

From one lack of freedom to another

The mantra that the world has been changing rapidly in recent decades is inevitably repeated by anyone who talks about the problems and paths of economic and social development. Most often these changes refer to scientific and technological progress and the opportunities it offers to humanity in terms of improving living conditions and creative activity. But there is another side to these processes, which until recently was seemingly outside the “mainstream” constructs of the future. Namely, the change of the system of international economic relations due to the emergence and strengthening of new leaders and weakening of the positions of the “heroes of bygone days” and their loss of many prerogatives of former influence. The collapse of the USSR was perceived by its political opponents as an unconditional victory and an opportunity to determine and direct the world economic and political processes in the direction they considered appropriate. Within this paradigm, the U.S. and EU countries formed and developed a system of economic and political relations with the new sovereign states that emerged in the place of the former Soviet republics. In their new picture of the world, Russia was not given any significant role in the processes of integration and cooperation with these countries. Time has shown that they were wrong. Moreover, the role of the rapidly growing China is becoming more and more prominent on the world stage every year, primarily in the economic and, to a certain extent, social development of the new states. First of all, the Central Asian republics, and then Ukraine and Belarus. The leitmotif of the transformations in all post-Soviet states was not only a striving to realize the ambitions and goals of their elites, but also the desire of the majority of citizens to taste “that sweet word – freedom”. People were tired of the norms and rules of “democratic centralism” dominating in the USSR, which implied unconditional obedience to the decisions made (where, when and by whom is another question). As a result of the mythologization of ideas about freedom, the “democratization of all aspects of life” during perestroika in the entire former USSR led all post-Soviet countries, each in its own way, to go from one non-freedom (suppression

of personal initiative and enterprise) to another caused by colossal difficulties, and often the inability not only to develop independently, but also to maintain the previously achieved standard of living of a significant part of the population. Assistance in overcoming these difficulties turned into a loss of political and economic independence for the young democracies, only now in relation to the “new” external forces. Let us note that the mentioned mythologization in the socio-economic aspect has two components – internal and external¹. The internal one is the myth about the state of the economy and the ways of its development, which is supported by the national elites. In the period under consideration it was first of all “absolutization of the omnipotence of the free market”². The need for its dominance was accepted by most of the post-Soviet leaders as an axiom. The rest had to put up with it. As I. Wallerstein wrote³, “Capitalism ... is a social system in which those who act according to its rules have a decisive influence on the social whole and set certain conditions, and everyone else must either adapt to them or blame themselves. This is a social system in which the scope of these rules (the law of value) increased; those who imposed these rules became less and less inclined to social compromise; these rules penetrated more and more deeply into the social fabric, even as social opposition to them became stronger and more organized. At the same time, however, at the stage of the discussion of transformations in the post-Soviet space J. Kornai noted: “The key point of transformations is that private initiative should come to the fore, private property should be legally protected... The faster the social climate changes, the more effective the role of private production and private trade will be in securing production and supply. This is the most important condition that must be created before foreigners can be allowed to rebuild a shattered economy⁴. Thus, internal mythologization is the substitution of the role and importance of the “long-awaited” private

¹ The problem of economic mythologization in this perspective belongs to the esteemed colleague Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences RAS. C. Greenberg – see: “Economic Mythology Lives and Wins. On the strange life in the “post-factual world”” // *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. 2018. December 24.

² *Ibid.*

³ Wallerstein I. *Historical capitalism. Capitalist civilization* / Translated from English. Ed. and preface by A. I. Fursov. Ed. 2nd revised edition. M.: URSS: LENAND, 2018. 304 c. [P. 133].

⁴ Kornai J. *The way to free economy. Passionate word in defense of economic transformations* / Translated from English. Moscow: Economics, 1990. 149 p. [P. 3].

initiative by the preservation of the status quo of those who influence the development of the newly created system of “pure market” capitalism. The external mythologization, as F. Oppenheimer notes, is associated with the idea that “external communities” help “young democracies” in carrying out reforms and transformations exclusively in the interests of the latter: “The entire world history from primitive times to the present day is nothing but a continuous struggle between “economic” and “political” methods “⁵. Analysis of the provisions of this work led Travin to the conclusion that “economic methods... represent methods of creation, political – methods of redistribution, by means of which what is created is taken away from those to whom it belongs. “Let us reflect not on the problem of building a bright future without exploitation (which is hardly possible at all), but on why in real life some countries have become rich while others remain poor,” the author suggests⁶. The papers in the thematic selection of this issue of “ECO” fully confirm the mentioned mythological delusions, describing the life of post-Soviet countries “in the post-factual” world. Thus, in Belarus, when the EU began to implement the Eastern Project, “the coordinated foreign policy of the Union State and the Union State itself began to be regarded... as a relic of the past” (paper by E. M. Kuzmina). The impact of political methods of redistribution of influence and the created economic potential on the development of the post-Soviet countries was undoubtedly most vivid in Ukraine⁷ and in the Baltics (paper by P.N. Teslia). The economic policy of most of the countries represented in this issue and in “ECO” #3/2022 is characterized by “the absence of their economic interaction and a high level of dependence on external factors” (paper by A.A. Migranyan). The available progress in a number of issues of the current economic situation (relatively stable growth of living standards in the Baltic states) is not comparable in scale with the real level that took place in the USSR era. None of the countries represented in this selection has yet managed to form any significant prerequisites for sustainable progressive growth of the national economy. Among the key reasons is the mythologization of their “market” relations. In the South Caucasus, it is, in fact,

⁵ Oppenheimer F. The State: Rethinking. MOSCOW: RUSSTATE.ORG, 2020. [P. 77–78].

⁶ Travin D. Я. Why Russia has fallen behind? St. Petersburg: Ed. of the European University in St. Petersburg, 2021. 368 c. [P. 21–22].

⁷ Migranyan A. A. Ukrainian Choice: 30 Years Later // ECO. 2022. № 3. P. 41–61.

a clan oligopoly, which has little in common with the development and promotion of entrepreneurship, in the Baltic countries – an open pseudo-market environment, regularly fed by significant external financial injections. It is obviously impossible to change the situation without demythologization of “achieved successes”, without real democratization of internal economic processes, development and encouragement of interstate cooperation and integration in the post-Soviet space. Movement in these directions requires time, focus and mutual trust.

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