



✿ *FUEL* ✿ *TO* ✿ *THE* ✿ *FIRE* ✿

A Tool in Gorbachev's Hands

Anne de Tinguy

Some 800,000 Soviets have fled their country since the arrival to power of Mikhail Gorbachev. This is much higher than in the 1970s, the decade in which emigration, for the first time since the Second World War, had already developed substantially. Why did the Soviet Union so briskly open up its borders? And by which criteria does it define its policy on this matter? Western analysts do not all offer the same answer.

There are those who surmise that the USSR's decisions have been dominated since the 1970s first and foremost by external considerations: depending on the state of relations between East and West and on what Moscow seeks to obtain from the outside world.¹ Then there are those who place above all else certain internal factors: economic, demographic, political and sociological (for example, the "policy of elite integration" which "has had serious consequences for the Jewish community").² The range of debate testifies to the difficulty there is in understanding a policy whose sole official concern up to the vote of the law of May 20, 1991, had been to reunite families and whose consistency is not always apparent.³

The truth quite likely is somewhere in the middle. There probably are not just one but several policies, taking into account considerations that are both internal⁴ and external, in proportions varying with time. Thus it would be wrong to deny the importance of one or the other.

Nevertheless, appraisal of the situation both past and present demonstrates quite clearly that emigration and international relations are tightly linked currently in the USSR, and have been for a long time.⁵ Of course this link should be looked upon with caution. The opening of the borders often has been considered a barometer of East-West relations, but not always. For instance, in 1979-80, East-West relations were not at their best, although Soviet emigration was at a peak. Foreign pressure without a doubt influenced Kremlin decisions, but in varying degrees of effectiveness. Since 1974, American legislation has linked trade to emigration, but did not prevent wide variations in the number of Soviet departures. Judging from the figures, this legislation may have had little influence on the Soviet attitude. For its own part, the USSR at times has linked emigration of its inhabitants explicitly to the state of its foreign relations.⁶ Yet until recently, the Soviet official position was to deny any link between the two and to reject intervention by other countries as unacceptable meddling in its internal affairs.

These facts should not hide the essential: the strong link existing between emigration and foreign policy. It is particularly relevant when analysing the moves made by Mikhail Gorbachev. He has made excellent use of emigration in his international dealings, without breaking—in spite of appearances—with the policies of his predecessors, at least up until May 1991.

Ethnic privilege

The main phases of Soviet emigration in the post-war period correspond more or less with the state of relations between the USSR and the external world.⁷ In the Cold War years between 1948 and 1970, departures were scarce. Sixty thousand were recorded, or an average of 2,700 per year. The numbers increased considerably with the arrival of detente in the 1970s. The signing of the agreements on Germany in 1970 and 1971, the establishment of a privileged Soviet-American dialogue, the conclusion of the first agreements on arms control (SALT I and II), the successful negotiations on security and cooperation in Europe, which lead in 1975 to the signing of the Final Act of Helsinki, all had positive effects. Between 1971 and 1980, 350,000 Soviets were given authorisation to leave their country, or an average of 35,000 annually.

The deterioration of East-West relations (tied to the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Third World, notably the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, to its arms policy of the 1970s, to the Euromissile crisis) coincided with a corresponding decline in the flow of emigration. Between 1981 and 1986, only 43,000 persons obtained an exit visa, an average of 7,000 per year, and only a few hundred in 1984, the most troublesome year.

Gorbachev's policy produced results as early as 1987. The number of departures bounded forward, from 6,000 in 1986, to 452,000 in 1990. The total for the years 1986 to 1990 (around 800,000) is higher than that of the entire post-war period (1948-1986).⁸

Highlighting the link between emigration and international relations, there is also the profile of the emigrés. Until 1991, Soviet law did not recognise the right of a citizen to emigrate. Emigration was officially not possible, as already mentioned, except for family reunification⁹ or repatriation; the latter justification was applied at the end of the 1950s for 200,000 Poles and 6,000 Spaniards.¹⁰ As Sidney Heitman said, emigration was an "ethnic privilege". Those given permission to leave were those with connections in the West: Jews, Soviets of German descent, Armenians, Greeks, thanks to intervention by the United States, Israel, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, France and other countries. That they were the only ones allowed to exit their country leaves not a shadow of a doubt as to their bartering by the Kremlin. Because of their connections in the world, they were valuable elements, bankable one way or another.

Bankable assets

The unprecedented opening of the frontiers begun in 1987 occurred without changing the pattern of "ethnic privilege". Of the 800,000 "Gorbachev" migrants, 300,000 were Jews, 310,000 Germans, 90,000 Armenians, and 30,000 Greeks.

This emigration wave corresponds to various orientations of Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign policy: some important, others essential.

First of all, there was the resumption of dialogue with Washington, which had found itself in a bad way at the end of the 1970s. The establishment of a privileged relationship with the premier world power has been part of the major and constant objectives of Soviet diplomacy since the Krushchev period. By the USSR of today just as by the USSR of yesterday, it is judged crucial because of what it represents in terms of power, in terms of the will of the Kremlin to arrive at agreements in arms control in order to bear down on US strategic programmes, and to have access to American technology and economic aid. Since 1986, the new Kremlin chief directed all of his efforts towards achievement of this rapport. The opening of the frontiers was one of the actions decided upon by Moscow to facilitate relations with Washington.

Mr. Gorbachev also aimed at the normalisation of Soviet relations with Israel, another principal objectives. Upon his arrival to power, he ascertained that due to a series of disillusion in the 1970s, in part tied to Egypt's defection from the Soviet camp and to the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreements signed under aegis of the United States, Soviet positions in the Middle East greatly had been weakened. The rupture in diplomatic relations with Jerusalem in 1967, leaving only the Americans in a position to negotiate with the Israeli and Arab parties, is largely responsible for the Soviet loss of influence. The Kremlin strove to correct this state of affairs and to resuscitate Soviet diplomacy in the region. Among other things, most notably it sought rapprochement with Israel, backing up this process with a spectacular rise in the emigration of Soviet Jews: the number of departures climbed from 914 in 1986, to 8143 in 1987, to 20,082 in 1988, to 71,509 in 1989, to around 190,000 in 1990. It was an emigration wave quite remarkable for its encounter with hostility on the part of the USSR's Palestinian and Arab friends, hostility which the latter were swift to express. In April of 1987, at a moment when the flux was still far from those dimensions it was to reach subsequently, Syrian President Hafez al Asad, on a visit to Moscow, shared with Gorbachev his worries on the subject.¹¹ Soon after, criticism was virulent, the Arabs accusing the Israelis of settling the new arrivals in the occupied territories.

In October 1971, Prime Minister Kossygin had justified the denials of requests to depart by Soviet Jews with the Soviet fear of strengthening the Israeli armed forces. If this reasoning today is no longer valid, it is because the USSR wants to employ the best means at its disposal to modify a situation that no longer corresponds to its interests. In allowing this fantastic advantage to Israel of the arrival of Soviet Jews, the USSR transformed the nature of its relations with the Jewish State. It was not merely by chance during the war in the Persian Gulf (January-February 1991) that Israeli authorities abstained, despite Iraqi attacks on its territory with Soviet-made SCUDs, from any criticism of the USSR, whereas it vividly denounced material aid given to Baghdad before the crisis by the FRG and France.

Another of Moscow's priorities is good relations with Bonn. The Federal Republic was perceived even before reunification as the partner to be privileged on a continent where the USSR wanted to change its status as a threat, and to renovate its positions. After a difficult period, tied among other things to the Euromissile question, relations between the two countries became close once again as of 1987. The visit by West German President von Weizsäcker to the USSR in July 1987, and that of Anatoly Dobrynin (then head of the international department of the CPSU Central Committee) to the FRG the following October (before Eduard Shevardnadze's January 1988 mission), signalled a step towards improvement which was rapidly confirmed afterwards. The year 1987 also marked a major resumption for Soviet emigration of German background: 931 departures in 1986, as compared to 14,448 in 1987. These exits accelerated even further: 47,000 in 1988, 100,000 in 1989, and 145,000 in 1990. And it was not affected by German reunification.

An additional orientation of Gorbachev's foreign policy was in the development of contacts with the Black Sea countries, notably Greece and Turkey. With these two countries, the USSR signed friendship and cooperation treaties in March and April 1991. Once again, where it was able to—that is, in its relations with Greece—the USSR used emigration to clear its path. Some 30,000 Soviets of Greek origin left the USSR in 1989 and 1990. And the Soviet foreign minister, Alexander Bessmertnykh, in Athens to sign the friendship treaty on April 9 and 10, 1991, set out to facilitate the departure of those

Greeks among the 350,000 living in the USSR who wished to emigrate.¹² In these four cases (resumption of dialogue with Washington and with Bonn, normalisation of relations with Israel, renovation of those with Greece), the Kremlin took advantage of the opportunities provided by the existence of minorities on its territory tied to these countries, in order to realise its own plans. Emigration was a tool in the service of its foreign policy.

To recognise the existence of a link between emigration and foreign policy, and to judge that the former reinforces the latter does not close the subject. At this point it is necessary to analyse Gorbachev's policy in order to grasp its objectives and significance.

A long record

When Mikhail Gorbachev, after his accession to the leadership, set out to confront the problem of emigration, the dossier he found was hardly virgin. He inherited a situation which he would have to reckon with, and which at first glance seriously limited his range of action. For decades, the question of the circulation of Soviets citizens had been a source of controversy between the Kremlin and the West; the lot of the Soviets of German origin is at the heart of the history of relations between the USSR and the FRG, and that of the Jews, central to the concerns of United States. Taking into account this heritage is indispensable to an understanding of recent Soviet approaches.

Since 1955, the year in which the USSR and the FRG established diplomatic relations, the latter has always kept a keen interest in the fate of Soviets of German origin, either descendants of Germans who emigrated to Russia at the time of Catherine II in the eighteenth century, or Germans who ended up in the USSR after the Second World War due to hostilities and border changes. Victims of poor treatment before and after the dissolution of the Volga German Republic in 1941 (population transfers and deportations), it is thanks to the intervention of Bonn that the life of these Germans improved after 1955.¹³ The population's condition was a central topic of the negotiations preceding the visit of Chancellor Adenauer to Moscow in September 1955. These talks led to what significantly is called the "Adenauer amnesty" of September 17, 1955, restoring their civil rights, and then

on April 8, 1958, to the “repatriation agreement”.¹⁴ Between 1956 and 1960, some 15,000 Soviets of German origin left the USSR for the Federal Republic.

The decree rehabilitating this population (August 29, 1964), adopted shortly after the visit to the FRG by Nikita Krushchev’s son-in-law, A. Adjubei, in July 1964, is also in itself tied to Soviet-West German relations and to the Kremlin’s



The Russians and the others

desire to see them take a new course after years of tension. The decree of November 3, 1972, abolishing the restrictions on place of residence that had been imposed on the Germans (as on other peoples) and the opening at the same time of the borders formed the answer to Chancellor Brandt’s Ostpolitik. With the signature in August 1970 of the Soviet-West German treaty, and in September 1971, the Four Powers’ agreement on Berlin, relations between the two countries entered a new era. Bonn took advantage of the situation to intervene in the Soviet authorities’ domain in favour of the German minority. These steps were favourably received because they were in tune with the USSR’s own

preoccupation to improve relations with the FRG, to cultivate German good will, and to overcome anti-Soviet sentiment. Moscow then cushioned its policy on emigration, notably at the time of ratification by the Bundestag of the August 1970 treaty, in order to strengthen Willy Brandt's standing.¹⁵ The priority accorded to Germany led the USSR to veer from the principle of family reunification: it began to allow the departure no longer merely of those Germans who had fallen under Soviet domination due to the war (which had been the case up until then), but also in great numbers those Soviets of German origin whose ancestors had lived in the USSR for over 200 years and who had no link whatsoever with the FRG. Emigration resumed (aside from a surge in 1966 and 1967 of 2,400 departures in two years, it remained very weak during the 1960s) and developed rapidly. The exits rose from 342 in 1970 to 1145 in 1971, and to 3420 in 1972. Between 1971 and 1980, they numbered 64,000.

Throughout this decade and afterwards, the West German authorities continued to be concerned about the lot of "their" minority. On this topic, Willy Brandt and then Helmut Schmidt carried on two very similar policies.¹⁶

With the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the upheavals in Eastern Europe, the question took on a new acuity. Thus, it is more than ever on the order of the day in discussions between the USSR and Germany. This was once again evident during German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's trip to Moscow in March 1991, and that of his Soviet counterpart, Bessmertnykh, to Bonn this past June.

Although the Kremlin denies the link between its decisions in matters of emigration and Soviet-American relations, it is clear that the two have been constantly and tightly intertwined since the beginning of the 1970s. The USSR's desire to have privileged relations with the premier world power, to ease negotiations on arms control, to promote trade and to prevent a Chinese-American alliance forced it to acknowledge US attachment to the lot of the Jewish populations and to the freedom to emigrate. But this phenomenon does not date back to the 1970s alone. Back in 1911, in protest against the czarist policy towards Russian Jews, the American government annulled the trade agreement which had tied Washington to Russia since 1837.¹⁷

Between 1972 and 1975, the Soviet attitude with respect to emigration and human rights provoked fiery debate in the United States which deeply jolted the newly initiated detente. The repression of Soviet dissidents and the absence of freedom in the USSR posed a fundamental problem: could detente be separated? Was the single interest of the West to live in peace with the communist world? Could Washington entertain cordial relations with the USSR without being concerned by the Kremlin's internal policies? To these questions the United States Congress supplied negative answers. When in August 1972, Moscow decided to impose an emigration tax on those eligible to depart who had had a college education,¹⁸ Senator Jackson reacted. In October, he presented to the Senate an amendment which provided that the United States would award most-favoured-nation status only to those countries which respected the freedom to emigrate. He was followed in the House of Representatives by Charles Vanik and then in the Senate by Adlai Stevenson, who both requested that a link be established with the import credits for the USSR. These initiatives were supported in 1973 by Andrei Sakharov.¹⁹ After two years of long and often impassioned talks and negotiations between Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the Soviet ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin,²⁰ the Jackson-Vanik and Stevenson amendments were adopted in December 1974. The importance that this debate acquired in the United States led the Kremlin to make certain concessions.²¹ Equally convincing to Moscow was the necessity not to underestimate the impact in the United States of its attitude towards human rights.

Nineteen years after its beginning, this affair has still not come to a close. On December 12, 1990, President Bush suspended for six months (with renewable terms) the Jackson amendment, allowing the Soviet Union to be eligible for credit guarantees of up to one billion dollars, but without awarding most-favoured-nation status.²² For this status to be accorded, the USSR had to modify in the direction of liberalisation its legislation on matters of emigration. After passage of the Soviet law on May 20, 1991, George Bush on June 3, 1991, extended the waiver for one year. But with the Soviet law coming into force only on January 1, 1993, Americans remain careful.²³

In this interval of nearly two decades, American pressure has not subsided.

President Carter, after having supported the Jackson amendment during his electoral campaign, oriented his foreign policy towards the protection of human rights. Ronald Reagan changed policies, but he, as well, insisted repeatedly on this question. At the time of the Reykjavik summit (October 11-12, 1986), Reagan explained at length to the new Kremlin leader that arms control, as important as it may be, was not sufficient to transform relations between East and West. Peace was only possible if human rights—of which the freedom to emigrate is part—were respected.²⁴ In Moscow (May 29-June 2, 1988), the American president once again picked up on this theme and repeated relentlessly that the problem was considered by the United States to be fundamental.²⁵

Soviet-Israeli relations are themselves even more directly influenced by Soviet emigration. Even as the first contacts were made after Gorbachev's arrival to power—contacts which were held in 1985 between diplomats and through the intermediary of the president of the World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman (the latter twice visited Moscow that year, in September and December)—Israel brought up the question of emigration.²⁶ Subsequently it has been at the centre of all discussions between the two countries. Shimon Peres, then foreign minister, even went so far as to declare in November 1985 that emigration of Soviet Jews was more important to Israel than restoration of diplomatic relations, and that Soviet liberalisation in this domain would lead his government and his country to a change in attitude vis-à-vis the USSR and Soviet participation in an international peace conference.²⁷ The Israeli delegation at the Helsinki meeting of August 18, 1986, the first held officially since 1967 between the two countries, expounded once again the position of his government on this point.²⁸ On April 13, 1987, Yitzhak Shamir, as well, declared that if the USSR wished to change its image and to improve relations with Israel, it would have to authorise the unconditional departure of hundreds of thousands of Jews.²⁹

Americans, Germans and Israelis are not the only ones to be interested in the fate of the Soviet populations. The West, in general, has long requested the communist world to allow the circulation of ideas and persons. It was one of the principal Western demands in the negotiations on security and cooperation

in Europe, demands at the origin of the third basket of the Final Act of the CSCE signed August 1, 1975, in Helsinki by the 35 participating countries (all the European countries plus the United States and Canada).³⁰

An arsenal of good will

Past and present insistence by foreign interlocutors of the USSR, and not the least important ones, has without any doubt pushed Mikhail Gorbachev to do some heavy thinking. This heritage probably led him to understand that the refusal to accord to Soviet citizens the freedom to emigrate and, similarly, the repression of dissidence were problems to which Western public opinion was very sensitive and which nurtured anti-Soviet sentiment abroad. Apparently he formed a triple conclusion. First of all, it was not possible to pretend that the USSR was in the process of change and that it had adopted a new approach in international relations if it continued to keep its borders closed. Perestroika, the affirmation as of 1988 (Nineteenth Party Conference of the CPSU) of the will to follow on the path of the formation of a state of law, and international commitments made by the USSR would not be credible if its attitude on human rights, in general, and on emigration, in particular, did not evolve in a more sensitive direction. Hiding behind the argument of unacceptable interference in its internal affairs was no longer a possibility.

The second conclusion was that it was not reasonable to resume detente and to hope for its durability if action was not undertaken in the emigration domain. Sooner or later, the topic would be raised by the West—if not by the governments, in any case by their public opinions—and as it had in the US between 1972 and 1975, it would cause questioning of the accomplishments of the established dialogue.

A third conclusion was that external pressure forcing the Kremlin to change its attitude, although difficult to accept because it resulted in what until then had been considered an inadmissible move, at the same time was also very beneficial. Western pressure meant in effect that Moscow disposed of an enormous arsenal of gestures of good will. Any serious initiative in the direction of liberalisation—under the condition that it must go further than

Brezhnev did at the end of the 1970s—would be considered by the Western world as concessions, testimony of a positive evolution in the USSR. And this situation opened up an important field of action.

Mikhail Gorbachev thus realised that he held a precious means for sending signals which would be understood immediately by certain countries particularly concerned, such as Israel. It is in this way that Gorbachev used the question of emigration, indicating very quickly after his arrival to power his intention to go forward in this direction, to convince Jerusalem of the sincerity of his desire for normalisation.³¹ And a precious means it was, as well, to affect (probably at little cost) Western public opinion and to transform his image abroad. The great media event made of the liberation in December 1986 of Andrei Sakharov, abroad the most famous of the Soviet dissidents, suggests that Mikhail Gorbachev understood the enormous advantage he could pull from a move which responded or seemed to respond, if only partially, to Western pressures. He quite masterfully exploited this situation to take several initiatives: to reorient the USSR's foreign policy, to transform his country's image in the world, and to obtain economic aid from the advanced industrialised countries, notably the Europeans.

The PR Czar

While at the beginning of the 1980s, Soviet leaders were little concerned with the image of the USSR in the world, Mikhail Gorbachev judged this to be essential. It was the element that would permit the USSR to change the tables on international relations and retake the initiative in the world.³² The new Kremlin chief committed himself with great attention to this renovation. Having an exceptionally tarnished image at the moment when he took over due to the initiatives both internal and external of his predecessors, he had to pursue a policy that was cunningly targeted. After a few months, in affirming his concern for reform, but also and above all in making some adroit proposals on disarmament, while adopting another attitude towards dissidence and authorising the emigration of numerous Soviet citizens, Gorbachev succeeded in the transformation. The USSR soon appeared to be a country in the throes of change, opening itself up to the outside world and no longer constituting for the

latter a threat. In France, surveys in 1985 showed that 9 per cent of those polled had a good opinion of Soviet policy in the world. In 1989, 51 per cent judged that the USSR "acted sincerely for peace".³³ Two out of three Americans in December 1988 thought the Soviets were interested above all else in their national security. Three years earlier, the same proportion thought the objective of the Kremlin was world dominion.³⁴

The USSR's emigration policy no doubt played a role in the reversal of Western public opinion. To make an impression on the West, the Kremlin defined in this domain a new and very elaborate³⁵ three-panelled approach. The first panel consisted in allowing the departure of hundreds of thousands of eligible candidates for emigration, and in steering them in great numbers to very specific states, notably the Federal Republic and Israel. In Israel, Soviet Jews arrived in December 1990 at an average rate of one thousand per day. Mikhail Gorbachev knew that these exits would be effective because they responded to the long-time desire of the West. He multiplied the result produced by creating a surprise—no one, on account of legislation in effect in the USSR, could have expected such an increase in departures—and in concentrating the arrivals on only a few destinations.

Secondly, what appeared at first glance as an opening of the borders was even more striking to Western minds because it was accompanied by a change in the Soviet attitude towards the emigrés. The policy followed up until then consisted in breaking all ties with those who had left or who were made to leave by the authorities, one another being considered traitors and for the most part denied of their Soviet citizenship. Gorbachev's USSR engaged in a program of renewal with them. The president of the USSR announced on August 15, 1990, that he would restore citizenship to 23 renowned exiles who had left between 1966 and 1988 (Yuri Orlov and Valery Chalidze, among others). The law of May 1991 on emigration foresaw not only a liberalisation in the procedures for departure but also the possibility of return.³⁷ The Supreme Soviet of the Russian Republic also made an initiative in this direction. Among other things it asked that emigrés have their nationality and their civil rights restored.³⁸

The third panel of the Kremlin offensive consisted of an attempted role-reversal, in accusing the West of not wanting to accept the Soviet immigrants. Even before changing the legislation, that is, even before liberalisation of its emigration policy, Moscow quite skilfully placed on the outside world the responsibility for its closed borders. As early as 1988, the chief of the office in charge of issuing exit visas, Kuznetsov, explained in the columns of *Moscow News* that the problem was no longer Soviet but American,³⁹ that the real limitations on emigration were no longer the work of the Soviet authorities but of the Western countries. Pointing a finger at the latter, the Kremlin refused from then on to play the role of the villain. And ever so easily it was able to insist on this analysis, because with the exception of a few countries like Israel and South Africa, rare are those countries today that wish for a massive arrival of immigrants, Soviet or otherwise. The Western nations continued to request that the freedom to emigrate be recognised to Soviet citizens, but for that matter were not ready to receive them in great numbers on their territory, for reasons easily identifiable. The fact that Moscow targeted its policy, in allowing only certain populations to leave and in choosing specific and limited destinations, increased the impact of the departures and hastened the evolution of Western public opinion on this problem. If one considers the number of requests from Germans or Jews, the Soviet emigration potential in effect appears substantial, and because of this, a real cause for concern.

In the FRG and above all in the United States, these events provoked reaction. The Federal Republic of Germany positively acknowledged, it was said, the exit authorisations given to the populations of German origin. Their emigration responded to the desires of the latter and to Germany's own interests. At a moment when the stagnant birthrate forewarned of problems, the new arrivals constituted a welcomed human advantage. But after having received in 1989 and 1990 several hundred thousand persons of German origin from the USSR, and also from Poland, the GDR and other East European countries, Bonn began to perceive this question differently. At the end of 1990, Chancellor Kohl made a blunt appeal to the Soviets to stay where they were, for "neither of the two countries has an interest in their leaving their country".⁴⁰ In March 1991 in Moscow, Foreign Minister Genscher shared with his partners in conversation the desire of his government to assist the USSR in keeping "its" Germans,



A gentleman from the East

notably by contributing to the reconstitution demanded by the minority of an autonomous region. This was perceived by Bonn as a way to dissuade possible candidates from departure.⁴¹

In the aftermath of massive arrivals of Soviet Jews in 1988 and 1989 (only 11 per cent of those leaving in 1988 and 14 per cent in the first eleven months of 1989 went to Israel), the United States as of 1989 took measures to contain the ever-increasing flow by establishing for the fiscal year October 1989 to October 1990 a ceiling of 50,000 refugees and 20,000 others.⁴² When the US took this decision, it was anticipating 300,000 requests for the year to come. During the same period and with the same goal, the US decided no longer to accept those requests made from Vienna or Rome, until then the two principal transit centres for Soviet immigrants.⁴³

Once the Western governments were sensitive to the evolution of the Soviet attitude and to the consequences it brought on or could bring on for them, the Kremlin policy began to use emigration for economic ends, playing on the fears of the industrialised countries.

Milking the cow

The Soviet authorities did not perceive emigration, at the time in any case, as a determining element of their economic policy. They even feared certain effects, in particular "brain drain", which would be very hazardous to their country at a moment when it was folding under the stress of its difficulties and had hardly any other solution but that of engaging in reform. However, the authorities figured that a certain dose of liberalisation in many ways, directly and indirectly, could have some completely positive repercussions.

The USSR hoped to obtain most-favoured-nation status from America and to have new access to credit from the Export-Import Bank. The lifting of the Jackson amendment, which it had long demanded, certainly to Soviet eyes and above all in the case of the most-favoured-nation status, had a political significance (the Kremlin judging itself victim of discrimination) and also an economic one. Thanks to the settlement of émigrés in the industrialised

countries, the USSR in addition could hope to create networks on which it would be possible to lean in order to develop, as it wished, commercial relationships. This reasoning could be applied to the cases of the FRG and of Israel.

Another Soviet objective centred on economic and financial gains. If the law favoured return, as it was said, this was because the Kremlin wished to see its émigrés or temporary migrants coming back to their country with “foreign exchange and know-how in their suitcases”,⁴⁵ or sending foreign exchange from abroad to their families. The possible gain to be obtained from this was evaluated by the Soviet government in the summer of 1990, at 10 billion dollars for 13 million persons working abroad.⁴⁶

Temporary migrations to the bordering countries—in particular to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary—of seasonal workers or of “consumer tourists” were another means of developing profitable operations for the USSR. This phenomenon which already existed and gave way to smuggling of all types was not negligible: several thousand persons crossed the borders in this manner. In Poland, the number of Soviet workers of irregular status was estimated at the beginning of 1991 at 30,000, these individuals having arrived for a stay lasting anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. The total comings and goings were increasing at a fast pace: 4.2 million Soviets went to Poland in 1990 for one reason or another, almost 50 per cent more than in 1989.⁴⁷ The fluxes were cause for ample concern in certain circles because black market labour and smuggling if they developed could get out of hand. These worries were reinforced by the fact that most of these countries had substantial minority populations in the USSR (170,000 Hungarians, 370,000 Bulgarians, 2 million Poles, 3.3 million Moldavians).⁴⁸ Concern led to measures allowing for a stopping or slowing down of possible massive arrivals of Soviets. Poland and Czechoslovakia in this respect redeployed military forces from the western part of their territory to the eastern regions.⁴⁹

The fear of a flux of refugees did not exist solely in the East European states. Aggravated by the USSR which played on it to put pressure on the industrialised countries, the fear had also grown in Western Europe. In autumn



German migran



Bremerhaven

of 1990, the Kremlin launched a veritable offensive. Catastrophic rumours began to circulate of an imminent exodus of millions of famine-stricken Soviets who in fleeing the chaos, were preparing to descend upon the Western countries.⁵⁰ The most extraordinary figures made the rounds: these invaders of a new kind were estimated (without any scientific analysis justifying the numbers put forward) at between 2 and 30 million.⁵¹ The conclusion made by the media was always the same: this human tidal wave represented a grave danger for the West, which thus should try to prevent it by sending the Kremlin the economic aid that would give it the means to dissuade its citizens from leaving.

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At the same time and already for some months, the West had been debating the terms of economic assistance for the USSR, a problem at the heart of discussions in June 1990 in Dublin among the twelve member-countries of the European Community, and of those in Houston in July among the G-7, to which Mikhail Gorbachev had written not long beforehand to solicit their aid. The Twelve and then the Seven fell into agreement over the principle of action and decided to have the European Commission in concertation with the main international economic organisations (OECD, IMF, World Bank) conduct a study of the situation and of Soviet needs. The coincidence between the rumours of a massive emigration wave from the USSR, rumours fed by the Soviets,⁵² and the debate which followed in the West after these meetings about support for the USSR was hardly accidental. In this domain as in others, the Soviet authorities tried to transform their weakness into trump cards. They played on the spectre of a massive and uncontrollable exodus if their economic situation continued to deteriorate. The message was clear: the USSR would not overcome the grave crisis it was undergoing and which inevitably would provoke considerable waves of departures if it received no external help. The

Western states thus had a choice: either they provided the USSR with the investments necessary to breach the difficult challenge of economic reform, or they would see hordes of emigrés descend upon them.

The message was understood most notably in Germany, concerned in the first place for political and geographic reasons at the moment of reunification by the evolution in the USSR. Thus, important lines of credit were opened. And at Christmas-time, Chancellor Kohl encouraged his compatriots to come to the aid of the great neighbour to the East.⁵³ In appealing in December to the Soviets of German origin to stay put, he himself declared that he was ready to contribute to improving their living conditions in the USSR, establishing an explicit link between the two.⁵⁴

This policy, so beneficial to the Soviets, was carried out at little cost, for in spite of appearances, actual liberalisation in this domain has been very limited.

The master of illusion

Certainly, 800,000 Soviets, as it has been said, have emigrated since 1986. Liberalisation cannot be denied. And yet the policy as it has been conducted since Gorbachev's arrival to power has consisted in opening the borders without opening them, and probably at first in order not to open them.

Legislation adopted in 1987 attempted to reconcile the two apparently contradictory objectives: taking account of the weight of history and responding to the international request without, nevertheless, recognising for the citizen the right to emigrate.⁵⁵ In the eyes of the Soviets, this question holds even greater importance as it is tied to economic, political, but also ideological considerations. The notion of emigration itself in the USSR has a moral component quite different from that which it has in the West. The West considers the circulation of persons as normal. To leave one's country is a move that engenders no sense of shame. But this is not the case in the USSR, where emigration is synonymous with desertion. Perceived as a sign of hostility against the homeland, as a will to reject the socio-political system, it is considered a failure for the country in its entirety.

For all these reasons, confronted by the necessity in light of foreign policy objectives to take decisive action in this domain, the Soviet authorities chose in 1986 and 1987 to walk around the problem. They opened their doors wide for certain peoples: those who had family outside Soviet borders and who held the attention of foreign governments. These groups were authorised to leave in great numbers. Thus, there was the appearance of substantial liberalisation, but it did not exist in reality. Continuing to base the departures on the principle of family reunification allowed the Soviet authorities to prolong a very restrictive policy—the door remained closed for those who had no ties to the exterior—and thus to limit the phenomenon: the potential of the persons concerned was limited.⁵⁶ The maintenance of restrictions in matters of internal movements and migrations and the fact that the poor treatment of candidates had not been halted,⁵⁷ confirm that the objective of the leadership was not liberalisation. And in addition, the policy conducted in this fashion allowed for that all-important necessity: the significance of emigration did not change.

The Kremlin's attitude towards the Jews is quite enlightening on this last point. Moscow did everything in order to channel their migration towards Israel. In July 1985, Yuli Vorontsov, then ambassador to France, at a meeting in Paris with his Israeli counterpart, declared that massive departures of Jews were possible if Soviet-Israeli and Soviet-American relations improved, *under the condition* that these subjects went directly and exclusively to Israel.⁵⁸ An exodus towards the United States, the premier capitalist power, leader of the "other side", in effect was judged unacceptable. Even if the principle of family reunification be used as justification, in this case the significance of emigration would change. With the percentage of Jews going to the United States climbing steadily as of the 1970s (33.5 per cent between 1971 and 1980, 46.2 per cent between 1981 and 1986, 71 per cent in 1987 and the beginning of 1988⁵⁹), the problem that this flux posed for the Kremlin was very real. Luckily for Moscow, its interests coincided with those of the United States. As the arrival of Soviet Jews increased considerably and the requests became ever greater, the United States in 1989 put a stop to the process (the decision to no longer accept requests made in Vienna or Rome, the imposition of quotas). Ninety-five per cent of Jews from then on settled in Israel.⁶⁰

Equally enlightening as to the Kremlin's policy is the treatment reserved for Armenians, who form a case apart from the other minorities in that they have on the interior of the USSR a national republic with all the national advantages this represents. As neither the Western governments (except for a few humanitarian cases), nor their respective public opinions, nor even the diaspora (many of its leaders deplore the departure from what they consider to be their historical homeland and their religious centre) exercise any real pressure in favour of their leaving the USSR, they have a lower "market value" than Jews or Germans. If Moscow authorises their departure in great numbers, it is because they fit into the policy of family reunification or because they are cases of repatriation (many of those who left the USSR came to settle in Armenia after the war following Stalin's appeal).⁶¹ The Armenian case adds to the effects produced by the other departures without changing the significance of emigration.

By broadly opening its borders to some, and repeatedly affirming the will to modify legislation in the direction of liberalisation, the Soviet authorities transformed appearances. Skilfully conducted, this plan of action permitted them to reap great advantages on the international front from emigration, while keeping their borders closed to the majority of its citizens. In this manner they were able to render compatible two apparently irreconcilable objectives.

This mode of action allowed them to avoid making decisions on the internal front which they feared, such as the one concerning reconstitution of a German autonomous region, requested for decades by the population of German origin and by the FRG.⁶² Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister Genscher once again put this question on the order of the day in their recent conversations with the Soviet leaders.⁶³ It is a decision that the central leadership does not want to take, for other minorities (such as the Tatars in the Crimea) have similar demands.⁶⁴ In accepting these fairly substantial departures, the leadership gave in to German pressure without agreeing to recreate a German region. The danger that this policy represents for the Soviets of German origin was stressed by the latter when they met for the first time at a special congress on March 1, 1991: the more emigration increases, the less are the chances of regaining their autonomy.⁶⁵

Time for a change?

The Kremlin hoped that perestroika and the process of democratisation engaged upon between 1986 and 1988 would lead to an improvement in living conditions in the USSR. In this way a new environment would be created causing the Jews, Germans and other peoples to lose the desire to leave their country. These two hypotheses revealed themselves to be false. Perestroika led to an aggravation of the situation in all domains, notably with regard to the nationality dilemma. And the mass of requests to emigrate, instead of diminishing, grew even further. The strategy carried out since Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival to power thus reached its limits.

The toughening of the Kremlin's positions at the end of 1990 and at the beginning of 1991, and anti-Western statements by the head of the KGB, V. Kriutchkov, and by Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov⁶⁶ suggest that the USSR, given the extent of the problems confronting it, was then tempted to close its doors to the outside once again. It is hardly likely that in this context the leadership would be anxious to liberalise its emigration policy. But the action undertaken since 1986 touched off a process that truly and increasingly will be difficult to channel. As the number of exit visas increases, pressure on the authorities increases as well.

In the 1970s, the Kremlin thought that in authorising the departure of some persons, it would eliminate destabilising and unassimilable elements: by short-circuiting the movement, it would heal the interior situation. The opening of the borders had the opposite effect: it provoked a sharp increase in requests.⁶⁷ Today as yesterday, by giving in if only partially, the leadership opened the path to even greater demands and to a change in attitude with respect to emigration, in particular among the youth. The fact that each month since fall 1990, sixty thousand requests (and many from the younger generation) for jobs abroad arrive at the International Labour Agency—a non-governmental organism which opened then in Moscow—is testimony.⁶⁸ The more the economic situation deteriorates, the more the demands in this sense will increase. The vote of the May 1991 law, the very long debates preceding it and the decision not to apply it before January 1993 testify both to the pressure

exercised on the authorities for liberalisation of the policy in this field, and to the hesitations and fears of the Kremlin.⁶⁹

As long as the Kremlin has the situation in its hands, it can continue to bank on emigration for the needs of its foreign policy while limiting it at the same time. Depending on its internal and external objectives and on the state of its foreign relations, it can continue either to open or to close its borders, or in other words, to use emigration as a carrot or a stick. But as time marches on, the less the central leadership, in light of internal pressures, has room for manoeuvres. Defining a new policy and overcoming the fear provoked by emigration thus become urgent. Here is a new constraint for the USSR but also for its former East European allies and the Western states—in particular the European ones—to take into consideration, all of whom are very directly concerned.

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- 2 - R. Brym, "The changing rate of Jewish emigration from the USSR: some lessons from the 1970s", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1985, vol. 15, no 2, pp. 23-35.
- 3 - D. Floyd, "Perestroika, glasnost, and Soviet Jewry: Gorbachev's address to the January 1987 CPSU plenum", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1987, vol. 17, no 1, p. 3; J.L. Scherer, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1985, vol. 15, no 2, p. 40.
- 4 - The reduction in emigration of Soviets of German origin beginning in 1978 (when that of the Jews was much higher) could be explained in part in this way, for example, as to some Soviet emigrés in the FRG, by the opposition of Soviet agricultural circles to these exits. B. Pinkus, "The emigration of national minorities from the USSR in the post-Stalin era", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1983, vol. 13, no 1, p. 31.
- 5 - See, for example, the analysis of R. O. Freedman, "Soviet Jewry and Soviet-American relations: a historical analysis", pp. 38-67 in R.O. Freedman, ed., *Soviet Jewry in the decisive decade, 1971-80*, North Carolina, Duke Press Policy Studies, 1984.
- 6 - Two examples: the president of the Gosbank, V. Alkhimov, stated to a delegation of American businessmen in February 1985 that 50,000 Soviet Jews could emigrate each year if Soviet-American relations improved. Yuli Vorontsov, then ambassador to France, declared in July 1985 to his Israeli counterpart that massive Jewish emigration was possible if Israel and the United States stopped criticising the USSR. See R. Brym, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 3, p. 19.
- 7 - S. Heitman, "The Third Soviet Emigration", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 2, pp. 17-42.

- 8 - On this opening of the borders, see *Moskovskie Novosti*, no 28 of July 9, 1989; *Pravda*, January 14, 1990; *The Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 1991.
- 9 - The policy of family reunification was explicitly defined by Prime Minister Kosygin in December 1966 in Paris, during a press conference: "If there are families divided by war who want to find their relatives outside of the USSR ..., we will do all we can to help them. The door is open to them and will remain open". Quoted in "Les Juifs en Union Soviétique", supplement to *Un mois avec les Juifs d'URSS*, April 1980, p. II.
- 10 - B. Pinkus, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1983, vol. 13, no 1, pp. 14-17 and 27.
- 11 - G. Salamé, "Est/Ouest/(Proche) Orient", *Politique étrangère*, 1990, no 2, p. 263.
- 12 - RFE-RL Research Institute, *Report on the USSR*, April 19, 1991, p. 27.
- 13 - H. Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Empire éclaté*, Paris, 1978, pp. 204-205; B. Pinkus, "The Germans in the Soviet Union since 1945", in I. Fleischhauer and B. Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans. Past and Present*, London, C. Hurst and Co., 1986, p. 107-112.
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- 15 - S. Heitman, *The Third Soviet Emigration: Jewish, German and Armenian Emigration from the USSR since World War II*, Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, Cologne, 1987, p. 248.
- 16 - B. Pinkus, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1983, vol. 13, no 1 pp. 20-21.
- 17 - A. de Tinguy, *USA-URSS. La détente*, Brussels, Ed. Complexe, 1985, p. 182.
- 18 - Between August 1972 and March 1973, the payment of this tax by 1450 Soviet Jewish candidates for emigration brought 7 million dollars to the USSR. In face of the scale of reactions this measure provoked abroad, the Soviet authorities suspended its application in March 1973, but did not suppress it. W. Korey, "The Jackson-Vanik Amendment in Perspective", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 1, pp. 31-33.
- 19 - A. Sakharov, "Open letter to the United States Congress", September 14, 1973.
- 20 - H. Kissinger, *At the White House*, Paris, Fayard, 1979, vol. II, p. 1328; *The Stormy Years*, Paris, Fayard, 1982, vol. I, p. 291-302 and vol. II, p. 1197-1212.
- 21 - The Soviet authorities excused some Jews from paying the emigration tax with the explicit goal of facilitating relations with the United States. W. Korey, *The Soviet Cage: Anti-Semitism in Russia*, New York, Viking Press, 1973, p. 320.
- 22 - *U.S. Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, December 15, 1990, pp. 4150-4151.
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- 24 - *The Department of State Bulletin*, December 1986, vol. 86, no 2117. See notably the declaration of the president of October 7, 1986, p. 1.
- 25 - The speech of President Reagan of May 31, 1988, at the State University of Moscow is completely devoted to freedom. *The*

Department of State Bulletin, August 1988, vol. 88, no 2137, pp. 15-19. See also pp. 26-29, the speech of Secretary of State Schulz in Los Angeles, October 31, 1986.

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27 - *Ibidem*, p. 48.

28 - Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty, *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* < August 27, 1986 (RL 321-86), p. 5.

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36 - See for example W. Korey, "The Jackson-Vanik ...", op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 1, pp. 44-45; R. Brym, "Soviet Jewish ...", op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 3, p. 22; *Le Monde*, July 8, 1987.

37 - See *Argumenti i fakti*, no 34, August 26-September 1, 1989, and *Trud*, February 13, 1991.

38 - RFE-RL Research Institute *Report on the USSR*, January 4, 1991, p. 63. The Russian parliament prepared in 1990-91 a week dedicated to Russian culture which should be held in autumn 1991 in Moscow. All Russian exiles would be invited.

39 - *Moscow News*, no 50, December 11, 1988, p. 7. See as well *Izvestia*, February 28, 1991.

40 - Statement of Chancellor Kohl to the prime minister of the Russian republic, Ivan Silaev, in Bonn *Le Figaro*, December 14, 1990.

41 - *International Herald Tribune*, March 19, 1991.

42 - *International Herald Tribune*, September 28, 1989, and January 12, 1991.

43 - *International Herald Tribune*, November 7, 1989, and C. Mansour, "L'émigration des Juifs soviétiques et le processus de paix israélo-palestinien", *Politique étrangère*, 1990, no 2, p. 328: Soviet Jews until then asked for an Israeli visa in Moscow because it was the way to leave the USSR, but once outside, instead of going to Israel, they stayed to Vienna or Rome. There, they presented visa

requests for the United States at the American Consulate. On the question of visas for Israel, see Y. Dinstein, "Freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 3, pp. 8-11.

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45 - A hope explicitly expressed, for instance, by Yuri Rechetov, Head of Human Rights Department at the Foreign Ministry, to the Moscow correspondent of *Le Figaro*. *Le Figaro*, December 14, 1990.

46 - *Vestnik*, September 1990, pp. 76-77.

47 - See M. Okolski, "Eastern Europe: a Region of Emigration, Immigration or Transitory Movements?", and *Le Monde*, January 31, 1991.

48 - V.V. Kusin, "Refugees in Central and Eastern Europe: problem or threat?", *Radio Liberty Report on Eastern Europe*, January 18, 1991, pp. 33-43.

49 - *International Herald Tribune*, February 2 and 5, 1991; *Le Monde*, November 24, 1990 (worries expressed by President Havel in Paris); and V. Kusin, op. cit., *Report on Eastern Europe*. At the beginning of 1991, the head of the Polish office of refugees, Skoczylas, stated "to wait and see the Russians arriving barefoot in the snow". In Czechoslovakia the federal government had requested on December 20, that the Ministries of the Interior and of Defence amend the Defence law so that the army could be used to contain the waves of immigration.

50 - *The Economist*, October 20-26, 1990, cover story: "The Russians are coming", followed by a dossier on the catastrophic situation of the USSR; *L'Express*, December 13-20, 1990, the cover dedicated to the "damned of the East", fleeing their country.

51 - Pierre Joxe, then Minister of the Interior, stated in November 1990, that "he got a chill" with regard to the two million Russians that could descend upon Europe. *Le Figaro*, November 12, 1990. The figure of 30 million is cited in *Le Figaro*, December 7, 1990, *Le Journal de Genève*, January 26-27, 1991, *Les Echos*, January 24, 1991, *L'Express*, February 7, 1991, *The Financial Times*, January 23, 1991.

52 - Igor Khalevinski, first adjoint to the consular department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, estimated that 13 million soviets could go work temporarily abroad after the adoption of the new law on emigration. *Vestnik*, September 1990, op. cit., pp. 76-77; R. Kuznetsov, from the same ministry, estimated that 7 or 8 million Soviets might emigrate. Vladimir Chemiatenkov, ambassador to the European Community, advanced the figure of 2 to 3 million—reported by V. Kusin, op. cit., *Report on Eastern Europe*, January 18, 1991; at the Council of Europe at a colloquium on East-West migrations in January 1991, V. Chtcherbakov, president of the State committee for labour, reassuringly estimated the number of possible departures at 1.5 to 2 million. *International Herald Tribune*, January 28, 1991.

53 - *The Wall Street Journal*, November 30-December 1, 1990.

54 - *Le Figaro*, December 14, 1990.

55 - F.J.M. Feldbrugge, "The new Soviet law on emigration", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1987, vol. 17, no 1, pp. 10-11.

56 - According to the 1989 census, in the USSR at the time there were 2 million Germans, 4.6 million Armenians, 1.4 million Jews (a figure probably smaller than in reality), 360,000 Greeks.

57 - *The Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 1991.

58 - R. Freedman, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 2, p. 45 and R. Brym, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 3, p.19.

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61 - 250,000 Armenians settled in the USSR between 1946 and 1960. S. Heitman, op. cit., *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1988, vol. 18, no 2, from p. 36; C. Mouradian, "L'immigration des Arméniens de la diaspora vers la R.S.S. d'Arménie: 1946-1962", *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, XX (1), January-March, 1979, pp. 79-110.

62 - B. Pinkus, op. cit. in I. Fleischhauer and B. Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans*, pp. 151-153.

63 - *The Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 1990; *International Herald Tribune*, March 19, 1991; *Izvestia*, June 14, 1991.

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65 - *Moscow News* no 12, March 24, 1991, p. 4.

66 - December 22, 1990, during the fourth Congress of Peoples' Deputies, V. Krioutchkov, chief of the KGB, accused the West of attempting to sabotage the Soviet economy, "KGB protiv sabotaza" (the KGB against sabotage), *Pravda*, December 23, 1990. On February 12, 1991, Valentin Pavlov, the prime minister, denounced the anti-Soviet conspiracy by Western banks. *Trud*, February 12, 1991.

67 - H. Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Empire éclaté*, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

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69 - On the debates concerning the adoption of the new law, see *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, October 24, 1990, no 43. Interview of Iou. A. Rechetov, in charge at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the department of humanitarian questions and human rights; *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, Dec. 12, 1990; *Izvestia*, May 17, 1991.