

The International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (The Gorbachev Foundation)

The Pandemic as a Challenge and New Thinking in the 21st Century

Introduction. Civilization at a Crossroads

I. The Pandemic as a Challenge

I.2. Consequences of the Pandemic and Related Issues

I.2.1. Global Inequality

I.2.2. The Breakdown of Trust

I.2.3. Geopolitical Shifts and the Danger of a New Bipolar Confrontation

I.2.4. The Changing Global Role of the U.S.

I.2.5. The Urgency of Demilitarization and the Role of the Leading Powers

I.2.6. The Biosecurity Problem

II. New Political Thinking in the 21st Century

II.1. New Thinking and its Contribution to the Philosophy of International Relations

II.2. New Political Thinking and the Challenges of the 21st Century

3. New Thinking and its Relevance in Light of the Current Crisis

Conclusion. The Tasks of New Thinking in the 21st Century

The paper has been prepared as part of the Expertise Round Table, a standing project of The Gorbachev Foundation. The team of contributors led by

Mikhail Gorbachev includes Pavel Palazhchenko, Vasily Zharkov, Olga Zdravomyslova, Karen Karageziyan, Vladimir Polyakov and Andrey Ryabov

As the global community moves deeper into the 2020s, it has become clear that the world may be on the brink of major changes. The new global challenge presented by the coronavirus pandemic caught everyone entirely by surprise. All countries turned out to be equal in terms of their limited ability to counteract the new global threat.

Introduction. Civilization at a Crossroads.

The pandemic that has infected and killed hundreds of thousands of people is a new challenge threatening modern civilization. It exacerbates existing problems between states while at the same time being a product of them. The response must be comprehensive and all-encompassing. Humanity must develop this response together in order to move to a new level of international cooperation and advance the creation of a more reliable global security system.

The current crisis is unique in that it has caused a disaster that is unfolding “here and now” and affects all social groups. The decisions cannot be partial or technical: the new threat demands a complete revision of international politics.

After the Second World War and the subsequent adoption of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the countries of the world took an important step towards a new model of behavior based on solidarity and cooperation. They assumed the responsibility to meet international obligations such as respecting human rights and adhering to the principles of good-neighbourliness and cooperation.

However, any state may claim that a call to comply with international obligations constitutes interference in its internal affairs, thereby essentially blocking the effect of international law wherever it contradicts its understanding of its rights and interests. This is the paradox of the international relations system today.

The second half of the 1980s brought the realization that the foundations of international politics needed to be revised urgently. *The concept of the new political thinking created during the Perestroika era is proceeds from the premise that states and peoples, while respecting each other's independence and refraining from interference in each other's affairs, at the same time recognize their common responsibility for the survival of humankind. The new thinking proposed a project to reshape the world in accordance with universal human values, above all human life, freedom, and security for each and every person.*

The new thinking inherited the traditions of the nuclear disarmament movement that emerged after the Second World War. The 1955 Russell–Einstein Manifesto signed by a number of preeminent intellectuals and scientists launched the Pugwash movement against military use of nuclear energy. In turn, reports published by Club of Rome since 1968 advanced the concept of sustainable development. As a result, both the campaign for peace and environmental movements had gained supporters throughout the world by the mid-1980s.

The principal tenets of the policy of new thinking were set forth in Mikhail Gorbachev's book *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. This philosophical and political essay contained "thoughts and reflections on perestroika, the problems we face, the scale of the changes involved and the complexity, responsibility and uniqueness of our time" [Gorbachev 1988:xi].

In the summer of 1988, the 19th CPSU Conference launched political reforms in the USSR aimed at democratization and the transfer of power from the CPSU to the Soviets. Internationally, Gorbachev's team was actively engaged in disarmament talks with the U.S. administration and was rebuilding cooperation-based relations with many countries.

The new thinking is organically linked with the vision of the objectives of Perestroika. In domestic policy, these are *glasnost*, democratization, reform of the political system, and decentralized economic management that would ensure a balance between private initiative and social justice. In foreign policy, these are demilitarization and abandoning war in favour of dialogue as a means of resolving global problems.

In his 1988 UN address, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke about the need to transition from rivalry to closer cooperation with a view to addressing common problems: "Uncontrolled spontaneity leads to a dead end. The world community must learn to shape and direct the process in such a way as to preserve civilization, to make it safe for all and better suited to normal life" [Gorbachev 1988].

The crucial steps towards that goal were taken primarily in Soviet–American relations between 1986 and 1991. However, the breakup of the USSR in 1991 interrupted this process. Western countries, primarily the United States, were quick to declare "victory" in the Cold War, which they believed gave them the exclusive right to decide the future of the world. This could not but cause resentment on the part of states and peoples with different visions of the world order. Additionally, politicians were in no hurry to resolve common global problems that continued to worsen.

The 2020 pandemic once again raises the issue of the need for a speedy transition from confrontation to partnership. Clearly, the fight against the

pandemic and the consequences of the crisis it has caused requires urgent collective action to save people and prevent an even greater disaster.

The New Thinking ideas must return to the global political agenda since the world is once again at a crossroads: either continuing to primarily follow instincts produced by national egoism, or realizing that civilization has reached the point where the interrelation and interconnection of states require a new global policy. The future of humanity depends on this choice.

I. The Pandemic as a Challenge

To many people, the global challenges of the past appeared relative and somewhat hypothetical.

Although the threat of humanity perishing in a thermonuclear disaster was evident, some people continue to think it is a purely theoretical possibility, while others view it as an instrument of deterrence and as insurance against a major war.

Climate change and the threat of global warming are frequently denied or underestimated. Prosperous countries strive to use their economic and military potential to minimize the risks caused by global inequality.

However, *the virus is a pure evil that is reaping its grim harvest today, and the task of combating it brooks no delay.* The course of global events since the start of 2020 shows us what the COVID-19 pandemic is. It is

- a global disaster with long-term and largely unpredictable consequences;
- a threat against which the usual means at our disposal today have limited effect;
- a challenge to people's health and life regardless of their social status and ethnicity;

- a threat to the economy and the way of life of most people around the world.

The West's wealthy countries have failed to throw up a barrier against a threat that originally emerged in the world's largest developing economy. These countries are suffering tremendous losses, often more significant than in less developed countries. At the same time, the pandemic will not and cannot produce any winners. If every country keeps looking for a solution only within its own borders, this will lead to the critical exacerbation of other global problems, complicating their solutions in each individual state.

Humanity has been challenged by a primitive organism that cannot be stopped with words or attacked with weapons; nor can it be turned back at the border or vanquished in battle. Yet it continues to take human lives daily.

This is perhaps the first time in many years that humanity is coming to the realization that there is, indeed, common good. This common good can be expressed at a supranational level: the survival of each and every person in the face of the threat of the pandemic continuing or recurring. This fundamental circumstance should prompt national governments to search for and achieve a new level of international cooperation.

1.2. Consequences of the Pandemic and Related Problems

Not all the consequences of the pandemic can be fully envisaged now. However, there are certain obvious problems that have been exacerbated during the pandemic and now require immediate action.

1.2.1. Global Inequality

The mechanisms set up by the Bretton Woods Conference (1944) that are still used by the World Bank in the development of its policies were intended to ensure a more balanced economic development of all states. In practice, however, things proved to be far more complicated: the free movement of capital led to the ruling regimes in a number of developing states using financial aid for personal gain. Consequently, a significant part of the funding received ended up in accounts in western banks, as investment in real estate in New York, London, and other financial centres, or was siphoned off and kept offshore. At the same time, developing countries accumulated more debt, and poverty among their people grew. Therefore, not only did the existing mechanisms fail to close the gap between the richest and the poorest states, but they actually made this gap worse. This is a fundamental problem of capitalism today.

Another problem concerns those developing economies that have appeared successful in recent decades, but in reality have significant imbalances in development and constitute a challenge to others, as well as to themselves. This applies, in particular, to China and some Southeast Asian states, many of which retain traditional authoritarian political structures. Global financial capital has found a place for these countries in the world economy by moving mass production of consumer goods to many states in Asia-Pacific. However, the display windows of the economic miracle created by the current globalization model concealed major tensions existing within successfully developing states, as well as tensions between those countries and the leading eastern states. Today, during the pandemic, these tensions have burst through as mutual grievances and accusations.

Growing economic inequality creates a range of problems that no national government can resolve. On the one hand, the continuing demographic boom in the “third world,” combined with economic and social disasters, produces

increasing flows of immigrants and refugees to the countries of Europe and North America. On the other hand, poorly controlled migration flows, combined with the decline of traditional industrial centres in the old wealthy states, result in the growing influence of populist forces that threaten both western liberal democracy and the level of international cooperation achieved in the post-war decades.

Donald Trump's victory in the United States presidential elections has led to the country pursuing a policy of economic isolationism. The coming to power of populist forces in Hungary and Poland, the electoral successes of ultra-right politicians in some other European states, and the vote for Brexit in the United Kingdom continue to cause significant damage to the European Union, the most successful supranational integration project in the world today. The World Trade Organization is also going through hard times, as are international regimes that regulate the flows of refugees and immigrants. While free movement of capital continues virtually unabated, the same can hardly be said of freedom of trade and the movement of human resources. All these factors decrease the stability of individual political regimes and the global order as a whole.

This is hardly the first time that the world has faced the threat of the mass spread of a viral infection. In recent years, prominent public figures have issued repeated warnings about a possible pandemic. And while we were saved on those occasions by the selfless devotion of doctors and the specific features of the transmission of a particular virus, in late 2019 the situation escalated out of control and in just a few months the virus had spread throughout the world.

Even though the United States and Western Europe have thus far borne the brunt of the pandemic, scientists warn that the spread of the disease in Latin America and Africa may cause many deaths. Developed states are far better equipped to protect the population against the disease and overcome the

consequences of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic may very well bring about a socio-economic and humanitarian disaster in many “third-world” countries. And this is a direct consequence of the problem of global inequality.

It is a mistake to place the blame for the spread of the virus squarely on China’s shoulders. It is certainly necessary to follow the entire chain of events that resulted in the pandemic, but when this problem is politicized, it is done out of an unwillingness to recognize the injustice of the current economic system and the desire to gain unilateral profit.

1.2.2. The Breakdown of Trust

One obvious consequence of the pandemic is the breakdown of trust in domestic government institutions and increased distrust at the international level.

This aggravates the situation that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres diagnosed back in 2018 as a “bad case of trust deficit disorder,” adding that this trend is obvious in the UN as well “when Member States struggle or fail to find reasonable common ground” [Secretary-General’s Address 2020].

While governments do not trust each other, people are losing trust in governments. And this is becoming a mass trend amid the coronavirus pandemic. A May poll of over 60,000 EU citizens showed that Europeans were losing confidence in the ability of their leaders to cope with the crisis. This is particularly noticeable in such large EU states as France, Italy and Spain [Eurofound 2020]. Russian polls also show that trust in the President and leading politicians fell between January and April 2020. At the same time, the feeling of uncertainty was on the rise, with half of those polled (49.7%) being undecided on whether they trusted the authorities [VCIOM 2020].

The only way to solve the trust crisis domestically is through democracy (or democratization). Internationally, the only way is through dialogue.

U.S.–Soviet relations in the mid-1980s were characterized by complete distrust, yet the experience of the cooperation between the two countries in the second half of that decade convincingly demonstrates that *mutual trust emerges during persistent joint efforts to resolve specific problems*.

Therefore, it is now particularly important to ensure trust and confidence in international cooperation and international organizations.

Everything possible should be done to prevent the collapse of the World Health Organization, as it is an irreplaceable instrument of international cooperation for human security.

Russia submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council proposing to reaffirm the special powers of WHO in combating the coronavirus. Although the resolution was blocked by the United States, subsequent initiatives along these lines are to be expected, as are proposals to introduce common international standards and ease sanctions, particularly in the field of medicine. On 16 April 2020, Mikhail Gorbachev called upon all countries to cut their military budgets by 10–15% [Gorbachev 2020]. Given the fiscal problems faced by all states, steps in this direction may succeed. *The UN Secretary General has called for an immediate ceasefire in all armed conflicts around the world.*

Given the current situation of an apparent deficit of power and its redistribution, states may well take heed of such initiatives.

1.2.3. Geopolitical Shifts and the Danger of a New Bipolar Confrontation

The current crisis both exacerbates and deepens existing tensions. This is precisely what happened in U.S.–China relations, as tensions between them

have gone beyond trade and economy and laid bare the frictions that had been building up for years and even decades.

Shifts are taking place in the mindset of the political and economic elites in both states, who are now deliberately and pointedly emphasizing what they had previously attempted to smooth over. The deep-running differences between the American and the Chinese political systems increasingly appear to reveal their incompatibility, which could lead to conflicts.

China and the United States are behaving differently in these rapidly changing circumstances. While demonstrating its intention firmly to defend its interests, in particular in Hong Kong, China clearly does not want the tensions to escalate into a new cold war. At the same time, the election campaign in the United States prompts Trump and the Republicans to advance a pointedly anti-Chinese narrative. It is yet unclear how far both parties are prepared to go in the escalating situation.

At the same time, it is evident that over the past few months, *the United States and China have failed, together or separately, to assume the leading role in managing the crisis and mobilize efforts either within official international organizations or within informal groups such as the G20, which brings together the world's leading economies.*

Meanwhile, the rivalry between the two biggest economies is a source of annoyance and alienation for many countries around the world. In particular, most countries, including the United States' allies, *have accumulated many grievances against the impulsive, selfish and unpredictable policies of the current U.S. administration* in the three years that Donald Trump has been president.

None of the scenarios of a “new bipolarity” appears to be favourable for the prospects of global politics. Each and every one entails too many risks both for the immediate rivals and for the entire global community.

This is certainly true for Russia. *Russia would be wise to make preventing the emergence of a confrontational bipolar global system an objective of its foreign policy.* This course of action may find support and understanding in Europe and some other states, in particular, in Japan and South Korea. For instance, Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union, noted that there is an “increasing confrontation between China and the U.S. It is something that will frame tomorrow’s world” and also stressed that European countries “don’t have to choose” between the United States and China and that the European Union needed “strategic autonomy” [Euobserver, 2 June 2020]. *Today, when a new framework is indeed emerging in the global arena, what is needed is a non-opportunistic, substantive policy buttressed by a vision of global perspective. New political thinking updated for a rapidly changing world can serve as the philosophical foundation for this new framework.*

1.2.4. The Changing Global Role of the U.S.

The course the crisis is taking shows that, under the Trump administration, the United States is progressively abandoning a constructive role in international affairs. Paradoxically, the U.S. President dresses it up as restoring the United States’ power, status and influence in accordance with the “America First” slogan. However, reality belies such statements: not only has the United States withdrawn from international mechanisms such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran’s nuclear programme and nuclear disarmament agreements with Russia, but it is also trying to dismantle international organizations. The latest example of this is the decision to suspend funding for and eventually withdraw from the WHO. Seizing the opportunity afforded by Trump’s decision, China announced it would be making a voluntary contribution to the anti-coronavirus programme that is twice the amount of the annual U.S. contribution to the WHO’s budget.

The most striking example of the United States distancing itself from international cooperation is its recent refusal to participate in the conference convened by the European Union to raise funds for the development of a coronavirus vaccine.

In these circumstances, the countries committed to international cooperation are bound to wonder whether they could influence the position of the United States, since it still has great capabilities, both positive and destructive. It may be possible to reverse this trend if Donald Trump loses the November elections. However, it is also possible that this is a long-term tendency, and in the future neither the European Union nor any other power will be able to take on the leading role. Consequently, there is a need for “collective leadership”. The problem is that it is unclear what such leadership means and what forms it could take. This issue requires serious consideration by the diplomatic and expert communities.

1.2.5. The Urgency of Demilitarization and the Role of Major Powers

The calls for an immediate ceasefire in all armed conflicts around the world and the reduction of military budgets may gain traction since nations, whose economies and finances have been battered by the pandemic may not be able to continue the arms race. There is, however, a different view, i.e. that military spending and military contracts may be a way to jump-start the global economy, while cutting military spending would negatively affect the welfare of tens of millions of people working in that sphere.

An historical precedent serves as an argument against this view: *the implementation of the disarmament agreements concluded in the 1980s–1990s curtailed the arms race and had no negative economic consequences. Therefore, relaunching the process of arms limitation and reduction appears both an urgent and realistic objective.*

Achieving this goal today is seriously hampered by the Trump administration's policy of dismantling the entire nuclear arms control system. *The President of the United States claims that he does not want a new arms race, but if one does begin, his country will win it.* Presumably, America's rivals must understand it, which in itself should provide sufficient guarantees of stability without outdated arms control agreements. A similar approach is gaining ground among some Russian experts as well.

In fact, *the course of dismantling the arms control system leads to "strategic chaos" and unpredictability that becomes increasingly dangerous with the emergence of new weapons and new military technologies.* Far from diminishing the need for efforts to enshrine nuclear disarmament in today's agenda, the evolution of military technologies increases it.

This is particularly relevant for Russia, not only because it has a special responsibility as a state with one of the two largest nuclear arsenals, but also because pursuing an active course for disarmament at multilateral forums, among other venues, would bolster Russia's international standing and shape a positive image of its foreign policy. As the experience of the second half of the 1980s shows, such behaviour can influence the policies of other countries, primarily those of the United States.

The U.S. administration has stated that effective agreements in this area are only possible if China is involved. Despite the demagogic nature of this demand (China's nuclear arsenal is still a fraction of those of the United States and Russia), the international community nevertheless has the right to raise the need for China to demonstrate greater transparency as regards its nuclear arms.

As a first step, major military powers could make a statement pledging to base the development of their militaries on the principles of reasonable defence sufficiency and transparency. It is possible that China could be brought on board to support such a statement.

Although a statement of this kind may appear to be a mere declaration, experience shows that declarations (for instance, the 1985 joint declaration made by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought) could play a positive role as a catalyst of negotiations.

I.2.6. The Problem of Biosecurity

The current crisis has highlighted the global biosecurity problem, which has not been resolved globally either in its public health dimension or in preventing the military use of the achievements of modern biology.

In 2005, the World Health Organization adopted the International Health Regulations intended to ensure biosecurity. Their purpose is “to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease” [WHO 2005].

The history of the new pandemic is clear evidence of a malfunction in the mechanisms provided by the International Health Regulations. Consequently, discussions are needed at the political and expert levels on making these mechanisms more effective, strengthening measures to ensure compliance, and investigating the causes of the pandemics and emergencies of international concern.

Given the political frictions that the pandemic has caused in relations between a number of Western countries and China, the challenge is to conduct this work in the spirit of cooperation without politicizing these exceedingly complex problems.

The current crisis is also a reminder that the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction that entered into

force in 1975 is weakened by the fact that it does not provide for a mechanism of control.

Additionally, some signatories to the Convention announced reservations concerning the provision allowing accumulation of biological agents and toxins for disease prevention and other peaceful purposes. Critics of the Convention note that there is a very vague line between permitted research conducted for the purposes of prevention and defence on the one hand, and research that may result in the development of bioweapons on the other.

Until now, efforts to develop an additional protocol to the convention stipulating mandatory control measures have been ineffective. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation notes that “when such a protocol was more than 90 percent ready, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the negotiations” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 April 2020]. The United States explains its position by saying that such a protocol “could not help strengthen compliance with the BWC and could hurt U.S. national security and commercial interests” [Arms Control Association March 2020].

Experts note that, internationally, bioterrorism-related threats have not yet been properly discussed. The danger of bioterrorism increases as various biotechnologies (including synthetic biology, i.e. designing and creating biological systems with tailor-made attributes and functions that may not exist in nature) spread throughout the world. There are real concerns that some biological substances may be used to create an atmosphere of fear, chaos and social tension. The relative accessibility of information on current research and the lack of international initiatives intended to counter biological threats are of particular concern.

Clearly, these two biosecurity areas are connected. Ultimately, the problem does not lie in the unwieldiness of the WHO or of inter-governmental

negotiating mechanisms. Rather, the problem lies in the lack of trust, primarily between the world's leading powers. This has clearly manifested itself in the current crisis. Grievances have already been voiced and will continue be voiced against many entities. But this path is a dead end. The only reasonable path today is to ensure real international interaction and cooperation focused on areas that have thus far not received sufficient attention.

II. New Political Thinking in the 21st Century

From the outset, the new thinking was not conceived as a theory to be discussed by politicians and experts; it was meant “to address directly the peoples,” to talk “without intermediaries [...] to the citizens of the whole world about things that, without exception, concern us all” [Gorbachev 1988: xi].

II.1. New Thinking and its Contribution to the Philosophy of International Relations

The new thinking demonstrates continuity with the Russian intellectual tradition represented by Vasily Malinovsky, Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Soloviev, as well as Andrey Sakharov in the 20th century.

Tolstoy was certain that people wanted peace. To prevent a new war, one had above all to appeal to people with the words of truth as opposed to lies and militant propaganda.

In the mid-20th century, it became abundantly clear that, as a means of achieving political objectives, war is pointless and irrational.

The new thinking begins by stating the fact that the world is now living in a new reality, “having entered the nuclear age [...] mankind has lost its

immortality” [Gorbachev 1988: 124]. Consequently, the basic political principle is that “nuclear war cannot be a means of achieving political, economic, ideological or any other goals” [Gorbachev 1988: 126]. The new thinking was based on the principles of cooperation and logically entailed the possibility of convergence of the two systems, an idea supported by Andrey Sakharov.

In the 1980s, virtually simultaneously with the new thinking, several influential branches of similar political thought emerged in the western theory of international relations.¹ Francis Fukuyama called the new thinking the Soviet version of liberalism.

The new thinking contained the essence of the humanist tradition in Russia and the West and served as its continuation. The new thinking is addressed to humanity that has entered an era of global risks.

The new thinking is not on the current political agenda in Russia today. However, it is precisely now that new thinking gives the country a chance to return to partnership and dialogue in today’s world.

II.2. New Political Thinking and the Challenges of the 21st Century

Three decades ago, new political thinking marked a new hope for the progress of democratization and for a more equitable system of international relations. In the second half of the 1980s, the policy of new thinking made it possible to put an end to the Cold War.

The breakup of the USSR and the revision of the outcome of the Cold War resulted in the progressive exacerbation of the global situation and the emergence of new challenges: *the need for a new model of globalization; the*

¹ In the 1980s, Kenneth Waltz created the concept of “structural realism” that described the state of the “bipolar world” and predicted a transition to “multipolarity.” An essay by Michael Doyle laid the foundations of the “democratic peace” doctrine, which states that democratic countries do not go to war with each other. The concept of an “international society”, based on common values and norms and trust between countries, became the cornerstone of the “liberal realism” of Martin Wight, Hedley Bull and Barry Buzan.

growth of conflict in the world; the counter-attack of authoritarianism; and the threat to the future of democracy.

The current model of globalization has demonstrated its vulnerability to the crisis caused by the pandemic. After the pandemic ends, restrictions on person-to-person contacts and movement across borders will continue for a while. However, modern economies will not be able to develop within national boundaries. This means that the problems in the functioning of the global economy and “mega-society” will have to be addressed at the same time as the international community strives to ensure its biological and medical security.

Deadly viruses emerge in poor “third world” countries (like the Ebola virus in West Africa), or in countries with major disproportions in development, such as China. Since viruses know no borders, wealthy developed countries will have to revise their policies towards developing states and introduce new forms of cooperation. The problem of providing effective aid to the countries on the global periphery is becoming relevant again. The only way that we can develop and launch a new globalization project that is more equitable than the neoliberal model is if the countries that form the “core” of the modern global system come up with a new policy that is aimed at eliminating inequality and limiting the commercialization of all areas of life.

The pandemic has become a factor in increasing global strife. Tensions between the United States and China are growing. The European Union is struggling to define the path of its future development. Developed states are facing the need to restrict migration, which, in turn, aggravates conflicts both along the North–South axis and within the global periphery. New steps for maintaining global security will be required, and the leading world powers will have to be the first to amend their policies.

The fact that the wave of democratization in many countries has given way to a counter-offensive on the part of authoritarianism is a major hindrance in

the way of implementing the principles of the new thinking. Authoritarianism has gained an increasing number of supporters during the pandemic. Freedom House reports that the coronavirus has resulted in a “dramatic democratic breakdown” in the 29 so-called “nations in transit” (“Nations in Transit 2020”) [Freedom House 2020]. The pandemic has made citizens more vulnerable to violation of their rights, including in countries with established democratic traditions. The threat of ubiquitous electronic surveillance is becoming more and more obvious. It is not enough to rely on legal constraints in this matter. A counterbalance is needed, specifically, public control over the activities of the authorities at all levels needs to be strengthened, and the accountability of the authorities needs to be increased. Consequently, expanding direct democracy and making greater use of e-democracy instruments is very important.

The world that existed for a privileged few (la Belle Époque) collapsed during the First World War. Since then, there have been no attempts to revive something of the sort. Therefore, the projects of a future “digital world” that essentially cater to the interests of a “creative minority” cannot but cause concern. As a counterbalance to these projects, demand will emerge for new forms and institutions of international social solidarity and a demand for a new social and environmental policy geared towards the majority.

There is an emerging need for a new social democratic project. It is not only left-wing political movements and weak, underprivileged groups that need it. Civilization as a whole needs it as a project that could balance the interests of various social and professional groups, those of the majority and the minority.

The time has come to think of international organizations not so much as bodies of global governance, but primarily as bodies of global democratization. Defining the “main tenets of the new thinking” in 2019, Mikhail Gorbachev wrote: “Democratization of society and democratization of international

relations are two facets of a global trend. This means that each country should be free to choose its own path. Imposing a particular understanding of democracy, especially by force, is impermissible.” [Gorbachev 2019: 64]

3. New Thinking and its Relevance in Light of the Current Crisis

The coronavirus crisis is international, cross-border, and universal. *It has brought to the foreground the issue of humanity’s survival and the absolute priority given to the life of every human being as a necessary condition for the survival of civilization as a whole.*

Jürgen Habermas, one of the preeminent philosophers today, says that “our complex societies constantly face the enormous deficit of security.” Today, however, “existential uncertainty is spreading throughout the world” since all states and societies are facing the danger of the pandemic and its “entirely unpredictable economic and social consequences” [Habermas 2020].

Of particular relevance today is the principle of “new thinking” which states that security in the modern world is indivisible. *Either everyone is equally secure, or no one is.* In other words, we need the security of every state to be combined with the same security of all the members of the global community. *This can only be achieved if international rivals are compelled to become partners and search for a path to universal security together. In today’s world, no one can strive solely for their own security and welfare at the expense of others. The world is coming to realize this.* In May, with the economic crisis unfolding and the unity of the European Union shaken by the pandemic, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron proposed issuing collective European bonds with a view to aiding states that have suffered most during the pandemic. Macron called the French–German proposal “a true change in ideology.” Mujtaba Rahman, chief

European analyst for the Eurasia Group, said, “It’s a European revolution – if it goes through” [*New York Times* 18 May 2020].

The indivisibility of security has become even more apparent as doctors and scientist whose professions know no boundaries or ethnic differences, work at the forefront of the fight for security. *As soon as a coronavirus vaccine is developed, it should be made available to every country equally precisely because security can only be ensured if states and peoples act together.*

Adherence to the principle of indivisible security creates prerequisites for the real equality of all states that are part of the international community. This, in turn, requires greater trust between countries.

Until now, the stubborn refusal to follow the basic tenets of new thinking has resulted in the threats to the world growing constantly. Today, however, the situation has changed. Threats that were pushed into the distant future in the late 20th century have to be fought today. This is the essence of the new historical era we live in.

Conclusion. The Tasks of New Thinking in the 21st Century

Will humanity be able ensure its own survival in the 21st century? In April 2020, Mikhail Gorbachev published an article in TIME magazine on the lessons and consequences of the pandemic, calling for “nothing less than revising the entire global agenda” [Gorbachev 2020].

That was precisely the objective of the “new political thinking” 30 years ago. Both then and now, it is not about a “new world order” but rather about the principles that should form the foundation of relations among states and societies in the world today.

The new thinking in the 21st century rests on several interconnected principles:

- *the need to revise the concept of security;*

- *demilitarization, reducing arms, cutting military spending, and a future without nuclear weapons;*
- *dialogue, trust, and cooperation in politics, economics and the humanitarian sphere.*

Revising the concept of security means that it should no longer be treated as the exclusive domain and task of the military. The current crisis has demonstrated the limited nature of this approach. Security is a broad notion that entails searching for solutions to all the key problems the humanity has faced in recent decades. Security means protecting and maintaining people's health, preserving the environment, natural resources, water and food, and combating hunger and poverty. Security means ensuring humanity's existence in harmony with the environment, with civilization and nature not opposing each other, but maintaining a reasonable balance.

The principle of the demilitarization of politics and thinking proceeds from the fact that the build-up of weapons arsenals and militarization of politics and thinking in East and West is still the gravest threat to humanity, restricting people's freedom and constantly threatening their lives. The money spent on developing, testing and manufacturing of new types of weapons should be channelled primarily into medicine, education and environmental protection.

Prioritizing trust and cooperation follows from implementing the principles listed above. The policy of rivalry and brinkmanship must be replaced by economic and humanitarian cooperation. The fight against disease, poverty and environmental disasters should bring states together, take them to a new level of international cooperation, and enhance the role and significance of international organizations and supranational bodies.

The alternative path would lead to greater international anarchy and increase the deadly risks for civilization and nature. An understanding of the acuteness of global problems in the light of a new universal threat should

prompt leaders and civil society alike to revise international politics in terms of openness, trust, equality and solidarity.

In the late 1980s, the principles of new thinking were put to practical use and proved their effectiveness in the relations between the leaders of the USSR and the United States, thus ending the Cold War. This was a difficult, yet certainly an outstanding example of cooperation. After the Soviet Union and the United States achieved their first major agreements on nuclear disarmament, humanity heaved a sigh of relief, realizing that a peaceful future was possible.

For today's Russia, the call to bring the new political thinking back on the agenda is particularly relevant. Revising its role in the world in the spirit of the new thinking would allow the country to resolve many of the foreign policy problems that have accumulated over the past few years and become one of the world's intellectual and moral leaders.

Notes

Address by Mikhail Gorbachev at the UN General Assembly Session (excerpts) 7 December 2018. History and Public Policy Digital Archive, CWHIP Archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116224>
https://www.gorby.ru/userfiles/file/vystuplenie_v_oon.pdf

“Mikhail Gorbachev: When the Pandemic is Over, the World Must Come Together” // time.com/5820669/mikhail-gorbachev-coronavirus-human-security/;
ria.ru/20200416/1570110605.html

Gorbachev Mikhail. *Perestroika: The New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. New York, Cambridge, Philadelphia, San Francisco, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Singapore, Sydney: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988

Gorbachev Mikhail. *What is At Stake Now: My Appeal for Peace and Freedom*. Moscow, Ves Mir Press. 2019 (in Russian)

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov's interview with the International Life magazine, 17 April 2020 https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/ukraine/-/asset_publisher/HfLxJk5I2xvu/content/id/4103408

VCIOM: Trust in Politicians (in Russian)
https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/doverie_politikam/

Borrell: EU Doesn't Need to Choose between U.S. and China
<https://euobserver.com/foreign/148520>

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) At a Glance
<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/bwc>

Europe's Leaders Must Stem Falling Trust
<https://www.socialeurope.eu/europes-leaders-must-stem-falling-trust;> Living,
Working and COVID-19: First Findings – April 2020
<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2020/living-working-and-covid-19-first-findings-april-2020>

Merkel, Breaking German “Taboo,” Backs Shared EU Debt to Tackle Virus
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/world/europe/coronavirus-european-union-fund.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

NEW REPORT: Nations in Transit 2020 Finds Weakened Institutions in Europe and Eurasia as Politicians Flout Democratic Norms
<https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-nations-transit-2020-finds-weakened-institutions-europe-and-eurasia-politicians>

Secretary-General's Address to the General Assembly, 25 September 2018
[Watch the video on webtv.un.org]

Jürgen Habermas über Corona: “So viel Wissen über unser Nichtwissen gab es noch nie.” https://www.fr.de/kultur/gesellschaft/juergen-habermas-coronavirus-krise-covid19-interview-13642491.html?fbclid=IwAR2Lok7JtTAoPDiF4GI_rNtlBOYnJcbipT_v6dDEoOwYc_aU2-rdcuHXnwL4

Strengthening Health Security by Implementing the International Health Regulations (2005)
<https://www.who.int/ihr/publications/9789241596664/en/>