

ANNEX

THE EAST²: TRENDS AND POLICIES OF CHANGE

The Soviet Union

Introduction: From Stagnation to Gorbachev's Revolution

For two decades preceding Gorbachev's assumption to power in 1985 there was little or no change in the unwieldy centralized political and economic structure of the USSR. The period is now publicly characterized in the USSR as the period of stagnation. The new leader was faced immediately with the critical problems of the national economy, which, apart from its military-industrial sector, was riddled with inefficiency, waste, inferior quality of production, and general infrastructural obsolescence. In addition, and perhaps most troublesome, the economy had been losing the momentum of growth over the previous five years. In the countryside the state of agriculture, which Gorbachev has described as "our society's biggest wound," presented an equally dismal picture. A related concern took the form of growing popular dissatisfaction with persistent shortages of food supplies, housing and consumer goods and with the failure to maintain standards of social programmes previously achieved. Moreover, from these circumstances, there arose, as a central preoccupation, the question of the ability of the deteriorating economy to support the requirements of national security, of Soviet foreign policy interests and of the USSR's position as a great power.

Gorbachev was also keenly aware that over the previous twenty years Soviet society itself had undergone significant processes of change in conditions of dramatic population growth and urbanization. There had emerged a far better educated people with diverse skills, rising expectations, a cynical indifference to their political leaders and evolving social and cultural aspirations. *Glasnost* and democratization would encourage and facilitate the expression of such popular concerns and reveal, in particular, the

² In this section "The East" is intended to include the Soviet Union and its six East European partners in the Warsaw Pact: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania.