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## CONTENTS

### Articles

- Changing Values of Russians from Brezhnev to  
Gorbachev  
*Yuri Arutiunian* .....1
- Perestroika and Interpretation of Russian-  
Ukrainian Relations  
*Stephen Velychenko* .....35
- Perestroika and Baltic Historiography  
*Toivo U. Raun* .....52
- The Dynamics of Lithuanian Historiography  
*Alfred Erich Senn* .....63
- Rewriting Turkic History in the Gorbachev Era  
*Audrey L. Altstadt* .....73

## Research Materials

Sociological Research Material .....	91
Code Book of Uzbek Urban and Rural Sample, 1973 <i>Institute of Ethnography, Academy of Sciences, USSR, Institute of History, Academy of Sciences, Uzbek SSR</i> .....	95
Pilot Sociological Survey of the City of Kharkov, Ukraine <i>Commissioned by the Center on East-West Trade, Investment, and Communications, Duke University</i> .....	140

## Changing Values of Russians from Brezhnev to Gorbachev

*Yuri Arutiunian*

For several centuries after the collapse of the Tatar despotism, the boundaries of the Russian state were systematically widened, and huge territories of Europe and Asia were settled by Russians. In the 20th century, the process of continual border expansion was extended to a claim of world domination expressed in the slogan, "Proletariat of all countries, unite." The Russians were often seen as the ethnic base of a new social system that would succeed the dominant "system of capitalism." All questions of war and peace, of revolutionary explosions and deep social transformations, wherever they occurred, were said to be connected to a certain degree, directly or indirectly, with the Russians.

Now we are living through an historical turning point in the fate of the Russian people. The policy of preserving and widening "the camp of socialism," which had been carried out at a heavy price to the Russian people, has been repudiated. Russian control of Eastern Europe was abandoned in 1989, and now the first elected president of Russia has deliberately broken up the Soviet Union itself. He relinquished claim to territories long taken for granted as an integral part of the Russians' own motherland.

Naturally these developments have been both the cause and effect of colossal changes in the consciousness of the Russian people. We must study this transformation in attitude not only to understand the past, but also to have some sense of the prospects and problems of the future.<sup>1</sup>

In looking at the Russians, however, we must be very careful in our definitions. Following the break-up of the Soviet