

In the dictionary of the Russian language edited by Dmitry Ushakov, the noun “hope” is defined as “the desire, the expectation of something joyful, pleasant, combined with confidence in the feasibility of implementation.”<sup>3</sup> These terms are followed by quotations from precedent texts, patterns of the normative use of the term. Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Griboyedov, and Anton Chekhov are quoted. Why do I pay attention to the names of the three Russian classics? The answer is: Because the fact that the lexical unit in question was illustrated only by examples from 19th century literature proves that ‘hope’ was not a word related to the most extreme, totalitarian Soviet public discourse (i.e., a discourse of a deeply polarized and politically mythologized language, having an exclusive sanction to be in operation in a specific area).<sup>4</sup> Ushakov’s four-volume dictionary, published between 1935 and 1940, documents the state of the Russian language of the period when it was severely petrified by ideology and political mythology.<sup>5</sup> It is a valuable source which enables us not only to trace the links between lexical and ideological units but also to develop a view of the degree to which the Russian language had become ideologized. For this purpose, one does not need to look for words such as “party” or “revolution.” The density of the network of lexical–ideological connections is evidenced above all by the slogans referring to words that seem to be devoid of a political context. Thus, if one of the meanings of the Russian noun *mir* (in this case “peace”) is defined as “absence of war, armed struggle in international relations,” the quotation that illustrates it comes from Stalin: “We stand for peace and defend the cause of peace.”<sup>6</sup> Similar is the case of the noun “method.” Its definition goes as follows: “Way, method, or technique of theoretical research or practical implementation of something.” The precedent text that illustrates the word ‘method’ is again from Stalin: “Lenin’s method is not only a restoration but also a concretisation and further development of Marx’s critical and revolutionary method.”<sup>7</sup> The reader is referred to almost all the classics of Marxism–Leninism: to Lenin and Marx by content, and to Stalin by authorship.

Although Khrushchev’s Thaw put an end to the domination of totalitarian discourse in the public sphere, totalitarian language—in a form not far

<sup>3</sup> Entry “Nadezhda,” in *Tolkovyy slovar’ russkogo yazyka*, ed. D. N. Ushakov, vol. 2, Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo inostrannykh i natsional’nykh slovarey, Moskva 1938, 334. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> See Michał Głowiński, “O dyskursie totalitarnym,” in Michał Głowiński, *Dzień Ulissesa i inne szkice na tematy niemitologiczne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), 37–41.

<sup>5</sup> Ushakov’s dictionary—seen as a document recording the state of the totalitarian language—received an excellent linguocultural analysis by Nataliya Kupina. See Nataliya Kupina, *Totalitarnyy yazyk: Slovar’ i rechevyye reaktsii* (Yekaterinburg and Perm’: Izdatel’stvo Ural’skogo universiteta, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Entry “Mir<sup>2</sup>,” in *Tolkovyy slovar’ russkogo yazyka*, 224 [working translation].

<sup>7</sup> Entry “Metod,” in: *Tolkovyy slovar’ russkogo yazyka*, 224 [working translation].

removed from its state as documented by Ushakov—remained a fundamental component of political discourse until the mid-eighties.<sup>8</sup> Neither ‘hope’ nor ‘fear’ were desirable categories in this discourse, and they rarely appeared in the statements of the Soviet leaders.

In fact, they were simply unnecessary. In the Lenin era, the shape of official discourse was determined by the phenomenon of utopian consciousness: there was a space in it for the certainty of achieving the ideal ‘here and now,’ although there were numerous visions of the ideal in question (while in a universe of certainty the category of ‘hope’ is not useful). In the Stalinist era, there was only one official communist ideal and it was established in the dogmas of the system of state mythology.<sup>9</sup> In the light of the mythological worldview created by the state, the party’s ‘only right path’ towards the ideal was the guarantee that this desired state of social reality would be achieved. ‘Hope’ again did not fit into that scheme. In official discourse, the Khrushchev era was a return to utopian certainty, best illustrated by the famous enunciation concluding the so-called third program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: The “Party solemnly proclaims: the current generation of the Soviet people will live under communism!”<sup>10</sup>

The situation changed radically during Gorbachev’s perestroika. Paradoxically, the appearance of ‘hope’ was accelerated by the Cold War and the arms race, the demands of which the anachronistic Soviet economy was no longer able to meet. Probably this single factor helped the new Soviet leader discern an ideological perspective unknown to his predecessors: a general human perspective. “Humanity is no longer immortal,”<sup>11</sup> says the title of a chapter of Gorbachev’s memoirs, accurately reflecting the rhetoric the Soviet leadership was beginning to consistently articulate. The significance of those words was tragically confirmed by the Chernobyl disaster. Developing his thought, Gorbachev stated, “There is a class interest, a national interest, a group interest, a corporate interest, but there are also human interests. We must recognize that they are a priority, because, in the event of nuclear risk and global environmental crisis, it is first and foremost that the life of mankind is given a priority.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Kupina, *Totalitarnyy yazyk...*, 53.

<sup>9</sup> See Jakub Sadowski, *Między Pałacem Rad i Pałacem Kultury: Studium kultury totalitarnej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron, 2009), 80–94.

<sup>10</sup> *Programma Kommunisticheskoy partii Sovetskogo Soyuza* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1961), 142 [working translation].

<sup>11</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *Nayedine s soboy* (Moskva: Grin strit, 2012), 456 [working translation].

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 473 [working translation].