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Reform and Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe

Chris Donnelly (abgeschlossen am 15.12.1991)

It has been widely reported that the failed coup of August 1991 has ushered in a new Russian revolution, reversing the «achievements» of the 1917 Revolution and opening up the country to democracy and free-market economy. In fact, journalistic enthusiasm is somewhat premature. The political process which was given such a boost by the coup failure may become a revolution, but for that to happen, there must be a fundamental transformation in society and the economy. This will be a most painful process that will place severe strains on Russian society, and we cannot be sure of the outcome.

Firstly, in a revolution, today's leaders of society, the generals, senior government officials and leaders of state industry will over time lose their jobs and their privileges, to be replaced at the summit of the social ladder by those who until recently have been at the bottom of that ladder. In particular, the new élite will be the successful entrepreneurs, whose activities before the Gorbachev era would have been branded as «speculation», a crime which – unlike murder – carried the death penalty. It goes without saying that today's privileged class, those still occupying the nomenklatura positions to which they were appointed by the now defunct Communist Party, will try to prevent this. The opposition and inertia that this massive in-place bureaucracy can generate could halt the revolutionary process instigated by Yeltsin after the coup. If the pace of change is not forced, then the «revolution» will become bogged down. The first lesson for post-coup Russia is that the rate of social change has to *increase*, not stabilize. For the West, this will pose the problem of how to deal with such change and the instability which will inevitably accompany it. This must be seen as a positive development, but it will not be easy to cope with.

Fundamental change will nowhere be more difficult than in the defence industries. For the economy to move to a free-market system the stranglehold of defence industries has to be broken. The massive arms plants which form the core of entire city complexes to the East of Moscow will somehow have to be converted. The Western solution to defence conversion – close down the factory and disperse the workforce – simply cannot be applied without the risk of popular revolt. The social security network is weak, and there is no real chance of alternative housing or employment. The problem is of such great scale that no single Western company could take on the transformation of such a plant. The Russians themselves lack the knowhow and the resources. Yet unless this transformation is achieved, the essential goal of market economy will not be reached. To «convert» the factory by increasing its output of civilian goods from the current average of 30% to 70% will actually *delay* the introduction of a market system.

This economic problem underlies the main issue of the reform process – the relationship between the defence establishment and the civilian establishment. The primacy given to defence affairs simply has to be reversed. The military and its industrial complex must become the tool of the political leadership, whereas today, it is the driving force, which sets its own policies and determines its own structures.

One of the problems of implementing such fundamental military reform is that the Soviet General Staff system

assumed that, whilst the army was «tamed» by the Party and by political control which rendered it neutral in relationship to the Soviet political system, military expertise was the monopoly of the uniformed military. There never developed any significant body of civilian expertise in defence

– journalists, academics, parliamentarians – whose involvement in defence decision-making is so crucial an element of democratic systems in the West. The whole infrastructure of think-tanks, research institutes and the like which we take for granted does not exist, and will have to be constructed if real civilian control of the military is to be achieved.

Furthermore, the lack of this body of knowledge and expertise amongst the reformers has increased the antagonism between them and much of the senior defence establishment. To the strains of radically differing political opinions in the wake of the Party's dissolution must be added the military frustration at seeing the disintegration of the union they were committed to defend, the loss of the post-war «gains» in Eastern Europe, the collapse of law and order in many parts of the country and the disastrous effect in the efficiency and morale of the army brought about by the social changes. When, in this environment, the reformers propose defence reforms which to the soldier make no military sense, the frustration could become too much to bear. We must also remember that many Soviet officers, brought up in a closed environment to mistrust Western intentions, find it very difficult to believe that the West will not try to take military advantage of their country's discomfiture, and attribute Western interest and offers of help as anything but humanitarian.

That said, the need for a reduction in defence expenditure is well recognized by the General Staff, as is the need to move towards some more professional type of armed forces. However, there is an inherent danger here that may already be developing in some Central European countries, which have proceeded further down the path of reform. The tendency of the General Staff everywhere will be to try to preserve intact their military systems, whilst accepting force reductions. To ensure the continued coherence of their military system, they will tend to try and dominate the reform process, excluding civilians completely. Their subordination to civil authority will be demonstrated by the ready acceptance of a civilian minister of defence and a decommunization of the armed forces. Henceforth, the army is to be motivated by a moderate patriotism and intense professionalism. It will respond not to any political party but to the head of state. In return, the military structures and procurement will be determined by the generals, and not by (often incompetent) civilians.

Superficially, this is a reassuring picture, and particularly appeals to those brought up in Anglo-Saxon traditions. But the UK and US have centuries of unbroken democratic traditions into which their professional armies fit well. The emerging democracies of Eastern and Central Europe should, perhaps, be looking to another model. The FRG, faced with the need to raise the Bundeswehr, chose to avoid a professionalized and de-politized «presidential» army precisely because of the experience of the pre-war German

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Army. Instead it opted for the remarkably successful concept of democratic politization – «Innere Führung» – to ensure the political neutrality and loyalty to democracy of the army. Norway and Switzerland have chosen somewhat different concepts of «total defence» to ensure that integration of the army into society which renders it a safely democratic institution.

As the disintegration of the old USSR continues, and new nations emerge from the former Union, those nations, just like the new democracies of Central Europe, will feel the need for some form of army to ensure their sovereignty. Russia is certain to emerge as the heir to the USSR, controlling the bulk of the old Soviet Armed Forces, along with most, if not all, of its nuclear capacity. It may well be that some form of union is maintained between some of the for-

mer Union republics. Whatever happens, military reform will be an integral element of the reform process, and a crucial factor in its success. It is in our interest to help this transition and to assist Russia and the other republics to achieve their transformation with as little pain and as much development of democratic institutions as possible, even though the pressure of social revolution may well push the leaderships towards strong rule – hopefully on a temporary basis. One of the most positive ways in which we can offer effective help is by making available our expertise, especially in the sphere of military organization. The Swiss model of an army might well be far more reliable a democratic institution for some of the smaller new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe than the Anglo-Saxon model in which they are currently showing such interest. ■

Zusammenfassung

Der misslungene Coup vom August 1991 endete in einer neuen russischen Revolution, die alle «Errungenschaften» der Oktoberrevolution von 1917 rückgängig machte und das Land für Demokratie und freie Marktwirtschaft öffnen sollte. Damit die Revolution nun auch wirklich stattfindet, bedarf es aber einer fundamentalen Transformation von Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft.

In der Logik einer Revolution werden die heutigen Führer (Generäle, alte Regierungsbeamte und Direktoren der Staatsindustrie) ihre Posten und Positionen verlieren, und junge erfolgreiche Unternehmer werden die neue Elite stellen. Dagegen wird sich die alte Priviligentsia wehren und versuchen, ihre Posten in der Nomenklatura zu halten, die sie von der Kommunistischen Partei erhalten hatte.

Die durch Jelzin angestiftete Revolution könnte durch den von der Bürokratie generierten Widerstand gestoppt werden, falls das Tempo des Wechsels nicht erhöht werden kann. Für den Westen wird sich das Problem stellen, wie dem Wandel und der Instabilität im positiven Sinne begegnet werden kann.

Die Transformation im Bereich der Rüstungsindustrie wird das grösste Problem sein und muss auf dem Weg zur Marktwirtschaft gelöst werden. Die riesigen Waffenfabriken, die im Osten Moskaus die Zentren ganzer Städte bilden, müssen irgendwie konvertiert werden. Die westliche Lösung mit Fabrikschliessungen und Dezentralisation der Arbeiter kann in der Sowjetunion nicht ohne das Risiko sozialer Revolten vollzogen werden. Die sozialen Auffangnetze sind dazu zu schwach und der Mangel an russischem Know-how und Ressourcen zu gross. So lange aber der Wandel nicht vollzogen ist, wird das Ziel «Marktwirtschaft» nicht erreicht werden.

Dieses ökonomische Problem unterliegt einem der Hauptpunkte des Reformprozesses; der Beziehung des Rüstungsestablishments zum Zivilen. Das Primat zugunsten der Verteidigung muss aufgegeben werden, der Rüstungs- und Industriekomplex muss zum Werkzeug der politischen Führung werden und nicht umgekehrt. Ebenso muss versucht werden, Fragen der Verteidigung von den zivilen Institutionen zu lösen und nicht allein den Militärs zu überlassen, die bis anhin in diesem Bereich ein Monopol besaßen. Obschon die Reduktion von Rüstungsaufgaben wie auch die Notwendigkeit einer Professionalisie-

rung der Armeen von den Generälen eingesehen wird, versuchen diese ihr militärisches System zu erhalten und die zivilen Stellen von den Entscheidungsprozessen auszuschliessen. Oberflächlich hat dies den Anschein angelsächsischer Tradition, wo professionelle Armeen über Jahrhunderte in das demokratische System hineingewachsen sind und sich gegenüber den politischen Institutionen neutral und loyal verhalten.

Die neuen, im Entstehen begriffenen Demokratien Ost- und Zentraleuropas sollten sich deshalb eher an den Verteidigungskonzepten Norwegens oder der Schweiz orientieren, wo sich die Armee als demokratische Institution in die Gesellschaft integriert hat.

Was auch immer passiert, die Militärreform muss ein integraler Bestandteil des Reformprozesses bleiben, und es liegt im Interesse des Westens, diesen Übergang mit Wissen und Mitteln zu unterstützen, damit die Revolution positiv verläuft. «Das schweizerische Modell einer Armee würde eine weit verlässlichere demokratische Institution für die kleinen neuen Demokratien Ost- und Zentraleuropas sein, als das angelsächsische Modell, an welchem sie so grosses Interesse zeigen.»

Andreas Schär

Führungsnachwuchs ...

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