

Call for Papers
**Perestroika and the “Wild” 1990s:
State, Society, and the Individual in Eastern Europe, 1985–2000**

Workshop at the German Historical Institute in Moscow, 3–4 September 2020, supported by
the *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Russia* and the *German Historical Institute in Moscow*

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Perestroika and the associated policy of *glasnost* set in motion some of the most significant political reforms of the twentieth century, reforms that ushered in an era of profound historical change. In Eastern Europe, this period of transition and transformation launched a fundamental remodeling of relationships between the state, society, and the individual. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies were intended to tackle the challenges of the stagnating Soviet economy and society, but across the globe their mostly unintended consequences had a dramatic impact: the fall of the Soviet Union brought about the end of the Cold War world order and caused, in Vladimir Putin's words, the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.”

For East European societies, perestroika became the starting point for far-reaching processes of liberalization and democratization which continued until the turn of the millennium. The reforms and the new transparency had deeply disturbing effects on these societies because they shed light on the numerous deficiencies, abuses of authority, and corruption which had marked the years of Soviet power. The period during which the reforms unleashed a massive destabilization of the socialist order was characterized by intense political, socio-economic, and cultural upheaval and displacements for many people. Because of widespread criminality and a virtually ubiquitous sense of chaos—but also as a result of a feeling of freedom and opportunities for innovation in every area of life—an entire decade was dubbed the “wild 1990s.” Looking back, many people condemned this turbulent time as a period when they experienced deep uncertainty and a loss of identity, as recent oral history studies have shown. The Levada Center's surveys record a steadily rising number of people who regret the destruction of the Soviet Union and complain about the consequences of perestroika. The reforms have become the primary way to explain the turbulent 1990s, with its economic crises, predatory capitalism, and socio-political cleavages. For many “ordinary” people, nostalgia about the lost certainties of late socialist life has become a widely shared emotional state and thus a driving political force in many parts of the former Eastern bloc, which in turn has helped to strengthen authoritarian and nationalistic forces. The ways in which norms, values, attitudes, and practices changed varied in terms of specific political cultures and the interests of particular groups of agents. Likewise, the extent to which political and economic elites—and different age groups, genders, communities, and individuals—experienced the caesura also ranged widely. The conference aims to examine the dynamics and impact of the reforms by looking at people's social, economic, and cultural practices during perestroika and in the following decade of transformation. Our intention is to explore the (dis)continuities, differences, and (dis)entanglements of this time in Eastern Europe in a comparative perspective and by taking methodologically innovative approaches.

The existing historiographies look at the countries of the former Eastern bloc from a national perspective. The research on these states is as diverse as the trajectories the different societies took after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Moreover, it is no surprise that the story of perestroika and the 1990s has not been limited to the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain but also affected “the” West as such. Therefore, the conference will treat the collapsing Soviet Union as a significant core of the transnational and entangled history of the late twentieth century. In view of the

current resurgence of nationalism and populism, the conference will challenge teleological narratives about how the post-perestroika transformation simply mirrors the Western success story of capitalism and ongoing progress symbolizes the ultimate triumph of parliamentary democracy and the market economy. It will explore the ways in which the Socialist individual coped with perestroika and adjusted to the manifold transformations of everyday life. In what respect did the archetype of the allegedly passive, opportunistic, and submissive *homo sovieticus* change during the transition and move closer to the Western-style seemingly active, liberal, and self-reliant subject? What can we learn about agency in liberalizing authoritarian regimes and during their transitions to post-socialism?

We are looking for original, unpublished papers which explore a wide range of topics and aim to highlight different aspects of this "wild" period's transformations and the (dis)continuities between Soviet/state-socialist and post-socialist countries. Papers could take explicitly comparative perspectives or could examine processes of transfer and interdependencies in order to deconstruct East-West binaries and to reveal the dynamics playing out within the former Eastern bloc. Papers could be dedicated to one of the following areas of exploration:

- The Transformation of the Political: The Waning of Authoritative Discourse, Democratization, and Civil Society
- The Transformation of the Public: Iconoclasm, the Mass Media, and Political Communication
- The Transformation of the Private: Emotions, Memory, and Generational Conflicts
- The Transformation of the Economy: Reforms, Crises, Practices, and Changing Values
- The Transformation of Everyday Life: Work, Leisure, and Entertainment
- The Transformation of Aesthetics: Perestroika, the Arts, and Popular Culture
- The Transformation of the Individual: Agency and Subjectivities in Times of Uncertainty
- The Transformation of the Former Cold War Superpower and its Clients

The conference languages will be English and Russian.

Travel and accommodation costs will be covered.

Deadline for submission of proposals: 30 April 2020. Please e-mail your proposal (max. 300 words) and a short CV in a single PDF document, with "Perestroika-Conference" as the subject, to both kirsten.boenker@uni-bielefeld.de and alexey.tikhomirov@uni-bielefeld.de.

The papers will be pre-circulated among the participants. We ask you to submit your paper by 23 August.

We intend to publish the papers as an edited volume in the De Gruyter series "Rethinking the Cold War."

In this time of uncertainties, we hope that the conference will take place as originally planned. If it is necessary to reschedule, the conference will be held 18-19 March 2021.