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Dissenting from the plan: Estonian visions of marketization, 1988-1991

The transformation of Europe's post-socialist economies, a core aspect of the sweeping changes of the post-Cold War era, has only recently been discovered by historical research. Unlike "transitology" scholars, historians approach the "triumph of the market" by highlighting continuities rather than ruptures. In the case of Estonia, the "systemic revolution" of the perestroika years has gained less attention than the "Singing Revolution", although the resulting embryonic reforms were, in hindsight, early state-building processes. The paper focuses on the contribution of Western economists and research institutions to the market-oriented agenda that developed after the Estonian Declaration on Sovereignty of November 1988. Since the publication of the so-called IME Proposal in September 1987, which promoted republican economic self-management, a core group of "economic dissenters" had been persistently stretching the borders of the reform discourse. While the central government's and the moderate local nomenklatura's continuous attempts to oust the market radicals from dominating the discourse still required some lip-service that claimed adherence to the main principles of the socialist economy, informal Western assistance in developing a new economic model, camouflaged as a contribution to perestroika, increased from early 1989 onwards. While Estonian reformers still had an eye on Poland and Hungary, the leaders of economic reform in the Soviet bloc which gradually prepared for a full transition to the market, the informal links to Western advisors increasingly gained momentum, which was reflected in law drafts, investment schemes and trade agreements that were elaborated prior to the restoration of Estonia's independence in August 1991.