

# News Release



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## NDI DELEGATION RECOMMENDS URGENT WESTERN ASSISTANCE FOR SOVIET REFORM EFFORTS

Washington, DC, September 21, 1990 -- Asserting that political factors as much as economic ones will determine the success of the Soviet Union's reform program, a report released today by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), predicts that "...while efforts to reform the [Soviet] economy will go forward, it is less clear whether political reform will endure during the austere and difficult transition to a market system."

"If the roots of democratic reform do not gain a foothold in the next few years," the delegation argues, "there will be a temptation to abandon democracy and to force economic change through authoritarian methods."

The report is based on the findings of an NDI-sponsored survey mission that visited the Soviet Union last month. The delegation was led by former Deputy National Security Advisor David Aaron, and included NDI President Brian Atwood; William Miller, President of the American Committee on US-Soviet Relations; Robert Litwak, Director of International Studies, the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars; and Mahnaz Ispahani, NDI Director of Research.

"Some Soviets talk openly of the need for a period of 'democratura' -- authoritarianism designed to achieve a market economy," reports the delegation. "Such an approach," in the view of the NDI group, "is bound to fail. Only freely elected, trusted and popular political leaders at all levels will succeed in the massive task of reforming [the] economic system... The Communist ideology that resulted in a system described by one democratic reformer as 'they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work,' is dead. An ideology based on efficiency alone will not likely restore the will to work."

Chaired by former Vice President Walter Mondale, NDI conducts political training programs, and seminars in democratic governance and election processes around the world. By working with political parties and other institutions, NDI seeks to promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions and pluralistic values in new and emerging democracies. The Institute worked throughout Eastern and Central Europe during the democratic transitions there last year.

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The survey mission heard many requests for political development assistance. Its report notes: "The urgency of the reformers' tasks is matched by the urgency of their needs: for information, political training, managerial expertise and communication -- both with other groups in the Soviet Union and with those abroad."

The delegation reports two views of Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. "In democratic reform circles Gorbachev is widely accused of belatedly adopting half-measures...Soviet democrats complain that in the current, crucial period of transition, when the Soviet Union requires his leadership of the reform movement, Gorbachev acts as the leader of a center that has lost its power to control the republics and as a reluctant reformer seeking compromise between two irreconcilable positions."

Gorbachev loyalists suggest, however, that "his decision to remain at the helm [of the Communist Party (CPSU)]...is based on his calculation that the CPSU is still too powerful an organ to abandon to his opponents...According to this view, Gorbachev is making an heroic personal and political sacrifice for the nation, restraining the Communist stalwarts while the reformers proceed with their work."

The delegation report warns that the "dangerous rift between the armed forces and civil society also appears to be widening. Generals are voicing their dismay at the hostile public attitude toward them...As domestic threats to the union arise, either from economic or political chaos, or from the nationalist movements in various republics, the potential for military intervention in politics increases."

The survey mission recommends that NDI and similar Western organizations begin their developmental efforts as soon as possible: Since the "window of opportunity [for the democratic reformers] may be narrower than many Westerners now believe, the need for assistance in the techniques of democratic management at all jurisdictional levels in the Soviet Union is urgent."

Based on the delegation's recommendations, NDI plans to begin its program in the Soviet Union with a conference involving members of city councils, in which many of the economic and political reforms are being initiated. Participants from Europe and the United States will share experiences on the structure and role of local governments in a democratic system. Noting that democratic coalitions prevailed in many industrial cities during last year's elections, Sergei Stankevich, Moscow's deputy mayor, pointed out recently that the "process of transformation" will now begin "using democratic governments at the local level to show how democracy can work economically and politically."