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### **Chernobyl, Perestroika and the Soviet Press**

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#### Abstract:

The paper deals with the effects the Chernobyl Nuclear Power accident had on the Soviet Press and on the political process of Glasnost and Perestroika.

It is well known that in the Soviet Union the military and civil use of nuclear power was one of the corner stones of the Communist state. For the ruling Communist Party nuclear power appeared to be the appropriate means for achieving military security and economic prosperity. Therefore the Chernobyl accident was not only a major political embarrassment for the USSR, but it also undermined the Soviet technocratic approach toward science and technology, and it shadowed effectively the Communist utopia of finally achieving an affluent society. Despite Gorbachev's new policy of Glasnost (openness), the news coverage of Chernobyl proved that in the beginning of Perestroika the Soviet press still remained under strict Party control.

This explains why in the immediate aftermath of the reactor melt-down the Soviet press failed to inform the public about the immediate danger of the radioactive fallout.

Nevertheless, in the month and years following the accident the policy of Glasnost gradually showed positive effects on the ways the Soviet media dealt with Chernobyl. These effects may be traced in the newspapers as well as in the popular literary and scientific journals. Reform-minded journalist, scientists and free-lance writers proved to be the forerunners of an unbiased, open and honest discussion of the causes and the effects of the Chernobyl power plant being blown off.

The Soviet public debate on Chernobyl in the years 1988/1989 soon took its own course freeing itself from the Communist party's influence and the tight grip of the state censorship. Reporting increasingly on the true technical causes of the Chernobyl accident the newspapers and journals triggered a debate of the scientific and atomic culture of the Soviet Union. The

Chernobyl-case turned into a general nuclear power issue of the Soviet Union. The increasingly critical look at the the entire Soviet nuclear complex contributed heavily to the effective delegitimization of the Power of the Communist Party and to the ultimately quick, but peaceful dissolution of the Soviet state in 1990/91.

## **I. Nuclear Power in the Soviet Union**

## **II. Perestroika, Soviet Press and the Nuclear Issue after Chernobyl**

## **III. Post-Soviet Russia: Assessing the Future of Nuclear Power**

### **I. Nuclear power in the Soviet Union**

Atomic energy in the military and in the civilian dimensions played a major political, economic and ideological role in the Soviet Union.

To understand the debates in the USSR over the specific issues of developing nuclear physics and using its results for the built up of a huge nuclear industry one has to pay attention to the more general patterns of policy and politics of the Communist Party ruling the country.

It seems appropriate here to remind two major structural political and economic decisions made by the Soviet government in the beginning Twenties. The combination of these two decisions predetermined more or less character of the Soviet society as a whole and ,accordingly, shaped the scope and the impact of discussions on energy policy in general and, later, on nuclear power issues in particular.

These two decisions are well known:

1. The adoption of the ambitious GOELRO - Plan , a plan for Russia's electrification worked out by a team of Russian scientists and engineers headed by Krzhizhanovsky.

This plan had been personally approved by Lenin., who did hope that by putting this blueprint into practice Soviet Russia would eventually overcome its backwardness and turn into a wealthy nation. More than that, expectations rose even higher: Taking into consideration the vast energy resources of Soviet Russia and envisaging the prospects of building up a socialist society in a single country (at least for the time being) Lenin pointed out his ideas over the Soviet future in his famous formula: Communism = Soviet power + Electrification of the entire country.<sup>1</sup>

The fate of this formula is well known. In the Sixties, there were made somewhat ridiculous promises by the late Crustshev about the next generation of Soviet people be living under Communism.<sup>2</sup> Although these promises corresponded the naive expectations of the working masses , the plans to built communism nevertheless revealed - regardless the revolutionary pathos - a general scientific and technicistic touch of the entire political and social life in the Soviet System. This brings us to the second major decision:

2. After having gained power in the wake of the successful military coup on October 25th 1917 (what was later called in a self-praising manner "Great Socialist Revolution") the Party of the Bolsheviks abolished in three steps the structural prerequisites of political , and eventually social modernity in their country :

In a first step the Bolsheviks dissolved the "Uhreditel'noe Sobranie", the National Assembly, resulting from the February Revolution.

In a second step during the Civil war and finally after the abortive uprising at Kronstadt in 1921 they prohibited all political parties with the exception of their own.

In a third step there was imposed a ban on all inner - party factions or wings with the result, that the ultimate power of obtaining relevant informations and making decisions was transferred to the inner circle of the Polit-Bureau. These decisions resulted in shaping a society in Soviet- Russia, that went off the road of democracy, the rule of law and parliamentary decision making process. By establishing an authoritarian, Party - autocratic type of statehood the revolutionary expectations of the poor and underprivileged classes in the Russian society had been turned into the grotesque reality of Byzantinism, self-sacrifice of the individual and the nightmare of the Gulag. Thus the Soviet Union evolved in manner, best described by Hannah Arendt as Totalitarian Society.<sup>4</sup> And although there had been a tremendous success in Industrialization, including power engineering during the years before and after World War II, the Soviet society has been modernizing in a "half cutted" way.<sup>5</sup>

Obvious progress, achieved by the Soviet Union in the fields of industry, science and technology has to be assessed against the background of fundamental shortcomings in public participation and public involvement in the decision making process at the governmental, administrative and strategic levels.

These shortcomings determined not only the basically scientific and technicistic approach to the society as a whole but shaped the science and technology policy as well. Strategic planning and implementation of decisions in these fields have been entirely concentrated in the hands of party and state polit bureaucrats, science administrators and technocrats.

Science and technology policy in the Soviet Union in general and nuclear policy in particular have been performed in a technicistic manner, giving a considerable degree of influence to nuclear physicists and engineers in matters concerning the planning and performing of an energy programme.<sup>6</sup>

In the fifties and sixties the use of nuclear power in the Soviet Union was regarded as a necessary prerequisite for attaining the goals of communist build-up. According to the official Leninist ideology Soviet Nuclear armement should provide an offensive "umbrella" against a hostile "bourgeois" environment, should foster the revolutionary process all over the world, while the "peaceful" use of nuclear power should provide abundant energy, indispensable for an affluent communist, egalitarian society.<sup>7</sup>

This rather naive confidence in nuclear power as an ultimate benevolent technological agent reflected the prevailing scientific paradigm in Soviet social thought, thus revealing hidden positivist currents in the Marxist-Leninist ideology or "Weltanschauung".

There is obviously no need here to make a general outline of the Soviet nuclear power programme beginning after World War II. nor is it necessary to mark the various stages, ups and downs in the implementation of the nuclear power programme, depending on the availability of gas and oil resources, the development of fuelprices and longer lasting trends of investment in capital and labour in the Soviet economy.<sup>8</sup>

It will be sufficient to mention here the heavy nuclear power built up programme, started with the beginning of the Seventies. The major reasons for this programme, as far as the Soviet Union is concerned are easily to be recalled in mind: Despite the discovery, the fast exploration and the increasing exploitation of the vast west Sibirean oil fields and the

huge resources in natural gas and coal, there still remained double gap between energy supply and energy demands: a double gap because not only the supply lies steadily behind the ever increasing demands of industry and households, but because of the traditional geographic imbalance between the energy supply regions east of the Urals and the heavily industrialized and densely populated regions in the European part of Russia and the Ukraine.

For these reasons it was decided to meet the energy demands in European Russia and the Ukraine by speeding up the construction of nuclear power plants at a wide range of locations: from the North nearby Leningrad to the South near Odessa and in the Crimea.<sup>9</sup> The goals had been rather ambitious: the power plants have been designed not only to serve the needs of industry and households in supplying electricity. Additionally some of these stations have been destined to produce energy for heating official buildings as well as hundreds of thousands of apartments in the residential areas in major industrial cities.

In the late Seventies and Eighties the nuclear power programme of the Soviet Union turned out to have an international dimension: the COMECON adopted far reaching plans for the construction of several nuclear power plants in each European COMECON country.

More than that, it was decided to create a COMECON based reactor building industry with a high degree of specialization in the production of parts and components. These joint efforts should result in the construction and production of reactors at a high output rate at the Volgodonsk reactor building plant. Because of the traditional shortages in the centralized planned economies of the COMECON countries these ambitious objectives never had been reached.

### **What have been the specific traits of nuclear power discourse in the Soviet society?**

**1.** According to the structure of political power in the USSR the **principal decisions** about the use of nuclear energy as well as about timing and scope of a nuclear energetics built up have been made at the top level of the Communist Party hierarchy: **at the Polit - Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSS**. This doesn't mean, that these decisions have been totally voluntary, unbalanced or not grounded. On the contrary: Within the logic of the administrative bureaucratic system of power there has been done a lot to come to economically balanced and technologically grounded decisions: a number of departments of the Central Committee have been preparing internal reports on a wide scope of related issues as well as departments in the Council of Ministers (Soviet Government), the State Committee for Science and Technology and the Academy of Sciences. The usual way for releasing information over nuclear energy plans have been the Party Congresses and the announcement of the next Five Years Plan. Needless to say, that neither the economic and technological planning in general nor the nuclear power programme in particular have faced open criticism or have been at least questioned at official State or Party rallies.<sup>10</sup>

**2. The Research and Science system** including the Academy of Sciences and its research centers, institutes of the Ministry of Defence, institutes related to ministries of the industry and some special establishments of higher technological education ("Tekhnicheskie Vuzy") have been playing an important role in developing and checking various scientific and technological blueprints. The R & D work done by these scientific and technological institutions led to some different types of graphite moderated and water pressurized reactors. According to western specialists the common features of the R & D efforts in Soviet reactor construction programme have been the pushing of larger and larger single units

(for the sake of economy of scale) up to a degree, that never would have been licenced in the West and the significantly lower safety standards in comparison to the West (lack of reactor containment).<sup>12</sup> There had been two areas of discourse (the internal political and the internal scientific technological) in the form of an "esoteric nuclear power discourse " in the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

**3. The Legislative did not play a decisive role** in these sensitive questions it plays in the West. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR as well as the Soviets at the Republican and Local levels have been totally subordinated to the Party hierarchy. No general open or even controversial debates in the Parliaments have been reported . No special sessions of parliamentary subcommittees (Science and Technology, Environmental Protection) led to critical or controversial public statements with regard to the nuclear energy programme.

**4. No independent judiciary did exist.** For this reason neither officials at the Republican or Local level nor private persons could defend their legitimate interests against an overriding Party and State bureaucracy putting into practice largescale scientific and technological projects, afflicting the lifes of hundreds of thousands of people. The whole process of choosing appropriate building sites for nuclear power stations (ecological, seismic, economic dimensions) as well as the erection and exploitaton of nuclear power stations appeared to have taken place in a manner free of law, if not to say in an unlawful manner.<sup>13</sup>

**5. The lack of an independent and free press** made it impossible to objectively inform the public properly on nuclear affairs.

The Soviet press in large was unable and unwilling to report on difficulties and contradictons within the nuclear power programme and incapable of reflecting the attitudes, fears and concerns of scientists, engineers and the ordinary people with regard to these sensitive technological and ecological questions. The biased Soviet information-policy ron nucöear matters resulted in an uninformed, manupilated public, mostly uncritical and unaware of the dangers and risks inherent in nuclear technology. Given the political inability of the Soviet press its no surprise, that the task of critical reflection of the direction and dimensions of scientific and technological progress with regard to Soviet society in general and to ecological hazards in particular have been fulfilled , at least partially, by novelists and free-lance writers. Writings of Dzingis Aitmatov and Valentin Rasputin come to mind in this respect.<sup>14</sup>

Relating the Soviet nuclear power issue to the field of social studies of science&technology one could say, that the way nuclear technology had been pushed forward in the USSR illustrates the general thesis of the social conditioning of technological change: The Soviet nuclear power programme was shaped by military ambitions, considerations of political prestige, by economic constraints and by social utopianism as well as by a special climat of secrecy as well as an official and a public neglect of the dangers inherent in nuclear technology.<sup>15</sup>

## **II. Perestroika, the Soviet Press and the Nuclear Issue**

Perestroika, the reform process initiated by General secretary Gorbachow was a unique, far reaching attempt to modernize the Soviet society, being at that time , in spring 1985 in a status of economic stagnation, political alienation and psychological depression.

For several reasons Perestroika failed to reach the intended objectives, and, on the contrary, ultimately produced quite unexpected results.<sup>16</sup>

But, after all, Perestroika showed how a society in motion is changing the set of social, political and even psychological factors, regulating science and technology. The case of the Soviet nuclear industry during Perestroika, especially after Chernobyl is another good proof for the thesis that developing and using of technologies is determined by social and political factors.

There is a close interconnection between the general process of democratization, public involvement in political and economic affairs started in 1985 and the Chernobyl accident one year later: Perestroika and Glasnost made gradually possible a more open discussion about the ecological hazards in nuclear technologies. The Chernobyl catastrophe itself reinforced the already ongoing process of democratization, gave an additional impetus to the peoples demands for Glasnost, political pluralism and participation.

The Chernobyl accident in April 1986, putting a horrible question mark in the beginning of the Perestroika, was the starting point for finishing the technological determinism in social thought as well as for the raise of a vigorous grass-root environmental movement.

Chernobyl and its aftermath had a twofold effect: It triggered an unprecedented ecological awareness among the Soviet people and it effectively undermined the already waning confidence in Soviet authorities and the Party state.

### **How did Perestroika change the public discourse on nuclear power?**

It can be shown, that the degree of open and free discussion in the press about nuclear power matters during the Perestroika depended almost entirely on the degree of political freedoms , achieved within the process of Glasnost.

Despite the announcement of a new style of politics by Gorbachev beginning in March 1985, despite all his public statements and speeches at public meetings and Party Conferences, the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the information released about it, showed that very little had changed in practice at that time.

For Gorbachev, the Chernobyl accident proved to be a disastrous set-back for his policy of economic renewal and ideological openness. Gorbachev was well aware to be facing the real possibility of Chernobyl diminishing the international standing of the USSR. More than that, Chernobyl could also undermine his personal reputation and trustworthiness as a politician.

The initial Soviet way of reporting on the accident therefore mirrored Gorbachevs strategy to minimize the likelihood of an international outcry caused by this extraordinary environmental tragedy. Moreover, the way of the Soviet Press reporting on Chernobyl may serve as an indicator for the real extent of Glasnost being granted by the Communist party to the Media.

The accident at the Chernobyl atomic power plant occurred during the night of April 26, 1986.

It resulted from a technical experiment, ironically being undertaken to enhance the security of the reactor and the electrical equipment at the plant. For several reasons (negligence and carelessness of the staff) the experiment went out of control, the reactor got unstable and, after a power excursion with a subsequent melting down of the core finally exploded.

A massive release of radioactivity happened. The radioactive cloud was quickly taken by the winds and spread all over Europe. The first alarmbells rang in Scandinavia. In searching for

the origin of the unusual radioactivity the meteorologist and environmental scientists got hints on a possible leak in one of the Soviet nuclear power installations.

This trace turned out to be true. The Soviet media however, instead of practicing glasnosts behaved in the old, experienced manner of the Stalinist past. No official word of explanation was given by the Soviet authorities, and of course, no independent journalistic search was made possible at that time. Only four days later, on April 30, 1986 the TASS news agency released an extremely short notice on an accident at the Chernobyl power plant.

***“The Council of Ministers of the USSR: In the Chernobyl-Nuclear Power Plant occurred an accident causing damage to the reactor. Measures have been taken to reduce the damage. Human casualties are given medical treatment. A Special Commission of the Government has began its work.”***<sup>17</sup>

Two days later, May the Second the press released another official note of the Government.

In the newspapers however, this note could hardly be found. It was hidden behind the bulk of reports on Labor Day praising the high spirits shown by the Soviet people on the occasion of the traditional parades and marches.<sup>18</sup>

In this note not a single word was given on the catastrophic consequences of the reactor explosion. Instead of informing the public about the immediate danger of radiation the official press release stressed a speedy success in rescue efforts and reconstruction work.

On May 4th a third notice appeared in the press informing the Soviet people about a high ranking delegation from Moscow visiting the site of the Chernobyl accident.<sup>19</sup>

The next day, May 5th, every year celebrated in the USSR as “The Day of the Newspaper” saw a another article on Chernobyl. This time as a propaganda blow pointing at various nuclear accidents in the West, thus indirectly playing down the Chernobyl disaster and defending the use of nuclear power in the Soviet Union.

After the initial silence on the Chernobyl accident had to be broken the official Soviet line in dealing with the melt-down at the Chernobyl plant boiled down to a double approach:

At one hand the Soviet media had to convey the official message of heroic work and of quick return to normality at the site of the burst reactor. Most of the press reports for domestic use kept this official optimistic tone. Some international support came from the officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Dr. Hans Blix and Dr. M. Rosen who payed a visit to Moscow in the first decade of May offering the Soviet government assistance and expressing approval and understanding for the Soviet measures.<sup>20</sup>

At the other hand the Soviet leadership tried to make some political profit out of the accident by comparing the heavy, but locally confined nuclear damage caused by the exploded reactor with the possible total destruction of mankind in the wake of an overall nuclear war between the Superpowers.<sup>21</sup>

But in pushing both arguments the Soviets had been trapped: If they succeeded in their strategy of denying the catastrophic outcome of Chernobyl, then they weakened the warning against the threat of nuclear war. If they wanted to succeed in their warning of the nuclear war, then they would have to present a rather realistic picture of the Chernobyl disaster.

This argumentational dilemma remained until the politics of Glasnost went out of the control of the Communist Party and finally Glasnost allowed the true picture of Chernobyl to come out in the Soviet press.

But, independently of this argumentational dilemma the Soviet press slowly and cautiously showed some positive changes in reporting the accident. This was at least partially a result of Glasnost and Perestroika.

Firstly, the Soviet Press started reporting on the technical and medical help being offered by the international community. Most prominently figured US aid brought to the Moscow medical centres by the American doctor Robert Gale, an internationally well known specialist in the field of spine bone transplantation.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, the Chernobyl reports at least in some reform-minded newspapers, like *Izvestija*, began displaying a more or less realistic picture of what was happening in the disaster zone. These reports tried to avoid the over-optimistic tones of official statements claiming minimal losses and speedy recovery. Andrej Illesh, the special Chernobyl correspondent of *Izvestija* mostly succeeded in reporting on the human side of the tragedy, in telling the public what the people of Chernobyl feel: the rescue workers as well as the ordinary men and women being evacuated from their homes in the deadly zone around the reactor.<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly his reports on Chernobyl appeared later as a book, published in the US.<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding these certain positive changes in the news-reports on Chernobyl, the leadership of the USSR remained silent for almost three weeks.

Only on May 14th 1986 Michail Gorbachev made a television address concerning the Chernobyl accident to the Soviet people and to an international audience. This speech was printed in full length, as usually, by the daily newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

Gorbachev repeated very much the line of argumentation already put forward in the TASS announcements and the press reports: At one hand admitting that the Chernobyl accident was a major accident, the effects of which are being quickly liquidated, at the other hand using the accident for Soviet arms control propaganda.<sup>26</sup>

At the time of the televised speech on Chernobyl Gorbachev was obviously playing down the catastrophic consequences of the Chernobyl accident. Only years later in a German TV interview he admitted frankly that Chernobyl marked a deep civilizational rupture in Russian society. **“Bei uns gibt eine Zeitrechnung vor und eine nach Tschernobyl”**<sup>27</sup>

During the second half of 1986 the Soviet press reported predominantly on the progress being made at the Chernobyl reactor site. The daily newspapers carried reports on the construction of the sarcophagus, designed as a protection against the radiation being emitted from the destroyed reactor, and the newspapers reported on the state banquet in honor of the rescue workers of Chernobyl.<sup>28</sup>

With these reports the news-coverage of Chernobyl in 1986 died down. Only one year later, at the first anniversary of the accident Chernobyl surfaced once again as a News story in the Soviet media.

At the same time Russian and Ukrainian and Belarus novelists, free-lance and film-makers writers played an increasingly important role in reflecting the Chernobyl accident and its ecological consequences for the Soviet people. In February 1987 the Soviet TV showed a documentary film about the Chernobyl disaster under the title “The Warning”. In April the newspapers reported on the theater play “The Sarcophagus” by Vladimir Gubarev

being played for the first time not in the Soviet Union but in Austria’s Capital Vienna.<sup>29</sup>



These movie and theater productions demonstrated the need for deeper reflection of the human as well the ecological dimensions of what happened with the Chernobyl reactor. In 1987 the Soviet press was not yet able properly to fulfill the function of stimulating an open and critical debate on nuclear power in the USSR.

To some extent Soviet writers, poets and artists took over the function of public reflection on science, ecology and nuclear power, the journalists were mostly restricted from.<sup>30</sup>

One good example for writers stimulating public debate on Chernobyl and on the Soviet system dealing with that accident is the Ukrainian Volomir Yavorivski, author of the Chernobyl-play "Maria z polinom u kinci stolittya".

In a televised debate with the readers of the literary journal *Drushba Narodov* (People's Friendship) on 31. May 1987, a date around the first anniversary of the reactor melt-down Yavorivski dealt with his impressions of the way the Soviet media was dealing with the Chernobyl tragedy: "... I would say that it is a sad and perhaps dramatic paradox - I trust you will understand me correctly - that what happened at Chernobyl did not happen, say five or six years ago. If it had, we would almost certainly have heard about the Chernobyl tragedy, but at the stage of our national openness we would probably only have heard that it was one of the best accidents in the world and on our planet (laughter). It is a bad thing that this happened right at the start of the restructuring. Unfortunately we lost a very great deal through this. . .

I am asked: what is the situation now in Chernobyl? There is a dead slice of land in the centre of Europe, a dead slice of Ukrainian and Belorussian land, which the people have left. The most alarming thing - on which I should like to dwell for a moment or so - is the affected cheerfulness with regard to Chernobyl. These mistakes were committed by our press in the first articles, but the saddest thing is that it is also happening now. Take the Ukrainian Health Minister - a very respected person who incidentally, spoke only on the ninth day after the accident - informing us of the need to wash our hands and feet well with soap. That was the first information given, when people were waiting to know what to do after finding themselves in this situation for the first time. The minister has again been appearing on television and has, so to speak, been calming us cheerfully. He brought along a diagram - you will not believe this - from which it emerges that before Chernobyl things were worse than they are now. The thought simply struck me that perhaps another reactor needs to blow up for everything to be absolutely fine in this situation (laughter). Chernobyl means pain and Chernobyl will not recede into past."<sup>31</sup>

Today the rather shameful story of the official Soviet news coverage right after the Chernobyl accident happened is well documented in the West<sup>32</sup>, but also in Russia and in Ukraine itself.<sup>33</sup>

A detailed inquiry into the news coverage about Chernobyl and its consequences (print media, radio and TV) proves, that the amount of critical information about the seriousness of the accident, the possible ecological and health risks had been restricted as long as the Party had been able to put pressure to bear on the media.

With the waning of the Party's influence and power more and more critical articles appeared, not only about the true dimensions of the Chernobyl catastrophe but also about the background of the atomic programme of the Soviet Union, about failures and shortcomings in reactor design, lack of public participation in the decision making process.

During the time up to 1988, the year, when the 19. Party Conference took place (this event has really been a watershed within the Perestroika) there have been publications on

Chernobyl and related nuclear power issues prepared in the usual Soviet manner i.e. playing down the scale of the accident and denying major ecological or health hazards for the population; focussing on the heroic work of the Soviet rescue workers (mainly firemen, servicemen, physicians) , praising the supervision of the rescue operations by Party and Soviet officials as well as by leading scientists and engineers , flown in from the major scientific centers, dealing with nuclear matters, showing gratitude for international help and opening at the same time a fierce propaganda battle against the alleged Western "Anti Soviet Chernobyl Campaign".

Beginning with 1989, with the open political battle between the reformers and the Communist hardliners within the Party, with the diminishing of the Party's influence in the Soviet Society and with the emerging of first sign of establishing a multiparty system , the discussions in the press and in the electronic media about Chernobyl and the Soviet atomic programme as a whole , including military aspects (weapon development, testing sites) have become step by step more and more open , free of pressure from the higher ranks of Party and State bureaucracy.

In 1990 and especially in 1991, when the Soviet Union was almost breaking apart and the real powers in the republics have been transferred to the newly elected parliamentary bodies, the full scale of the Chernobyl tragedy with respect to the Ukrainian and Belorussian people has been revealed. On the Fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident at the end of April 1991 had been held two conferences in Kiev and in Minsk on the consequences and the various ramifications of the Chernobyl disaster.<sup>34</sup>

Eventually critical comments have been appearing about principal shortcomings and even failures in the design in the RBMK (Chernobyl type) reactor, thus highlighting, that not only the irresponsible behaviour of the technical and engineering staff at the Chernobyl station is to blame for what occurred, but that some inherent technical design faults in the very construction of the reactor have to be regarded as the main contributor to that catastrophe.

More than that. Articles in the press and TV features have been appearing about aspects of the military use of nuclear energy, over radioactive contamination of large areas in the Urals and in Kazakhstan, due either to accidents, that have occurred in the past and kept secret by the military, or due to the testing programme of nuclear warheads in the "Semipalatinsk Polygon".

Triggered by these publications concerned citizens in a lot of these afflicted regions (Kazakhstan, the Urals region, Northern and Central Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltic Republics) came together and founded either movements in protection of the environment and defying nuclear technologies ( both military and peaceful) or Green or Ecologist Parties.

Ecological and anti-nuclear protests played a major part in the nationalist movements in Russia, in Ukraine, in Belarus, in the Baltic states and in Central Asia mobilizing the people for democracy, freedom and independence from the central government in Moscow.<sup>35</sup>

December 1991 saw the final curtain falling in the political Drama of Perestroika: Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's president appeared to be a king without land, all effective powers had been transferred to the Soviet republics. Finally Gorbachev resigned from his post and the Soviet Union ended in dissolution. In hindsight the explosion at the Chernobyl power plant at the very beginning of Perestroika appeared to be the first, albeit unintended blow at the Communist rule in Moscow.

## **Conclusion: The Dilemmas of Post-Soviet Russia's nuclear policy**

There is a general agreement among political scientists, that the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the foundation of democratic republics within the CIS has paved in many respects the way for the transition of Russia to a western type parliamentary democracy.

This transition to democracy includes the establishment and the protection of a free press as a part of an emerging Russian Civil Society, capable of controlling the state and the bureaucracy. It's an open question though, whether Russia will succeed on its way towards democratic rule. The establishment of democratic institutions and procedures in Russia after 1991 (presidency and Parliament elected under competitive conditions; the division of power between legislative, executive, and judicial authorities; the existence of a pluralistic media system encompassing a wide range of political and ideological positions) is a particular development well in line with the existence of several waves of democratization after 1945 throughout the world.

Nevertheless, the process of establishing democracies in Russia (as well as in other parts of Eastern Europe) is not to be confused with the mere fact of installing parliamentary institutions. The problem lies much deeper: Real progress in matters of Russian ( and general East-European) democratization depends on institution-building as well as on the emergence of structures and behavioral patterns of a "civil society". Using the term "civil society" one has to aware of the vagueness and even ambiguity of this concept: Whether the civil society encompasses the institutions of the democratic state or not is an issue of contention among scholars. But having in mind the historical evolution of the civil society in Western Europe with its emancipation from the ancien regime, it's quite clear, that the introduction of the concept "civil society" during the Eighties within the communist states of Eastern Europe was either a matter of dissident circles (Poland, Chekhoslovakia, Hungary) opposing the existing state<sup>36</sup>, or was a matter of reform oriented intellectuals within the higher ranks of the ruling parties, intending to improve the state ( notably and most influentially in the Soviet Union under Gorbachov).<sup>37</sup>

Assuming for historical and methodological reasons that the civil society is existing independently from the insitutions of the democratic state, it's hard to deny that in the case of Russia , as well as in the other East European Countries, we face the problem, that the social traditons in these countries are lacking a great deal of "civilian elements".

"Most of the societies of Central and Eastern Europe which were later to find themselves with the communist bloc, and are currently in the process of systemic transformation, did not experience this (western) path of development. ....their peripheral character and backwardness were not conducive to the development of civil society.... Thus there was no mass socialization culminating in the acceptance of the institutions of the state, familiarity with their structure, and assumption of responsibility for them." <sup>38</sup>

Hence the survival of the democratic state in Russia today depends to a large extend on the emergence of a civil society, its mentality, its patterns of action and standards of behavior.

In this respect there is a peculiarity in Post-Soviet Russia and a specific difference to Western Europe: In Western Europe civil society developed prior to the structures of the democratic state; in Russia today one can distinguish structures of parliamentarism, but it's hard to find a civil society comparable to that in the West.

Hence the emergence of a civil society is to be fostered by the state itself, not to gain more control over the people, but quite on the contrary, to become a strictly neutral and reliable structure. If there is no progress in creating a civil society in Russia, it's hard to avoid the consequences that the republican institutions in that country will remain little more than a mere "facade", being vulnerable, weak and fragile.

With regard to nuclear policies and nuclear power debates in the post-soviet era its fair to conclude that the structural and institutional changes in the atomic complex as well as the relative openness of the political and scientific debate on nuclear power demonstrate a certain progress of Russia towards the model of a democratic society. The least one can say is, that structural foundations for a democratic and pluralistic discourse including a free press reporting on controversial issues have been laid.<sup>39</sup>

But, with regard to Russian nuclear power there is still little progress in public discussion.

Up to now the Post-Soviet Nuclear Power complex faces severe difficulties tantamount to real dilemmas:

**The first dilemma** is based on economics:

This dilemma in nuclear politics is resulting from the so far painful and not very successful shift to market economy in Russia. Despite the sharp decline in GNP there is a shortage of energy supply mostly due to old energy wasting technologies. This creates a need for generating electricity from insecure nuclear reactors.

And, notwithstanding that in Russia exists is a unique situation: the country owns huge natural resources of oil, gas and coal, there is a special need for nuclear power in the European part of Russia, particularly in the big cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>40</sup> An additional factor pressing for the domestic use of nuclear power is the traditional structure of Russian exports: The main source of hard currency revenues is the export of crude oil and natural gas to the West. This export strategy imposes limitations on alternatives using gas turbines for power generation instead of nuclear reactors.

**The second dilemma** is of scientific-technical nature, but related to economics.

The existing Russian civilian nuclear complex, consisting of dozens of scientific and technical institutions with thousands of highly qualified scientists and engineers is able to design and produce new, safer types of pressurized water reactors. In order to improve - wherever feasible - the safety of the existing reactors Russian scientists are willing to cooperate with the West. The scientific discussions in Russia are reflecting the need for safer reactors as well as the ability to achieve that goal. But unfortunately at that rather abstract point the consensus and the capacity in Soviet nuclear science ends. Given the economic situation in today's Russia, nobody can offer a clear cut realistic strategy for a renewed nuclear power programme.<sup>41</sup>

More than that. Any prolonged economic crisis in Russia will certainly weaken the scientific and technical basis for innovations in the nuclear industry and therefore damage the capability of Russia to modernize or replace its aging nuclear reactors.

**The third dilemma** is the most powerful. It is political in nature:

The existing political institutions and governing bodies in Russia and Ukraine (Presidency, Parliament, independent Judiciary) are being legitimized by the will of the people expressed in free elections. In that respect any of parliamentary decisions or of presidential "ukazy" enjoys a political legitimacy much greater than the decisions of the "people assemblies" in

Soviet times. But this is a rather formalistic statement, true only in principle, for a given moment of time. The political legitimacy of any institution and its decisions is derived from the existence of democratic procedures and the obedience of democratic rules.<sup>42</sup>

In this respect the political institutions in Russia today can be regarded as democratic ones. But once the democratic rules of the political game are given, then the legitimacy of decisions is self-asserting or self-denying for pragmatic reasons: The legitimacy of political decisions is also depending on how these decisions are being put into practice and to what extent they are being honored by the various political actors. If Parliaments are producing legislations nobody cares about, than the legitimacy of these legislations is being undermined. Many of parliamentary and governmental decisions in Russia are either doubtful or wrong. Decisions turn out either to have no practical relevance or to be blocked in a stalemate between Presidency and Parliament. There shall be no surprise about the lack of respect among the Russian population for a Government and a Parliament indulging in idle, vain and fruitless debates. Under these circumstances Russia is not expected to be developing or even to be implementing a technically sound, an economically grounded and a politically legitimized nuclear energy program in the near future.

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G. Krshishanowski: Die Hauptaufgaben der Elektrifizierung Russlands, (russ.) Moskau, 1920.

<sup>1</sup> W.I. Lenin, Werke, Berlin, 1959, Bd. 31, S./ 414/415; *ibid.* S. 278/279; S. 513.

<sup>2</sup> N.S. Chrustschew, Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, Moskau, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> See: Wolfgang Engler: Versuch über den Staatssozialismus, Frankfurt/M., 1992, pp. 26.

Andrzej Walicki: Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom. The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia, Cambridge, 1995

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt: Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft, Frankfurt/Main, 1955;

<sup>5</sup> The proposed notion "Half-Cutted Modernity" (in German: "Halbierte Moderne") may be instrumental in describing the peculiarities within the modernizing process, that underwent the Soviet Union: tremendous progress in science, technology and industry against the background of political repression and ideological indoctrination.

The question though, how to assess the modernization (industrial, social, scientific) of non-democratic totalitarian or authoritarian societies requires further investigation. Parallels between modernizing processes in Nazi - Germany and the Soviet Union during the thirties may be drawn. In particular the question of social mobility and technological modernization in totalitarian societies is to be analyzed.

<sup>6</sup> Paul R. Josephson: Atomic Culture in the USSR: Before and After Chernobyl, in: Soviet Social Problems, edit. by Anthony James, Walter D. Connor, David E. Powell, San Francisco, Oxford, 1991, pp. 57-77.

<sup>7</sup> On the official soviet line towards nuclear power: "The taming of the atom for peaceful and defensive purposes", see: Science in the USSR, Moscow, 1973, p. 26.

See also: Atomnoj Energetike XX let. Moskva, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> David R. Marples: Chernobyl & Nuclear Power in the USSR, London 1986, pp. 37-70.

<sup>9</sup> David R. Marples: Chernobyl & Nuclear Power in the USSR, London 1986, pp. pp. 71-93..

<sup>10</sup> See: Proceedings of the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th Party Congresses of the CPSU, Moscow, 1971;1976;1981;1986.

<sup>11</sup> On the Soviet Nuclear Program see: A.M. Petrosy'ants: Problems of Nuclear Science and Technology. The Soviet Union as a World Nuclear Power, Oxford, New York, 1981

<sup>12</sup> Joan T. DeBardeleben: Esoteric Policy Debate: Nuclear Safety Issues in the Soviet Union and in the German Democratic Republic, in: British Journal of Political Sciences, 15, pp. 227-253.

<sup>13</sup> Donald D. Barry: Political and Legal Aspects of the Development and Use of Nuclear Power in the USSR and Eastern Europe, in: Soviet and East European Law and the Scientific Technical Revolution, edit. by Peter Maggs, Gordon Smith, George Ginsburgs, New York 1982, pp. 159-180.

<sup>14</sup> See: Valentin Rasputin: Abschied von Matjora, Berlin, 1979;

Dshingis Aitmatov: Der weisse Dampfer, Berlin, 1974.

- <sup>15</sup> Shores Medvedev: Nuclear Disaster in the Urals, New York, 1979, Shores Medvedev: The Legacy of Chernobyl. Oxford, 1990, Victor Hayes, Mirko Bojcun: The Chernobyl Disaster, London, 1988,
- <sup>16</sup> Hans Wassmund: Die gescheiterte Utopie. Aufstieg und Fall der UdSSR, München, 1993; Stephen White: Gorbachev and after, Glasgow, 1992, Rachel Walker: Six years that shook the world. Perestroika the impossible project, Manchester 1993.
- <sup>17</sup> The Russian original text: TASS. Ot Soveta Ministrov SSSR. Na Ćernobyl'skoj AQS proizo,la avariä, povrel' G'Q odin iz reaktorov. Prinimaüt'sä mery po likvidacii posledstvij avarii. Postradav, im okazyvaetsä pomow'. Sozdana pravitel'stvennä kommissiä." Izvestija, 30. April 1986.
- <sup>18</sup> Die in der UdSSR traditionellen Erste-Mai-Paraden und Festumzüge wurden routiniert wie immer, aber politisch-ptopagandistisch ganz im Zeichen des Aufschwungs und der Perestroika durchgeführt. Auch in Kiew, der Hauptstadt der Ukraine wurde bei strahlenden Sonnenschein (in einem von den Menschen ungeahnten doppelten, dramatischen Sinne) der übliche Maiumzug ohne jegliche Einschränkung durchgeführt. Dies erscheint im Lichte der durch Tschernobyl verursachten Strahlenbelastung als ein ungeheuerlicher, politisch kalkulierter Zynismus der Sowjetbehörden gegenüber der eigenen Bevölkerung.
- <sup>19</sup> Posewenie rajona Ćernobyl'skoj atomnoj stancii. In: Izvestija, 4. Mai 1986. In dieser 160 Worte umfassenden TASS-Mitteilung über den Besuch der Regierungsdelegation an der Unglücksstelle (wobei ca. 25% des Zeitungstextes bestand aus der vollständigen Wiedergabe der offiziellen Amtsbezeichnungen der Delegationsmitglieder bestand) wird über den guten Fortgang der Aufräumarbeiten und über die Sorge von Partei und Regierung um das Wohl der betroffenen, und teilweise evakuierten Menschen berichtet.
- <sup>20</sup> Siehe u.a. TASS-Mitteilung in: Izvestija, 6. Mai 1985 und den Artikel 'K avarii na AQS'. In: Izvestija 9, Mai 1985. Siehe auch die TASS - Mitteilung über die Pressekonferenz anlässlich des Besuchs des Generaldirektors der Internationalen Atomenergiekommission (IAEA) Dr. Hans Blix in Moskau unter dem Titel: Ćernobyl'skaä AQS: Situaciä stabiliziruetsä. In: Izvestija 11. Mai 1986.
- <sup>21</sup> Ebenda. Symptomatisch dafür außerdem der Aufsatz "Ćernobyl' i Va,ington" in: Izvestija, 7. Mai 1986.
- <sup>22</sup> Siehe: Izvestija 6. Mai 1986. Siehe auch das Interview mit Dr. Gale in der Izvestija unter dem Titel: Missiä Doktora Gejla, in: Izvestija, 16. Mai 1986. Ausführlich dazu die Erinnerungen von Robert Gale in seinem Buch: "Final Warning". a.a.O.
- <sup>23</sup> Siehe: A. Illesh: V trudnyj čas, in: Izvestija 9. Mai 1986, A. Illesh: Dni zabot i trevog, in: Izvestija 12. Mai 1986, A. Illesh: Neskol'ko interv'ü po odnomu voprosu, in: Izvestija 13. Mai 1986, A. Illesh: Osobaä Zona, in: Izvestija, 17. Mai 1986, A. Illesh: Ćerenga nomer odin, in: Izvestija, 19. Mai 1986, A. Illesh: V dvux ,agax ot reaktora, in: Izvestija, 21. Mai 1986, G. Alimov, A. Illesh: Bol' Ćernobylä, in: Izvestija, 28. Mai 1986, Nikolai Baklanov, Andrej Illesh: Obyčnyj rejs po osoboj zone, in: Izvestija 29. Mai 1986, B. Ivanov, A. Illesh: Slovo Ćernonyl' znaüt vse, Interview mit Robert Gale, in: Izvestija, 30. Juli 1986.
- <sup>24</sup> Andrei Illesh: Chernobyl, New York, 1987. Theater play " The Sarcophagus" by V. Gubarev, published in excerpts in "Sovetskaya Kultura" in September 1986; See also the documentary novel by Yury Sherbak: "Chernobyl": A Documentary Story", London, 1989, first published in 1987 in the journal "Yunost" and the novel by Volodimir Yavorivsky: "Maria z polinom u kinci stolittya", published in the journal "Vitchizna" in 1987.
- <sup>25</sup> Izvestija, 15. Mai 1986.
- <sup>26</sup> Vystuplenie M.S. Gorbaçova po Sovetskomu Televideniü, in: Izvestija, 15. Mai 1986.
- <sup>27</sup> Gorbatschow zu Tschernobyl in seiner Wirkung in der Sowjetunion: in: Interview mit Franz Alt in dessen Sendung "Querdenker" in 3sat am 20. August 1997 um 21.15-21.35 Uhr. Das Interview wurde dokumentiert in: Der Tagesspiegel: Nr. 16076, 20. August 1997, S. 4.
- <sup>28</sup> A. Illesh: Spasibo, Geroi Ćernobylä, in: Izvestija, 26. September 1986, N. Baklanov, A. Pralnikov: **Ukrowenie reaktora**, in: Izvestija, 30. 9. 1986.
- <sup>29</sup> N. Novikov: 'Sarkofag' v Vene, in: Izvestija, 8. April 1987. Das Theaterstück der "Der Sarkophag" von V. Gubarev, wurde in Auszügen erstmals in "Sovetskaja Kultura" im September 1986 veröffentlicht. See also the documentary novel by Yury Sherbak: "Chernobyl": A Documentary Story", London, 1989, first published in 1987 in the journal "Yunost" and the novel by Volodimir Yavorivsky: "Maria z polinom u kinci stolittya", published in the journal "Vitchizna" in 1987.

30

See the poem on Chernobyl by Ivan Trifonov:

Po doroge na Pripät´

Na severo.zapad legla polosa  
Soglasno kaprizu pogody,  
I tixo osnovnye vänut lesa,  
Ronää zelenye svody.  
Kak prosto naru,en estestvennyj krug  
So dnä sotvorenää sveta!  
I ¶ |OW|[ derevev vse bol´,e vokrug  
V razgare zelenogo leta.  
Mne zdes´ postoät´ - i minuty nel´zä;  
Zdes´ skorost´ dol¶ QD byt´ - ne ni¶ H  
Zdes´ vse, kto v salone, - segodnä druž´ä,  
A zavtra, byt´ mo¶ HW L bli¶ H  
A ¶ HOW\H sosny stenoi stoät,  
I ä skvoz´ nevol´nye slezy,  
Glä¶ X kak poslednej listvoj ,elestät  
Dve-tri belostvolnyx berezy.

In: Moskva, 11/91, S. 74.

Verweis auf Christa Wolf: Der Störfall, Berlin 1988.

Zur politischen Kompensationsfunktion von Kunst und Literatur in den staatssozialistischen Gesellschaften siehe Lutz Rathenow und seine These: der **”Literatur als politischer Ersatzauskunft”** in der DDR und in den anderen real-sozialistischen Gesellschaften. In: Sendung “Richard Schneider im Gespräch mit Lutz Rathenow” B1 TV am 12. August 1997, 23.20 Uhr.

Die Sendung handelte vor allem von Rathenows Leben in der DDR, seiner Sicht auf die juristische Aufarbeitung des DDR-Vergangenheit, dabei insbesondere auf die DDR-Grenzschrüter sowie um Egon Krenz und deren Verantwortung für die Mauertoten.

Rathenow streifte die Rolle der Literatur und die Bedeutung der Literaten in der DDR und verglich diese mit der jetzigen Rolle von Ex-DDR-Literatur in der bundesdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit. Seine These lautet: Verlust des politischen **“Bedeutungsmehrwertes”** der DDR Literatur nach der Wende.

31 Volodimir Javorivskij: “Chernobyl - one of the best accidents” in: Survey - a journal of East & West Studies. Vol. 29, Nr. 4(127) August 1987, S. 139-140.

32 David Marples, Chernobyl & Nuclear Power in the USSR, London, 1986.

33 See: I vpade zvezda polin, Kiev, 1991.

See : the book by Andrey Illesh: Chernobyl, New York, 1987.

34 David R. Marples, Chernobyl: Observations on the Fifth Anniversary, in: Soviet Economy, vol.7, Nr 2 (April-June) 1991, pp. 175-178.

35 David R. Marples, The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster, New York, 1988;

See also: Report on Tatarstan Anti-Nuclear Society's efforts to call for an All-Russian Referendum on nuclear power plants, in: Postfactum, Moscow, 10. May 1992.

36 For Poland see: Piotr Ogrodzinski: For Models of Civil Society and the Transformation in East-Central Europe, in: Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski (edit.): After Communism, Warsaw, 1995, pp. 183/84

37 The concept of "Civic Society" has been discussed during the Eighties by Soviet social scientists and philosophers, maintaining that "Democratic Socialism" should be based on the rule of law and on open discussions on the exiting contradictions within the society.

For the former Soviet Union see: Gail W. Lapidus: State and Society: Toward the Emergence of Civil Society in the Soviet Union, in: Seweryn Bialer (ed.): Politics, Society and Nationality Inside Gorbachev's Russia, Boulder, London, 1989;

See also: Anatolij Butenko: Zum Verlauf der Perestroika, in: Klaus Segbers (Hrsg.): Perestroika. Zwischenbilanz. Frankfurt/M., 1990, S. 367-383.

38 Jadwiga Stanizkis: In Search of a Paradigm of Transformation, in: Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski (Edit.): After Communism, Warsaw, 1995, p. 43.

- 39 National bodies of supervision of the nuclear complex USSR - Committee for the State supervision of Safety in Industry and Nuclear Power, Ministry of Nuclear Energy and Industry, In Russia (since 1992): Gosatomnadzor Rossii, Gossanqpidnadzor, Gosmometet po črezvyčajnym situaciäm, Roskomgidromet, Minčkologii Rossii)  
 In Ukraine (since 1992): Ukrainskij Goskomitet po ädernoj i adiacionnoj bezopasnosti.  
 Legislation on Chernobyl:  
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 Zakonodatel'nye akty Ukainskoj SSR sväzannye s Černobyl'skoj katastrofy, Kiev, 1991  
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 Goskomčernobyl' Rossii (Gosudarstvennyj komitet po likvidacii posledsvij avarii na Černobyl'skoj AQS);  
 Institut problem bezopasnogo razvitiä atomnoj qnergetiki Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk;  
 Formirovanie central'nogo banka dannyx po sistemno-analičeskomu obespečeniü rabot Goskomčernobyl' Rossii.  
 Mel' YHGRPVWYHQ\M issledovatel'skij centr AN Ukrainy.
- 40 In Russia nuclear power contributes only 11% to total amount of electricity being produced, but in St. Petersburg the share is 33% and Moscow the share is 22%. In Ukraine the share of nuclear power in the overall production of elecric energy is currently 25%.
- 41 Scientific debates on the future of nuclear power in Russia see:  
 Kommissiä po atomnoj qnergetike RAN;  
 Discussions and findings see:  
 Bezopasnost' ädernoj qnergetiki. Diskussiä v Prezidiume RAN, Vestnik Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk 9/1992, str. 3-39.  
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 V.N. Abramova, A.I. Abramov, Nuł QD li nam ädernaä qnergetika?, Moskva 1992,  
 I.I. Novikov, G.N. Kruł LOLQ (3 Anan'ev, Atomnye qlektrostantsii i vozmoł Q\H alternativy, Vestnik RAN 6/93, str. 498-502,  
 K.N. Semenenko, Vodorodnaä qnergetika: mif ili real'nost'?, Vestnik RAN, 10/93, str. 885-888.
- 42 Niklas Luhmann: Legitimation durch Verfahren, stw 443, Frankfurt/Main, 1983  
 Bettina Westle: Politische Legitimität. Theorien, Konzepte, empirische Befunde, Baden-Baden, 1989.