

What Lies Ahead?

TODAY, WITH THE benefit of hindsight, I believe that those who signed the Belovezh accord had no intention, even from the outset, of carrying out the commitments they made. They deliberately deceived their own people because, after all, they clearly saw that they could win support only by appearing to be concerned about preserving the Union—granted in the form of a commonwealth. It had to appear that they were not retreating from the choice the citizens made in March 1991.

To deceive the public, to lead it astray in order to paralyze any possible resistance to the operation they had begun—that was their aim. It was as though they were saying: “Look, we are preserving everything that Gorbachev wants to preserve with his treaty, but in our version almost all the republics will unite except for the Baltic republics. Gorbachev’s version will unite only six, seven, maybe eight republics, leaving out Ukraine.”

In general—and I think this is obvious from everything I have said above—the Russian leaders, along with their two partners, intended to deceive the public from the very beginning. They proclaimed one thing to our country and to the international community, but they did another.

The commonwealth scheme lacked any real impulse toward cooperation. Today’s problems all flow from this. Of course, also sharing the blame are the politicians in the CIS countries. (I would exempt from this charge Nazarbaev, president of Kazakhstan, who insisted quite stubbornly, and still insists today, on the development of processes of integration.) The “top brass” in the CIS countries are happy playing the “sovereignty flute”: They do not wish to relinquish one iota of power. But unless they do, no kind of unification is possible. In short, the interests of the political elites were given priority over those of the citizenry.

Especially noteworthy is the responsibility of the Russian leadership in

all this. By no means was it accidental that at a summit of the CIS, held in Kishinev in the fall of 1997, all the participants criticized Russia and its leadership for the Commonwealth's state of paralysis. President Yeltsin even acknowledged that the criticism was justified: After all, for years he had been chairman of the Council of Heads of State, but during that time nothing ever moved from dead center. It is not yet clear what conclusions he has drawn (or will draw) from the sharp criticism lodged against him or from his own self-criticism. I, for one, do not expect much. True, recently there seem to have been some steps toward greater cooperation among members of the Commonwealth. Once the euphoria over independence had passed and sobriety had been restored, public opinion shifted significantly—and even the views of some of the political elite.

Under these conditions new attitudes have developed regarding the relations between members of the CIS—above all, those between Russia and the other member states. Here disparate interests clash and many different cards are being played—by Russia, the new states on the territory of the former USSR, their neighbors, Western Europe, and the United States. All this deserves separate analysis. Here I will examine only what applies to the subject at hand.

At issue, above all, are the natural processes of integration that are gaining strength in many regions of the world and also on a world scale. For the “post-Soviet space” this problem is extremely acute. Everyone is aware of the wide-ranging consequences that resulted from the disruption of historically established, diverse ties. But if these consequences are understood, it would seem logical for people to seek new forms of cooperation and integration. Yet neither in Russia nor in the countries of the so-called “near abroad” [the non-Russian countries of the former Soviet Union] is there the necessary clarity on this question.

Proposals for closer cooperation with the countries of the “near abroad” are regarded with suspicion by many in Russia. The reasons are political, because the question arises as to who was responsible for the destruction of the former Union. And economic motives are also involved, related to the financial difficulties Russia is experiencing today.

Another factor exists which, although not discussed openly, can be deduced from the position the Russian authorities have taken. They regard the current state of affairs as more advantageous for Russia because, in the absence of multilateral treaty mechanisms of integration, Russia can more easily pursue a differentiated policy on a bilateral basis, to carry out its own

maneuvers, pursue its own narrow interests at the expense of the interests of others, and impose its will. In my mind, operating in this way means seeing no farther than the end of one's nose. It indicates a failure to understand the advantages that a new form of integration can bring.

Attitudes among ordinary Russians present quite a different picture. The latest sociological research shows that, increasingly, the Russian people understand they were deceived. But so far they are unable, or unwilling, to force their leaders to take a serious approach toward questions of integration within the framework of the CIS. Further, the press and television in Russia try to convince people that what is needed today, above all, is to think about "how to live in Russia" and that the rest is unimportant. *But in fact the very question of "how to live in Russia" involves the question of what to do about integration, how to arrange relations with other member states of the CIS.* These are essentially two sides of the same coin—unless of course one is occupied with constructing scholastic schemes and playing mind games, lacking the courage to assess the situation soberly, to evaluate the people's attitudes and their desire for cooperation among the states of the former USSR.

The same situation prevails in the other former Soviet republics. In these past few years all the new independent states have traveled a considerable distance and have strengthened their sovereignty. But among the peoples of these states, interest in the historical community that existed, in economic, cultural, and scientific ties, in the fact that for centuries we were all in the same melting pot—that interest persists. *The state represented by the Soviet Union no longer exists, but for the time being that country is still alive.* It has been broken into pieces, but those pieces are trying, so to speak, to form a network of capillaries so that the flow of blood will not be stopped completely. And, I repeat, this interest in the community that once existed is being expressed by the people themselves, which is decisive.

Another aspect of the matter is the position maintained by the West. In Western capitals judgments are made with extreme prejudice against processes of integration in the post-Soviet space. Such processes are regarded there as nothing less than attempts to revive the Russian or Soviet empire. Not only do they make no effort to hide this attitude, they actively oppose rapprochement among the new independent states. The United States has reacted with great concern. It does everything it can, taking advantage of momentary difficulties, to prevent integration in general, especially among Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. But such a policy is, to say the least, short-

sighted. It will result in the very opposite of what is intended by encouraging Russia toward actions in the spirit of imperial policy.

Contrary to this view, a process of integration, if carried out within a legal framework of definitive rules, adhering to principles of equality, operating only voluntarily, and providing for the creation of effective multilateral mechanisms that would erect barriers against any manifestation of imperial ambitions—that kind of integration (and that is the only kind we are talking about) would be in the best possible interests of Russia, the West, the entire international community—that is, their interests as properly understood. But for this to occur many things must change: the policies of Russia itself, the positions taken by the other CIS countries, and the orientations and approaches adopted by the West.

In my opinion, integration among the CIS countries is both necessary and possible. As I have already indicated, strategic, economic, and cultural factors speak for reintegration. Above all, there are human factors that operate in favor of reintegration. But to resolve this issue, certain questions must be answered.

First, is a movement for a new Union even possible? If you consider that most of the heads of state in the CIS countries are the same politicians who concluded the Belovezh and the Alma-Ata agreements, and in view of the way they have operated within the CIS until now, I frankly am not optimistic. I do not think that they will display the will and initiative necessary for this process.

In my view, the locomotive for a revival of the Union, the engine that would drive a process of reintegration, could be the parliaments, which have a mandate from the people.

Second, what lies ahead? A return to the USSR? Today that would be a reactionary idea. Of course we all feel a sense of loss and injury for the country in which we lived and for which we bore responsibility. But there are distinct realities and circumstances, and a particular context in which the discussion is proceeding. Today this context consists in the fact that, whether we like it or not, *independent states* do exist. That of course is primary and cannot be ignored.

Therefore I do not believe that a return to the USSR is possible. If such a demand were raised, and especially if a policy consistent with that demand were pursued, defeat would be inevitable. And it would be a defeat for all those who care about our country and about what is happening to us now that we are living in separate states.

My answer is that Russia's relations with the now independent republics must be improved. I believe that *the republics would recognize relations that were based on equality and that, by improving relations in this way, these states could reach a new stage of cooperation.*

There are also those in Russia who say that the Russia that existed before the October revolution, before the formation of the Soviet Union, must be restored. But what does that mean? Do they want to ignore the nearly seventy years of the Soviet Union's existence, when Union republics were indeed a reality? However difficult the conditions under which these republics developed, they did exist. Does anyone think that this has no importance for Ukraine today, for Kazakhstan, or for any of the other CIS countries? Does this mean we should begin an all-out campaign to reunify these countries? I think such an approach would drag the Russian people, and not only the Russian people, into bloodshed. How many times can people be put in that kind of situation? I was always mindful of precisely that problem, always guided by concern about it, and I remain absolutely convinced that such an approach is not the answer.

And so the question arises: *What kind of new Union?* A federation, a confederation, an economic union like the European Economic Community? What would its composition be? A Union of only the Slavic states [i.e., Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine] or a Slavic union plus Kazakhstan? And so the questions go, and all require answers if we are to have a serious discussion, if we are to arrive at a serious policy.

I believe that it is realistic today to promote the idea of a solid Union among four states: the three Slavic states plus Kazakhstan. Let the CIS live according to its rules and its laws. But we should state emphatically, right away: "Here is the possibility of a genuine Union, a modern form of close cooperation."

Any political speculation on this subject must be decisively opposed. If we remain within the framework of the old thinking, the old philosophy, we will not move one step forward in the search for a policy suitable to our times.

We should not become euphoric. I have traveled in many regions of Russia, and the mood of the political elites in these regions is not to act hastily on the question of a Union. "Things are so difficult," they say. "We don't know how to solve the problems we already have, especially our economic and social problems. All responsibility has devolved to the regions; it is all on our shoulders. Wouldn't a Union mean that once again we would have to share our finances and resources with other republics?"

The political scientists with whom I meet monthly—people of varied ideological persuasions—constantly emphasize this aspect of the problem. When people are asked whether they would agree to a certain lowering of their standard of living in order to become reunited once again and to provide aid to the other republics who are in an even worse situation, the answer is most often (by nearly two-thirds of those polled), “No, we wouldn’t want that.” Still, in polls that have been taken in the three Slavic republics and Kazakhstan over an extended period, 72–75 percent of those questioned speak in favor of the revival of a Union in some new form.

To repeat, we should not become euphoric. To do so would make a bad situation worse and would only discredit the idea of reintegration. It would make it more difficult to start this process, which is now emerging from below.

As a first step we need a political declaration that would establish one goal: to create a Union of the four states. On the way toward this goal, a great deal must be done. There are partial goals we must achieve: the formation of an economic union, coordination on defense problems, and cooperation in humanitarian fields. Such a declaration would immediately remove many problems in relations with Ukraine, and it would have a calming effect in Kazakhstan and in Russia as well. The process would begin to flow in a normal channel.

These, then, are my practical proposals and my general conception of what is needed. I wish to add one reminder: Without an overall plan, we will constantly be bumping our noses against the main question, which remains unresolved.

The question is not one of restoring a unitary state. The nations of the Commonwealth will not renounce their independence. Nor will the nations and nationalities of Russia gain anything from attempts to impose political domination. The problem is to establish a reasonable balance between the independence of the participants in the Union and the powers that are granted to its common institutions.

The Union could have been preserved. A new Union can be created.

