-war Latvian republic. Just like Estonia, Latvia also adopted a unicameral parliamentary system. Saeima's (parliament) mandate is to represent Latvian citizens and also has legislative power. Moreover, it ratifies international agreements and elects the president. The President is the head of the state and serves for 4 years. The president of Latvia may be elected twice in a row. The President also nominates the Prime Minister, who chooses the Cabinet of Ministers to form his/her government. However, the Prime Minister needs to get a vote of confidence from Saeima, and only after receiving this confidence, the government can begin to function. Guntis Ulmanis, who served between 1993 and 1999, became the first President of Latvia after the restoration of independence. During his presidency, great attention was paid to foreign policy. Guntis Ulmanis promoted Latvia's integration into international organizations and the establishment and strengthening of cooperation with both European and other countries. However, one of the most significant successes during his tenure was the Latvian-Russian agreement on the withdrawal of the Russian army from Latvia in 1994.

In the early 1990s, citizenship law became one of the most controversial issues in Latvia, just like in Estonia. In October 1991, Supreme Council restored Latvian citizenship only to those who were citizens before June 1940 and to their descendants. As a result, more than 700,000 people, or around 29 percent

of Latvian residents became stateless. In line with the developments in Estonia, the Restorationists dominated the political landscape of Latvia. The Citizenship Law was adopted in 1994 when the new parliamentary election was held. Similar to the Estonian example, people who immigrated to Latvia after 1940, had to apply for citizenship if they met the requirements of the Citizenship Law such as Speaking Latvian, knowing the basic principles of the constitution, loyalty to the state, etc. [5, p. 105] As a result of intense international pressure, the Citizenship Law was amended in October 1998. The principles of the law were relatively softened, and children born after 21 August 1991 automatically acquired Latvian citizenship. As of 1 January 2018, 11 percent (233,393) of Latvian residents were still non-citizens, compared to 29 percent (approximately 730,000) in 1995. [9]

Like Estonia, radical economic reforms were carried out in Latvia with the introduction of free-market principles and the privatization of state-owned enterprises in the wake of regaining independence. In May 1992, the Latvian ruble was introduced into circulation but from the next month, it became the only official means of payment. In March 1993, the Latvian ruble was also replaced by the national currency - Lats. [1, p. 181] International institutions played an important role in combating the economic crisis in Latvia. In May 1992, Latvia officially became a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and in August 1992, it became a member of the World Bank. Latvia also showed its desire to join the European Union by submitting its application in October 1995.

Despite the economic recession of the early 1990s, Latvia continued its economic and structural reforms. The reforms began to bear fruit especially after 2000. Latvia reached the highest GDP growth rates in Europe, achieving a record GDP growth of 12.2% in 2006. [1, p. 183] In September 2003, a

referendum was held in Latvia on the EU membership. In March 2004, Latvia joined NATO and became a member of the European Union in May 2004. On 1 January 2014, Latvia adopted the Euro and thereby joined the euro area.

Like Estonians, Latvian leaders also were rushing to integrate with the Western world to secure their independence. They were also afraid of Russia, which could manipulate Latvia's internal dynamics to gain influence in the country. Even though Latvia achieved an agreement with Moscow on the withdrawal of Russian troops from the country, they could not draw the border between the two countries until 2007. While the main reason behind the impasse seemed to be the difference between the pre-1940 border and the border throughout the Soviet Union, the real problem was that Russia strived for thwarting Latvia's NATO and EU membership by keeping the border controversial.

Lithuania

Not surprisingly, as in the other Baltic countries, political, economic, and cultural life in Lithuania was dominated by the Lithuanian Communist Party (CPL) until 1988. Just like Estonians and Latvians, most Lithuanians relied less on the Soviet system than people living in other republics of the Soviet Union. However, they certainly welcomed and actively supported Gorbachev's initiatives, which promised radical reforms in the structure of the Soviet Union. Led by 35 Lithuanian intellectuals, the Lithuanian Sąjūdis Reform Movement was founded on 3 June 1988 and gained popularity throughout the country. Sąjūdis's main aim was to promote reforms in Lithuania on the basis of the rule of law and democracy. The main motto of Sąjūdis was "openness, democracy and sovereignty", aimed at ensuring political, economic, and cultural domination of Lithuania. The movement was implementing its program very attentively. In this sense, it was created an impression that it actually supported the reforms

initiated under the leadership of the USSR to avoid criticism of the communists. [10, p. 282-285]

The Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR, inspired by Sąjūdis, adopted constitutional amendments regarding the supremacy of Lithuanian laws over the USSR's legislation. The Supreme Soviet annulled the 1940 resolution on the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union and allowed a multi-party system in the country. Moreover, it adopted some other critical decisions such as revitalizing the national anthem or the Lithuanian flag. On 23 August 1989, during the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians joined hands to form a 670-kilometer human chain (known as the Baltic Way) from Vilnius to Tallinn to highlight the occupation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union. [10, p. 286]

Parliamentary elections were held in Lithuania in early 1990, and candidates supported by Sąjūdis won the elections. On 11 March 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR declared independence and re-established the Republic of Lithuania. Lithuania was the first Soviet republic to declare its independence from the USSR. The leader of the Sąjūdis (Vytautas Landsbergis), became the head of the newly restored state, while Kazimira Prunskienė led the cabinet of ministries. Moreover, the parliament put the pre-war constitution back into force.

Lithuania's declaration of independence heralded the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union, which alarmed Gorbachev who aimed to reconstruct the USSR but certainly not to dissolve the Union. Therefore, on 15 March he furiously demanded the withdrawal of the 'unlawful acts' of the Lithuanian parliament. By threatening with military force, the Soviet Union imposed political and economic sanctions on Lithuania. The conflict between the central government of the Soviet Union and Lithuania reached its peak in early 1991. On 10 January

1991, Gorbachev delivered an ultimatum demanding the immediate reinstatement of the USSR constitution.

Following the ultimatum, Soviet forces occupied several important buildings in Vilnius, and three days later, on 13 January, the Soviet soldiers stormed the television tower. A total of 14 unarmed civilians defending the parliament and the television tower in Vilnius died and over 600 were injured. [10, p. 294-295] As a result of the resistance of Lithuanians and political pressure from the West, the USSR was forced to end its military intervention in Lithuania. In response to the bloody events, an independence referendum was held in February 1991. With an 84 percent turnout, 90 percent of the voters voted for an independent Lithuania. After the failed August coup in Moscow in 1991, Lithuania's independence was recognized by most of the major international actors within a very short time. On 6 September, following the United States, the Soviet Union recognized the sovereignty of Lithuania along with the other two Baltic states. [10, p. 298] On 17 September 1991, the Republic of Lithuania was admitted to the United Nations.

Just like two other Baltic countries, the euphoria that stemmed from the independence movement in Lithuania was interrupted by worsening economic conditions. As part of the transition from a state-controlled economy to a free market economy, Lithuania has initiated a privatization process to sell state-owned commercial enterprises and residential real estate. Losing its old markets as a result of the breakup of the Soviet Union, Lithuania experienced the worst economic conditions between 1992 and 1994. In 1993, the country's GDP was 40 percent of the 1988 GDP level. Nevertheless, GDP started to grow again in 1995 due to the decisive implementation of the economic reforms. Lithuanian national currency- Litas was issued in June 1993 and was pegged to the United States dollar in 1994. Lithuanians faced another economic crisis in 1998-1999,

in the course of the financial crisis in Russia. The CIS countries, particularly Russia, were the main trading partners of Lithuania. The CIS countries were composed 36 percent of Lithuanian exports before the crisis. In 1999, it declined by 56 percent. As a result, Lithuanian officials started looking for new markets in the West that would benefit the country more in the long run. [10, p. 301-302]

Although Lithuania regained its independence, a number of Russian soldiers remained on its territory. As mentioned earlier, the Baltic states did not feel complete independence as long as Russian troops were deployed on their territories. Therefore, the withdrawal of Russian forces was one of the main foreign policy priorities for Lithuanian leaders. Finally, Russian soldiers withdrew from Lithuania on 31 August 1993. [11, p. 772] Like the other Baltic countries, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuania accelerated the Western integration process not only in the political or economic sphere but also in the security domain. In order to ensure its independence, the country applied for NATO membership in 1994. Lithuania became a full member of NATO in March 2004, and after the general referendum on membership, the country became a member of the European Union in May 2004.

In brief, the Baltic states were at the forefront of the struggle to sever ties with the Soviet Union. Their independence experience which consolidated the national identities between 1918 and 1940, played a vital role in the campaign for sovereignty in the late 1980s. In addition, the Baltic countries learned important lessons from the Russian invasions, the last of which lasted nearly 50 years. Therefore, after the restoration of independence, all the Baltic states strived for the withdrawal of Russian troops from their territories. Instead, they promptly initiated the Western integration process to secure their long-desired sovereignty.

Questions for Self-control

1. Outline the historical background of the Baltic states that paved the way for the formulation of their distinctive features among other Soviet republics.

2. Define the main challenges that Estonia faced during the state-building process in the early 1990s.

3. What were the main similarities between Estonia and Latvia in the state-building process?

4. Evaluate the independence movement in Lithuania and the reaction of the Soviet government to it.

5. What was the biggest threat perceived by the Baltic states in the aftermath of regaining their independence, and what solutions did they develop against it?

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CHAPTER 5

POST-SOVIET EASTERN EUROPE: BELARUS, MOLDOVA, AND UKRAINE

Reader's Guide

As clarified in the previous chapter, the Baltic states followed more or less the same path in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The historical and political developments of the Baltic republics paved the way for an active campaign of independence from the USSR. As soon as these republics regained their independence, they opted for moving away from the Russian Federation and instead quickly integrate with the West. However, socio-political conditions in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine were different from those of the Baltic countries even though overall developments were similar in most of the Soviet republics in the course of the struggle for independence. In this respect, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine do not constitute a distinctive region, unlike the Baltic one. This section details the freedom struggles of these countries and the developments that took place later.

Taxonomy of the theme and learning outcomes:

1. Recalling the independence movement in Belarus and the factors that prevented the consolidation of democracy in the country.
2. Understanding the strengthening process of the Lukashenko administration in Belarus.
3. Analyzing the sovereignty movement and its central motivation in Moldova.

Belarus

As mentioned before, during the Perestroika and Glasnost process, initiated by the Gorbachev administration, the Soviet republics were allowed to criticize the Soviet system. As a consequence, a number of national movements flourished across the Soviet Union in an attempt to break the affiliations with the central government in Moscow. Under these circumstances, the role of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) gradually increased, while the authority of the Communist Party of Belarus declined. In 1990, the BSSR Supreme Council granted Belarusian state language status. The reform-minded candidate Nikolai Dementei prevailed in the elections for the Belarusian Supreme Soviet on 4 March 1990. In the course of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the parliament of Belarus declared the Byelorussian Socialist Soviet Republic to be sovereign on 27 July 1990.

Four days after the failed coup in Moscow, the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus unanimously passed a declaration on the political and economic independence of Belarus on 25 August 1991, and the Belarusian Communist Party temporarily suspended its activities. Following the proclamation of independence of Belarus, the BSSR was renamed and became the Republic of Belarus. Meanwhile, Nikolai Dementei resigned as the head of the Supreme

Soviet of Belarus. Stanislav Shushkevich was appointed Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus and thereby became head of the Belarusian Parliament. Shushkevich was thus the first head of the newly independent state of Belarus. The white-red-white flag was approved as the State Flag of the Republic of Belarus while the coat of arms 'Pahonia' was adopted as one of the main symbols of the country. On 20 March 1992, the new armed forces of the Republic of Belarus were officially formed. At the end of the spring, the national currency was introduced.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, reformist governments were pervasive throughout the post-Soviet space. Especially the transition to a market economy and seeking ways to consolidate their independence were the major priorities of the former Soviet republics. It is no wonder that political, and economic conditions in Belarus were developing in line with the other former Soviet countries in the early 1990s. However, Belarus began to swiftly lag behind the other states, especially the Baltic states, not only in terms of transition to a market economy but also in respect of establishing a democratic republic.

Unlike its northern neighbors, which managed to integrate rapidly with the Western world, two major factors prevented Belarus from developing as a democratic state. First, different from the Baltic republics, Belarus did not have independence experience before the Soviet Union. In this regard, the taste of independence was not what Belarusians imagined. The early years of independence were coupled with the weakening of state authority, the rise of mafias, and, most importantly, the collapse of the economy in the country. Belarusians had the highest standards of welfare during the Soviet Union, which disappeared with the declaration of independence of Belarus. [1, p. 170]

Second, the national consciousness in the country was very low that 80 percent of Belarusians spoke Russian, [2] while only 8.3 percent of the population was ethnic Russian. [3, p. 27] Not surprisingly, they did not welcome the declaration of Belarusian as the official language, as the majority of the population spoke Russian and thus tended to keep Russian as the official language. In general, gaining independence did not have any immediate positive effect on Belarusians and in this manner, they began to feel nostalgia for the Soviet past. Under the circumstances, the then Deputy Supreme Soviet, Aleksandr Lukashenko, took advantage of the political landscape of Belarus.

On 15 March 1994, the Supreme Soviet of Belarus adopted a new constitution which was a *sine qua non* for the foundation of the new republic. The new constitution introduced a presidential post, but the main power remained in the parliament. Under the constitution, the Belarusian president was elected for five years and could run for the second time in a row. Following the adoption of the constitution, the first presidential election was held in July 1994. In the second round, Supreme Soviet Deputy Alexander Lukashenko won the election. Lukashenko was never in favor of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Even at the time of the ratification of the Belavezha Agreements, which ended the Union, in the parliament, Lukashenko was the only MP (a member of parliament) who did not support the agreement. As anticipated, right after becoming the president, Lukashenko began to strive to sustain the Soviet-style economy in the post-Soviet era. Unlike the Baltic states, which primarily tried to sever ties with Russia or get out of its sphere of influence, Lukashenko commenced a policy of rapprochement with Moscow. This was clearly the opposite of what the Belarusian People's Front had intended. The Popular Front aimed to revive the Belarusian nation, culture, and language that was suppressed during the Soviet regime, and indeed, it achieved some of its goals when the

Supreme Soviet adopted Belarusian as an official language of the state and approved the white-red-white flag.

Obviously, Lukashenko's U-turn inevitably confronted the president and the Popular Front. Lukashenko proposed to hold a referendum to solve the impasse. In essence, the president did not have the right to decide on a national referendum. Only the Supreme Soviet had the right to decide for holding a referendum in the country. Therefore, the deputies of the Popular Front protested the president's decision and refused to leave the building of the parliament. Despite their efforts, the referendum was held on 14 May 1995. In the referendum, the following questions were asked:

- Do you agree with granting Russian the same status as Belarusian?
- Do you support a new state flag and coat of arms?
- Do you support the economic integration with the Russian Federation?
- Do you agree with the termination of the powers of the parliament by the President in case of violation of the Constitution?

It was obvious that Lukashenko was not only planning to get the citizens' support to implement his own policies but was also trying to trivialize the authority of the parliament. Lukashenko's proposals were approved by the citizens in the referendum and laid the foundation of altering the flag and the coat of arms, 'Pahonia'. The flag was replaced by the flag of the BSSR, and since then white-red-white and 'Pahonia' have become symbols of the opposition group in Belarus. Following the referendum, Lukashenko increasingly pursued his anti-sovereign policies. Despite the demand of the Popular Front and the parliament to consolidate the Belarusian national identity and resume the privatization of the economy, Lukashenko halted the process of the transition to a market economy and strengthened the relations with Russia by signing an agreement on the Union of Sovereign Republics in April 1996. The

parliament and the president were confronted once again over determining the future direction of the country. Lukashenko proposed a referendum on constitutional amendments to turn the parliamentary-presidential political system into a presidential republic to overcome the stalemate. Although the Constitutional Court of Belarus found the proposal of the president inconsistent with the constitution, Lukashenko ignored the decision of the Court.

Utilizing his populist skills, Lukashenko accused the Court of limiting the democratic rights of citizens to participate in the referendum. Going beyond the limits of his presidential mandate, Lukashenko also dismissed the Chairman of the Central Election Committee Victor Gonchar, an active lawyer, and opposition figure, ten days before the referendum. Victor Gonchar was replaced by L.M. Ermoshina[4] who was an ardent proponent of the president. Under the circumstances, the referendum was held on 24 November 1996, and the president's proposals on the amendments of the constitution were approved by the citizens. In addition to the constitutional amendments, citizens voted against the abolishment of the death penalty and the privatization of land in Belarus. [5] After the referendum, Lukashenko dissolved the Supreme Soviet and established a new one by appointing the new deputies apart from those who supported him in the referendum.

Opposition groups did not recognize the legitimacy of the new constitution and declared to hold a new presidential election in 1999 in the context of the 1994 constitution. Lukashenko felt the danger of alternative elections that could reduce his presidency to nonsense. At this moment, an incomprehensible incident occurred in Belarus. The former Central Election Committee Chairman V. Gonchar, former Interior Minister Y. Zakharenko, and A. Krasovskiy, a businessman who financed the opposition, vanished away. This event weakened completely the opposition in Belarus.

Despite the harsh criticisms of the West, Lukashenko persisted in maintaining his power in Belarus and consolidated a genuine authoritarian regime that has been constantly called 'the last dictatorship in Europe' by the European Union. The last presidential election was held in August 2020, and Alexander Lukashenko was re-elected with more than 80 percent of the vote. In the wake of the election, the most widespread protests in the history of Belarus, which continued until this date (December 2020), commenced. The Belarusian people showed their will to overthrow Lukashenko, though scholars such as Artyom Shraibman did not give any possibility that Euromaidan-like mass protests could take place in Belarus. [3, p. 26] Although it is not yet clear whether the Belarusians will succeed in overthrowing Lukashenko, it is evident that with these demonstrations Belarusian national identity is consolidated more than ever which may contribute to the formation of the democratic republic of Belarus in the future.

Moldova

With the onset of Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost reforms, the Soviet republics began to put more emphasis on their cultural values. This ostensibly free environment set the stage for the spawn of political demands in the Moldovan SSR, as in the other Soviet republics. In 1989, the Moldovan Popular Front, an association of political and cultural groups, was established. The Popular Front of Moldova organized numerous large demonstrations in 1989. The increasing pressure of the Popular Front was reflected in the decision of the Moldovan Supreme Soviet on 31 August 1989. The Supreme Soviet passed the new language law, declaring Moldovan as the state language. The law proclaimed the unity of the Romanian and Moldovan languages, and the alphabet was converted to the Latin script. The Russian language was designed as a lingua-franca among the ethnic minorities while the Gagauz language was

allowed to be used in Gagauz areas along with the Romanian/Moldovan and Russian. [5, p. 149-155]

Following the adoption of the language law, a number of protests were organized by Russian and Ukrainian ethnic groups demanding the restoration of Russian as an official language. There was also growing unrest in the south, where the Turkish-speaking Gagauz people were in the majority. Gagauz people found the 'concessions' of language law towards minority groups insufficient and began to demand their national and cultural privileges. On 12 November 1989, the first Congress of the Gagauz people was held, and the Gagauz Autonomous Republic was proclaimed as a component of the Moldovan SSR. The declaration of the congress was found by the Moldovan parliament null and void. [5]

The first democratic election for the Supreme Soviet of the Moldovan SSR was held in March 1990, although only the Communist Party was allowed to participate. Its democratic characteristics stemmed from the fact that independent candidates were also allowed to participate in the election. The independent candidates were reform-minded intellectuals, mostly in line with the Popular Front. Additionally, a considerable number of lawmakers in the Communist Party were moderated in favor of the reforms. [6, p. 146] Thus, in the 1990 Supreme Soviet election, the majority of votes were won by reform-minded candidates. After the election, former communist Mircea Snegur was elected president of the Supreme Soviet.

The growing impact of the Popular Front in the political landscape of Moldovan SSR opened the way for the formation of the pro-Soviet camp that was mainly composed of Russian speakers and the Gagauz people. Hence, the first division was spawned in Moldovan politics. The division deepened and fringed with the strengthening of the ideology of the unification of Moldova and Romania. The

newly formed Moldovan Supreme Soviet passed a law that invalidated the flag of the Moldovan SSR and instead recognized the coat of arms of Moldova with the Romanian tricolor as the new national flag. In addition, the national anthem of Romania became the national anthem of Moldova. Moreover, by changing the name of the state to the Republic of Moldova (in May 1991), the Supreme Soviet declared the sovereignty of Moldova, prioritizing local legislation over the Union laws. In doing so, the Communist Party was renounced, and the multi-party system was enshrined as the basis for developing democratic political life in Moldova. [5, p. 149-155]

Political developments after the March 1990 elections were reflected differently in the Gagauz and Transnistria regions. On 19 August 1990, the Republic of Gagauz Union was proclaimed and followed by the declaration of the Dnestr Moldovan Republic on 2 September 1990. [7, p. 51] Both formations were immediately denounced by the Moldovan Supreme Soviet. Nevertheless, Moldovan forces were able to restore order in the Gagauz region only after a decree from Moscow that found the Gagauz declaration illegal. Despite their proclamation of independence, the Gagauz people, in essence, did not have the intention to establish a separate state from Moldova. The declaration of independence was mainly a reaction to the rise of nationalism in Moldova and the ideas of unification with Romania. Thus, with the efforts of the newly elected parliament and President Mircea Snegur, the Gagauz districts became Moldova's autonomous region as envisaged by the 1994 Constitution. Nevertheless, the conditions in Transnistria turned into a full-fledged war in 1992 with the help of the 14th Russian Army deployed in Transnistria. The Moscow Agreement was signed by Moldovan President Snegur and Russian President Yeltsin on 21 July 1992, which ceased the war.

As in the other Soviet republics, the failed August Coup in Moscow was a final blow in the path of independence in Moldova. The coup attempt was condemned by the Moldovan parliament. In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the independence of the Republic of Moldova was declared on 27 August 1991. Mircea Snegur, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Moldavian SSR, was elected as the first president of the Republic of Moldova. In contrast, the leaders of Gagauz and Transnistrians supported the coup-makers in Moscow. Siding with the conservative communists, the Supreme Soviet of Transnistria voted to join the USSR. [5, p. 149-155]

It should be noted that parallel to the developments in Moldova, Romania was also experiencing a monumental change in its political scene. In December 1989, Romanians succeeded to overthrow the regime of Nicolae Ceausescu as a result of a violent revolution. Ion Iliescu, leader of the National Liberation government, was keen to develop close ties with the Republic of Moldova. In this regard, seven crossing points were opened along the Prut river which was impossible just a few years ago. People from both sides began to cross the river to meet their family members who were separated from each other by the international borders. [6, p. 148]

The warming of relations between Romania and Moldova further radicalized separatist tendencies in the Gagauz and Transnistria regions. Nevertheless, the euphoria about the unification of Romania and Moldova faded away at the beginning of the 1990s. [5, p. 149-155] Moldovan Popular Front was marginalized in Moldovan politics with the emergence of centrist groups in the country. Charles King claims that from the early independence of the Republic of Moldova, three camps (pro-unification, pro-Russian, and centrists) formed in Moldovan political life. [6, p. 146] When the Moldovan Popular Front failed to offer alternative politics to the idea of unification of Moldova and Romania,

separatism intensified even further in the Gagauz and Transnistria regions, which supported pro-Soviet and then pro-Russian policies. The Popular Front, which supported Pan-Romania, was further weakened when its community split into two separate groups under the Intelligentsia Congress and the Christian Democratic People's Front in 1993.

As mentioned earlier, the parliamentary (Supreme Soviet) election in Moldova was held in 1990, when only the Communist Party was allowed to participate along with independent candidates. In the following years, the reform-minded moderate communists distanced themselves from the Romanian-oriented visions of the Popular Front. When the Communist Party was banned, the moderate communists established a new party called Agrarian Democratic Party in November 1991. Finding themselves between two radical camps (pro-Romanian and pro-Russian) the agrarians began to support the maintenance of Moldova's independence. They mainly argued that Moldova neither should become a province of Romania nor a *guberniya* of Russia but should remain as an independent state.

This point of view has become the guiding principle of the Agrarian Democratic Party, and its most central figure turned out to be the country's president Mircea Snegur. Snegur's adoption of the 'Moldovanism' as new rhetoric different from the pan-Romanian or pro-Russian viewpoint helped Agrarian Democratic Party in the 1994 parliamentary election. The party won the majority of the seats in the election by receiving 43 percent of the votes while two branches of the Popular Front together gained only 16.7 percent of the votes. [6, p. 158]

Mircea Snegur lost the next presidential election held in 1996 to Petru Lucinschi in the second round. The popularity of the Agrarian Democratic Party also began to decrease towards the 1998 parliamentary election. The economic reforms which were launched by Snegur continued also in Lucinschi's tenure.

Moldovans were dissatisfied with the transition to the free-market economy and privatization policy. Under these circumstances, the Communist Party began to increase in popularity by objecting to the policy of privatization and at the same time simply creating nostalgia for the Soviet era. Hence, the Communist Party won the 1998 parliamentary election by obtaining 30 percent of the votes. [8, p. 85]

The Communist Party increased its votes even more in the next parliamentary election held in 2001. The party won 50.2 percent of the votes, which meant 71 seats out of 101, in the parliament. [5, p. 13] This outstanding success led the Communist Party to elect the president. Composed mainly by the communists the parliament elected Vladimir Voronin, the leader of the Communist Party as the third president of Moldova. In the course of the election campaign, Voronin pledged to make Russian a second official language and introduce Russian as a mandatory language in schools. However, after encountering mass protests the president halted his campaign pledges. Moreover, relations between Moldova and Russia worsened after Russia's proposal to resolve the Transnistrian conflict. According to the plan, an asymmetric federation between Transnistria and Moldova was proposed, while the presence of Russian troops in the region was extended for up to 20 years to observe the function of the federation. Russia's reluctance to withdraw its troops from Moldova pushed Chișinău closer to the EU.

The Communist Party in Moldova won the parliamentary election once again in 2005 and Voronin was re-elected as the president of Moldova. Although the party also won the 2009 parliamentary elections, mass demonstrations were held in the capital of Moldova by the opposition to protest the election results. Parliament's failure to elect the president resulted in the dissolution of the parliament. Therefore, new parliamentary elections were held, and the

Communist Party lost the election to the Alliance for European Integration. Political turbulence in Moldova ended when the parliament elected Nicolae Timofti as president in 2012. From 2009 to 2019 pro-European governments ruled the country. Meanwhile, the decline of the Communist Party in the 2014 parliamentary election led to the rise of another pro-Russian party, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) in 2019. The PSRM supported Igor Dodon during the presidential election in 2016. Considered a pro-Russian leader, Dodon served as the president of Moldova between 2016-2020. In brief, the Moldovan political landscape was dominated by the pro-Russian parties since the independence of the country. Nevertheless, pro-Russian governments have been constantly challenged by pro-European coalitions even though the latter groups lack the maneuverability to integrate Moldova into the EU due to mainly the deadlock of the Transnistrian issue and the EU's unwillingness, albeit for the same reason.

Ukraine

The reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev to transform the Soviet system were also reflected in the Ukraine SSR. By early 1989, a number of groups, mostly demanding cultural emancipation, had already flourished in Ukraine. The growing alternative groups to the Communist Party formed the Popular Movement for Restructuring Ukraine (Rukh). In its program, Rukh set priorities such as supporting the sovereignty of Ukraine, granting Ukrainian state language status, and democratizing Ukraine's political system. The popularity of the Rukh grew rapidly throughout Ukraine particularly in the central and the western parts of the country. On 21 January 1990, the movement organized more than 450 km of human-chain stretching from L'viv to Kyiv to underscore the solidarity of Ukrainians. [9, p. 575-576]

The first relatively democratic elections in the Ukrainian SSR were scheduled for March 1990. The pro-Rukh candidates as a part of the Democratic Bloc won 100 seats out of 450 in the new parliament. However, the new parliament witnessed many moderate communists who would favor sovereign Ukraine. Democratic Bloc together with the moderate communists led to the declaration of Ukraine's sovereignty in the parliament on 16 July 1990. [10, p. 772]

Still, Rukh was not very popular in eastern Ukraine, where Russian speakers were predominant compared to western Ukraine. Therefore, the moderate Democratic Platform began to seek a middle ground between Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Soviet groups. [11, p. 133] The key actor who first understood the necessity of a compromise between the East and the West of Ukraine was Leonid Kravchuk, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine SSR. Kravchuk began to act as the head of the state. Positioning at the center of two political factions in Ukraine, he tried to gain time in order to comprehend the developments in the USSR. Even in the course of the August Coup attempt in Moscow, Kravchuk neither condemned the coup nor supported the independence. Instead, he stated: "our position is deliberation and once again deliberation." [11, p. 136] Hence, the failure of the August Coup cleared the fog of political vagueness in Ukraine in the eyes of Kravchuk. On 24 August 1991, the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine declared Ukraine's independence.

One of the greatest achievements of Ukraine, following the declaration of independence, was to preserve the territorial integrity of the country. Considering the ethnic clashes and wars that broke out in most of the other former Soviet republics, it was very significant for Ukraine to avoid any separatism. Nonetheless, the presidency tenure of Kravchuk can be called "years of uncertainty". During his presidency, there was not even an agreement on

whether the new state should be a unitary or a federal country, as the Constitution had not yet been adopted.

This ambiguous environment paved the way for separatist groups in Donbas, Transcarpathia, and Crimea to raise their voices. Not surprisingly, Crimea was the biggest threat to Kyiv in this context. As is known, the Soviet authorities handed the peninsula to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. Moreover, 65 percent of the peninsula's population consisted of ethnic Russians. Under the circumstances, Russian ethnic groups did not welcome the inclusion of the peninsula within the borders of Ukraine following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Crimea declared independence and aspired to join the Russian Federation and the CIS in May 1992. [9, p. 609] After the declaration of independence, the tension between Crimea and Kyiv escalated, but when the separatist leader Yuri Meshkov could not get backing from Moscow, the peninsula was forced to remain within Ukraine. At that moment, Kremlin was unable to endorse the Crimean decision due to secessionist movements in Chechnya. The threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity ended in May 1996 with the ratification of the constitution in the Crimean parliament. Even though the constitution granted autonomy, it recognized Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine. [9, p. 610]

In his tenure, Leonid Kravchuk paid attention to the question of national identity in order to consolidate the solidarity and unity of Ukraine rather than initiating political and economic reforms. In this respect, he placed special emphasis on the usage of the Ukrainian language. Likewise, Kravchuk promoted the use of the national flag, the anthem, and the coat of arms. It is no wonder that the Ukrainization policy caused dissatisfaction in Russified eastern Ukraine different from western Ukraine. [11, p. 142-143]

In the 1994 presidential election, Leonid Kuchma was elected the second president of Ukraine. Kuchma pursued a state-building policy and reinforced the sovereignty of the country. At the outset, Kuchma pioneered the adoption of a new constitution and the new currency of Ukraine, the *Hryvnia* in 1996. Under the new constitution, Ukraine was defined as a unitary state and declared Ukrainian as the country's only official language. In international relations, Kuchma succeeded in splitting the Black Sea Fleet, gave consent to the denuclearization of Ukraine, and managed to sign a Friendship Treaty with Russia in May 1997. [9, p. 599-600]

Kuchma's emphasis on state-building policy and transition to a market economy altered the political environment in Ukraine. His policy was welcomed by the Western voters who initially were skeptical of Kuchma while causing discontent among the eastern Ukrainians who expected the economic reforms to be abandoned. [9, p. 616] In such circumstances, the dichotomy between the East and West of Ukraine was sustained in the 1999 presidential election. Obviously, the region-based politics in Ukraine became more pronounced in 2004. [11, p. 155]

The polarization of Ukrainian society was also reflected in foreign policy. In this context, while the western part favored integrating with the European Union, the eastern and southern parts of the country preferred to establish closer relations with the Russian Federation. Neglecting the rule of law and growing concerns about corruption in the country discouraged Western investors. Besides, when Kuchma realized that the EU was reluctant to promise full membership to Ukraine, he completely turned the foreign policy direction of the country to Moscow. [11, p. 158]

Kuchma increasingly improved relations with the Kremlin. Having met with President Putin eight times during the year, Kuchma declared 2002 'the Year of Russia in Ukraine'. In addition, the president was making great efforts for Ukraine to join the Eurasian Economic Union. Nevertheless, before the 2004 presidential election, Kuchma chose to retire and so began looking for a reliable successor. Thus, for the 2004 presidential election, Kuchma decided to support the leader of the Donetsk clan, Viktor Yanukovych. The opposition favored Viktor Yushenko, who was known as a reformist and pro-Western leader. [9, p. 634-635]

In the first round, none of the candidates won the majority of votes and therefore, a run-off election was scheduled for 21 November. Yanukovych, allegedly getting 49.4% of the votes, won the election. However, a number of election frauds were reported by election observers. Likewise, international observers declared the election unfair, reporting that it did not comply with democratic standards. [12, p. 65] Numerous frauds were reported by the OSCE observers, including abuse of absentee ballots, incorrect voter lists, or pressure in favor of Yanukovych on government employees and students. [13, p. 3] After the election, widespread orange-covered demonstrations were held in Maidan Nezalezhnosti to object to the election results. [11, p. 170]

In contrast to these protests, pro-Yanukovych groups organized counter-demonstrations in support of their candidate. Moreover, congregating in Severodonetsk (Lugansk oblast), local councilors demanded autonomy which was a direct threat to the central power. Some local politicians in eastern Ukraine undermined the territorial integrity of the country with their separatist statements. [12, p. 66] On 28 November 2004, the Donetsk region Council held a session for organizing a regional referendum to transform the political system into a federal structure and to declare the region's autonomy. Besides,

Yanukovych accused Yushchenko and his defenders of staging a coup. [14, p. 99-100]

To resolve the impasse, a roundtable was held among Yanukovych, Yushchenko, Kuchma, Polish president Alexander Kwaśniewski and Javier Solana (EU foreign affairs high representative). On 8 December 2004, the parties agreed on re-election by accepting a constitutional amendment to transform the presidential political system into a parliamentary-presidential system. [12, p. 67] Besides, the Supreme Court canceled Yanukovych's victory due to widespread election fraud, which eased the tension between the two poles. Consequently, the third round was held on 26 December, and as a result, Yushchenko, who received 51.99% of the votes, became the new president of Ukraine. [15, p. 37]

Yuliya Tymoshenko, the favorite of the pro-Maidan groups, was appointed as prime minister. Despite the fact that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko united against Yanukovych in the course of the Orange Revolution, they failed to work in harmony. At first, the two leaders could not agree in dealing with the unfair privatization that occurred in the 1990s. In essence, the conditions were much more complex because political leaders were being funded mainly by oligarchs. In this sense, while re-privatization could benefit one oligarch, it was a burden on another. [16, p. 71]

In September 2005, the crisis in the Orange Coalition deepened when Yushchenko dismissed the Prime Minister, Tymoshenko. Fearing the growing popularity of Tymoshenko, Yushchenko developed closer relations with his former rival, Yanukovych. Nevertheless, Tymoshenko became Prime Minister once again after the 2007 parliamentary elections. To restrain the popularity of

Tymoshenko, Yuschenko began to block almost all initiatives of the Prime Minister which benefited only Yanukovych.

In brief, Orange Revolution could not produce any revolutionary changes in Ukraine. The polarization of the country between the West and the East further deepened and consolidated. The rivalry between two Orange leaders, Tymoshenko and Yushchenko set an excellent ground for Yanukovych. Thus, Yanukovych was elected a new president in the 2010 presidential election. [17, p. 220]

Yanukovych rapidly reinforced his authority in the country. His administration was composed of the Lytvyn Bloc, the communists, and the defectors from Our Ukraine and Tymoshenko Bloc. In essence, the new government was made up of region-based oligarchs, which could also be called a coalition of nine oligarchs. The new Cabinet consisted of several businessmen from Donbas. [16, p. 81] Yanukovych began to dominate the other branches of state power including the parliament and the courts. [18] Moreover, Tymoshenko was indicted for abuse of power and sentenced to seven years in prison in 2011. As a result, Yanukovych achieved the elimination of all potential opposition groups and became the sole power in the country. [19]

In accordance with the circumstances, the only optimism for Ukrainians to believe in the future of the country was the negotiations with the EU. However, the Kremlin also had plans for Ukraine. Putin's special advisor, Sergey Glazyev pointed out that Ukraine had to choose between the European Union and the Customs Union. In this regard, Glazyev stated: "We are preparing to tighten customs procedures if Ukraine makes the suicidal step to sign the Association Agreement with the EU." [16, p. 96] Intimidation of Moscow had the opposite impact not only on Ukrainians but also on the Yanukovych administration.

Instead of the Russian-led Customs Union Yanukovych pursued closer relations with the EU. In his speech, Yanukovych emphasized:

> For Ukraine, association with the European Union must become an important stimulus for forming a modern European state. At the same time, we must preserve and continue deepening our relations and processes of integration with Russia, countries of the Eurasian community. [20]

The president repeatedly pronounced that he was going to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. His speeches were convincing and Ukrainian citizens began to believe in the president. Nevertheless, on 21 November 2013, Yanukovych announced that he refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. In an interview, the president expressed:

> Do we have to go blindfolded and run anywhere? We already were running very fast. We overcame in a short period a very big distance. We may get problems…As soon as we reach a level that is comfortable for us when it meets our interests when we agree on normal terms, then we will talk about signing. [21]

His U-turn from the pro-European to the pro-Eurasian direction caused great disappointment among citizens who saw the EU as the only remedy for their corrupt political and economic systems. Following Yanukovych's announcement on the Association Agreement people growingly showed up in the Maidan and the protests spread throughout the country. The protests lasted around three weeks. The most violent face of the demonstrations occurred between 18-20 February 2014 when around 100 people were killed by snipers in the Maidan. [22] This massacre played a vital role in the negotiations between the opposition and Yanukovych. In the wake of the massacre, the president's last loyal guards also abandoned him. [23, p. 110] On 22 February 2014, Viktor Yanukovych left Kyiv and after spending a few days in Kharkiv he fled to Russia.

Consequently, the Euromaidan Revolution which is also called the Revolution of Dignity involved violence different from the almost bloodless Orange Revolution and became a milestone in Ukraine. Although the majority of citizens celebrated their victory over Yanukovych, separatist groups in certain parts of the country raised their voices against the provisional government in Kyiv. The separatist tendencies in Crimea and Donbas were well exploited by the Kremlin, which led to the illegal annexation of the former and the destabilization of the latter.

Questions for Self-control

1. Describe the independence movement in Belarus and the factors that prevented the consolidation of democracy in the country.
2. How and under what conditions did Aleksandr Lukashenko manage to consolidate his power in Belarus?
3. What were the main motivations of Moldova's sovereignty movement?
4. What were the consequences of pro-Romanian politics in Moldova in the early 1990s?
5. Clarify the independence movement and state-building process in Ukraine.
6. What were the repercussions of the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions on the political landscape of Ukraine?

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ВСТУП ДО ЄВРАЗІЙСЬКИХ СТУДІЙ

Навчальний посібник