

The Restoration of Central Europe

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There was a British political writer, *Scotus Viator*, who before 1918 was very popular in Zagreb and in Dalmatia and who contributed a great deal to the creation of a Greater Serbian Yugoslavia. His son, Hugh Seton-Watson, became a distinguished historian, who some 22 years ago gave a series of lectures at the University of Washington in Seattle on the Danubian lands and said: "Europe remains the heart of the human race and the heart of Europe is sick."¹ Today people in Central Europe certainly don't feel very well but they are certainly better than they were in 1975. The collapse of the Communist (internal and international) system made curing possible, and although the medicine is very bitter the doctors believe it will work.

Under Communism Central Europe was dying and was being forgotten. Applying the term "Eastern Europe" to Czechoslovakia and Hungary and the term "Balkans" to Croatia and Slovenia was tantamount to acquiescence in Soviet and Serbian domination of the Danubian lands. But Central Europe had been too strongly linked culturally to the West to be absorbed easily and its citizens made good use of the weakening of external and internal control, so when the failure of the Communist utopia became manifest in 1989 the political earthquake unearthed and revealed our beautiful world of Central Europe. It was here, in the borderland between Western Europe and the Russian heartland that the post-Second World War period came to an end and a new era in world history began. Thus after 1918-1920 and 1945-1947, 1989-1991 became the third historic turning point in the 20th century. As a result the largely artificial federations: the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, ceased to exist, many nations and states emerged from decades or sometimes centuries of oblivion. Parliaments became real centers of debate and even power not only in such old, historic European capitals like Prague, Zagreb or Budapest, but also in new ones like Bratislava and Ljubljana.

The present generation of politicians, advisers and thinkers has the historic responsibility to make the best of the great changes which occurred between 1989 and 1991-2, in other words *to utilize the resounding victory won by our tradi-*

tional European values and principles, by the Euro-Atlantic political, economic and social model. The traditional mistake made by so many victors: to win the war and to lose the peace, should be avoided. Today the road is still open to restore the historic frontiers of the western world as a Euro-Atlantic community, with a chance to expand it eventually much further, one day perhaps reaching the borders of China.

The Forgotten Europe

As we know it very well, but our friends in Western Europe and on the other side of the Atlantic know it far less, in the last two millennia the lands between the Baltic and the Adriatic were the borderland, the defense line of western civilization. Here, at a historical fault line, two political cultures (autocratic and pluralistic), three major Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) and four linguistic groups (Latin or Romance, Indo-German, Slav and Finno-Ugrian) meet. A thousand years ago the emerging new version of western civilization came to incorporate the new Christian kingdoms of Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Croatia. (As it is again not widely known by people in the West Bulgaria, the Kievan Rus and Serbia were converted to Christianity by "the second Rome", Byzantium, adopted the Cyrillic alphabet, and came to develop along different cultural and political patterns.) Although centuries later the independence of these countries was destroyed by the Ottoman Empire (representing an earlier version of Islamic fundamentalism), and by the expanding Habsburg and Russian Empires, the peoples of Central Europe remained closely linked to western European intellectual and political thought. (The Reformation as well as the Enlightenment and the three great democratic revolutions made a strong impact on them.) By the 18th century the Habsburg Monarchy - with considerable military support from the rest of Europe - pushed back the Ottomans and then for two centuries kept regional peace. (The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston declared in 1849 in the British House of Commons that "The political independence and liberties of Europe are bound up... with the maintenance and integrity of Austria as a great European Power.")² That great

power gradually abandoned its German and imperialistic character and its eleven constituent national groups were able to assume increasing responsibility for running their own affairs, politically some and in the cultural and religious sphere practically all. It was a large common market, with benefits to all the inhabitants. The splendour of that golden age, the 19th and early 20th century, is still visible, and its cultural achievements have made their mark all over the world. Then came the Great War, the great folly, and it shattered not only what by then was known as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but also the great hopes about the 20th century. The break-up of the Monarchy might have been unavoidable, but not the ensuing instability.

(In October 1918 Leo Amery, then an adviser to the British Prime Minister, with remarkable foresight, spoke out against the division of Central Europe into small states.)

*"Permanent stability and prosperity could best be secured by a new Danubian Confederation comprising German Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania and probably also Bulgaria. (...) The various nationalities of Central Europe are so interlocked, and their racial frontiers are so unsuitable as the frontiers of really independent sovereign states, that the only satisfactory and permanent working policy for them lies in their incorporation in a non-national superstate. We can delay, but we cannot prevent the eventual coming of that superstate. To commit ourselves unreservedly to nationalism at the Peace Conference, and to ignore the inevitable coming of the larger non-national superstate, would be to commit precisely the errors which our grandfathers committed at the Congress of Vienna, when they settled Europe on the basis of legitimacy, on which the war had been fought and argued, and not on the basis of the new nationalist forces which the war had called into being."*³

The United States, and President Wilson personally, meant well by proclaiming the doctrine of national self-determination, but few were aware of the difficulties involved. Responsibility for the faulty execution of a fair principle lies mainly with the victorious European powers, but the appetite of the beneficiaries of the 1919 peace settlement and the policies pursued by the governments in the new Central Europe also contributed to the sad developments that came.) "In each of the new states there prevailed a narrow official nationalism", and the repressive policies pursued towards the large national minorities led to internal and external tensions and conflicts. "This state of generalized and mutual hostility provided opportu-

nities for any great power intent on disturbing the peace."⁴ For the blunders of the greater and smaller powers of Europe the whole world paid a very heavy price, but the Central and Eastern Europeans suffered incomparably more and longer. Having been occupied, conquered and decimated by Nazi Germany, they were "liberated" by the Soviet Red Army, and as a result the easternmost part of the West came under an Asiatic-type despotic rule. With Hitler's and Stalin's aggressions western institutions and values receded to the Atlantic countries and the very existence of western civilization became jeopardized, while the markets and the resources of Central Europe became cut off from the rest of the world for almost half a century.

Shrewd politicians, like Bismarck and Stalin, were always aware of the strategic importance of the geographical center of the European continent, but the destruction of Central Europe by two world wars almost obliterated the notion of this important region from the minds. Most people came to believe that there was only a western and an eastern Europe, and academic institutions and programs reinforced the results of Soviet conquest by using the term "Slavic studies", Russian and East European programs". In this way well over 150 million non-Russians were almost overlooked. This was not a small oversight.

Perhaps some people did not mind that. They tended to associate Central Europe with the powder-keg of the Balkans, and remembered only that two world wars broke out there. In the United States, but also in France and Britain, there were quite a few people ready to write off the quarrelsome small states living between the Germans and the Russians, first to Nazi Germany, then to Stalin's Russia. Unfortunately Churchill's advice to save Central Europe, in the 1930's by abandoning the policy of appeasing Hitler, during the war by liberating Central Europe from the south, pushing through "the soft underbelly" and thus forestalling the Red Army, was not heeded to. American thinking in 1943-45 was guided by other considerations: in order to ensure future Soviet cooperation (in the war against Japan and also later) Central Europe should be accepted as falling outside the western and inside the Soviet sphere of interest. Its nations should be left to their own device and encouraged to find an accommodation with the Soviet Union. It was only hope that a kind of neutrality, rather than full Sovietization, would be permitted by Stalin.⁵ That option materialized only in the case of Finland.

In the late 1940's it was not for the first and

neither the last time that the Central Europeans felt themselves let down. Poles will always remember the four partitions, the Hungarians the 1920 peace treaty and the Czech Munich. It also came as a surprise for these nations that they were allowed to fall under soviet domination after 1945. In a most painful and tragic way the notion of being abandoned revived in 1956, 1968, and 1981 respectively. True, all over the world there was strong and genuine sympathy shown for Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland in their dramatic attempts to change the system imposed on them, and there was even a desire to help, but it appeared to be too dangerous to go beyond protests and tears. The military division of 1945 was accepted as a practically permanent political one, only further Soviet expansion was to be met by force. It was only hope that oppression in Central and Eastern Europe would eventually weaken, that increased political and economic contacts would change the Communist leaders to become more amenable, but "liberation" and "rollback" were only catchwords, never meant seriously. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act gave a seal of approval to the division Europe, although giving it "a human face".

Despite all that there was no feeling of serious resentment towards the West in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. People looked at NATO and increasingly at the nations of Western Europe as the ultimate hope that freedom would return and prosperity would set in one day in the East, too.

Some lessons of the transformation process

1989 was truly an *annus mirabilis*, the year of the miracles, when in the wake of the political transformation of Poland and Hungary, all the communist dominoes fell, the whole edifice of communism collapsed and the countries which, against their expressed will, adopted irrational and harmful policies restored or introduced democratic constitutions and started to reestablish the market economy.

What Central and Eastern Europeans usually call 'the West', i.e. Western Europe and the United States, was unprepared for these changes. This was first pointed out by the late Hungarian prime Minister József Antall, who warned at the Paris CSCE summit of November 1990 that perhaps the greatest danger for the new Europe lay in the continued division of the continent with the one-time Iron Curtain being replaced by a Welfare Wall which would separate the victims of communism from their more fortunate fellow-Europeans. Just consider, during the last two

world wars extensive preparations were made for the post-war reconstruction, yet none seems to have been made for the current post-Cold War reconstruction. Naturally the new non-communist governments elected in and after 1990 had no ready plans for managing the transition either. There was no recipe how to reconstruct the command economies, how to cure those sick societies. But if we look around today in Central Europe, from Warsaw to Zagreb, do we not see how much this part of Europe has changed for the better? Politically certainly, economically it is on the right track but far from making the good results available for everyone, for the masses, for those who - so far - have not benefited from the transformation. And the spiritual, the mental transformation, the restoration of some basic characteristics of Central Europe like honesty, the old work ethics, the incorruptible civil service, a liking for having an easy time accompanied by compassion and solidarity is unfortunately very far. Nevertheless the governments, the intellectuals who took over after 1990 must have done a better job than it was immediately perceived by many of their electors. But instead of assessing the performance of the governments in Central Europe let me make some comments on the performance of our friends in the old established democracies.

Once, at a meeting of NACC in Brussels, I said that having pulled down the Iron Curtain we, the former "captive nations" found ourselves as the hero of the book, "The spy who came in from the cold". He was given a hero's welcome - but then the air started to cool down around him. He had been too long out in the cold to fit into the cosy free world. There was the smell of poverty and irrational passions around the people living in Central and Eastern Europe. There was genuine sympathy towards these people but letting them in, into the club of the rich and the educated, looked too risky.

Apart from the costs there was also a psychological deterrent which made our western friends very cautious and often despondent about the so-called new democracies: the events in the former Yugoslavia and the fear that there are many more potential Bosnias. In that connection I would like to share with you a few historical and personal observations on the international handling of the most terrible crisis since World War 2.

a. Turning a blind eye to the dark side of Tito's Yugoslavia

Following the break between Stalin and Tito the United States and her allies gave very

substantial economic and military support to Yugoslavia - for perfectly valid reasons. But in the following decades western countries turned a blind eye to the gross violations of human rights in Yugoslavia, and were apparently unaware of the growing resentment felt by the non-Serbs towards the political and economic domination of the country by Serbs calling themselves Yugoslav internationalists.

b. Related recognition of the heterogeneous national-religious composition

The desire to keep Yugoslavia united (and also memories of Serbia as an ally in two world wars) made most members of NATO and the European Community reluctant to accept the idea of substantial changes in the political geography. We all remember when the American Secretary of State in June 1991 still spoke out in favour of a "unitary Yugoslavia". That undoubtedly encouraged the Yugoslav Army to try forestalling the assertion of independence by Slovenia and Croatia. When I told James Baker at the CSCE Foreign Ministerial conference in Berlin that the debate between Belgrade and the constituent republics might be compared to when thirteen English colonies in 18th century North America spoke out for their specific interests he did not see the parallel.

When violence erupted and already serious war crimes were committed the European Community came up with an admirable plan for a new constitutional arrangement, the so-called Carrington Plan: special status for all national communities in the old Yugoslavia, for the Serbs in Croatia and the non-Serbs (Albanians, Hungarians, Croats) in Serbia, while preserving the economic and monetary union of a confederal Yugoslavia. Unfortunately the Belgrade leadership was not interested in a fair, peaceful solution, and the European Community proved too weak to insist upon the settlement proposed by itself.

c. Illusion of a political as opposed to a military solution

Contrary to the often repeated line that there was no military solution to the crisis, only a political one, it should have been realized that once the war started and unbelievable crimes were committed there was no political solution without the use of some force. But it was only in 1994 that the British weekly *Spectator* became fed up with the endless talks about the "peace process" and wrote: "What we need is a war process." For too long history was misunderstood, opinion makers drew up false analogies of World War 2 and

of Vietnam, and there was a misplaced fear of Germany and a possible new German zone of influence. The fire was not put out when it was still a small one. No wonder that soon it spread over to Bosnia.

d. Moral failure over Croatia, over war crimes

When the war started to rage in Croatia, with appalling crimes, violations of basic human rights, and total disregard to the law of war, there was very little publicity given to that aspect before the spectacular siege of Dubrovnik started. There was only one lonely voice: the Visegrad countries jointly called for action already in October 1991, at their summit meeting in Cracow. Probably that should have been the time for NATO to act, on behalf of the UN.

e. Policies smacking of appeasement

Instead of timely and resolute action the leaders of Europe were trying to satisfy the appetite of the aggressors in the hope that they would calm down, would stop the atrocities. The world saw endless talks, ceasefires (to be broken immediately), gradual recognition of war criminals as negotiating partners, even as "presidents" of non-existing states. No wonder that NATO was seen as a paper-tiger, and the UN simply as a useful source of supply for feeding the soldiers, including the paramilitary criminals distinguishing themselves in ethnic cleansing and mass rape.

A personal note: some efforts in preventive diplomacy

Hungary as a neighbouring country, with close to half a million Hungarians living in the old Yugoslavia, had a strong interest to prevent and later to stop violence, also to see a solution or the peaceful co-existence of various ethnic/religious groups living side-by-side. Prime Minister Antall and myself made many suggestions in word and in writing to all the interested parties and leaders, supporting the solutions proposed by the European Community, urging "the effective co-operation of the international community",⁶ and drawing attention to the likely consequences, like adding an Islamic or Slavic solidarity dimension to the crisis. We constantly warned about the wider implications, too. "In case the international community is unable to facilitate the democratic solution of the recent crisis it would send a negative message for the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, which liberated themselves and restored democracy, or at least move towards it. At the same time such a failure would give encouragement to the supporters of the old, totalitarian regime, who still exist. It is also obvious that the situ-

situation in Yugoslavia has a decisive impact on the outcome of the ongoing transition in the Soviet nuclear superpower. Therefore Yugoslavia is likely to serve as a precedent, it will show whether international cooperation can or cannot solve such a crisis."⁷

The Hungarian political leadership was concerned not only with the security of its own country (then under serious threat from the ongoing war along the southern border) and the future of the Hungarian communities in Yugoslavia, but also with the danger of the conflict spreading to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Before that happened, in a letter sent in December 1991 to several highly-placed people involved in trying to find a settlement, I wrote the following: "The UN should immediately try to send peace-keeping forces not only to the territory of Croatia but also to those areas of Yugoslavia where there is still a fragile peace: to Bosnia and to the two formerly autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo. Without that a wholesale massacre may occur, as reports confirm."⁸

Wasn't there a kind of appeasement? Sanctions, let alone peace-making military measures were not even thought of by western politicians (as opposed to the military) before the summer of 1992, almost a year after the outbreak of hostilities. By that time intervention became far more difficult, and the costs of action looked too high for western governments to consider seriously. It also took a long time for the public to change their opinion about Serbian policy. Many considerations and pretexts were found against action, just like in the 1930s. But the problem did not simply go away, and eventually some action had to be taken. A considerable UN force was sent in and a massive humanitarian aid program was launched, but UNPROFOR received a very narrow mandate. In that way they could only act as observers, had to suffer humiliation and accept that much of the aid sent went into the hands of the armies, thus helping them to continue that most barbarous war.

Appeasement always wets the appetite of the aggressors and so it happened with the violators of the CSCE norms, principles and recommendations. I am afraid later events justified my appeal written to a colleague of mine: "It is not too much to say that the success of the whole transition process in Central and Eastern Europe is endangered if the war in the former Yugoslavia is not finished in the nearest future. The way in which the international community reacts to this crisis and demonstrates its capacity and readiness

to act may set a crucial precedent for the future. It is therefore vital for the relevant international fora to yield tangible results, otherwise the international community would send an extremely equivocal and wrong message to other over-zealous nationalists and fomenters of unrest around the world."⁹

Almost four years were wasted before NATO, led by the United States, had enough of the humiliations and proved that it was far from being a paper tiger. The aggressors immediately understood that language and a diplomatic solution, the Dayton Accord, could become possible.

Central Europe and Euro-Atlantic Integration

There is no denying that western governments showed much goodwill and sympathy, but with hindsight it is hard to explain why they reacted so slowly and cautiously both to the new opportunities and the dangers. It took more than three years for the European Community to adopt the position, at the June 1993 summit in Copenhagen, that it was willing to admit the former command economy countries as members - once they were fit for that. Self-interest, to use the considerable skills and the lower wages of the Central and Eastern Europeans in world wide competition should have also dictated expansion to the European Union, but fear of the costs and concern with the immediate problems kept Brussels and the majority of the twelve governments less than enthusiastic about considering their application. It required a strong diplomatic offensive from Hungary, starting in 1993 and later joined by Poland to convince the Twelve that we are right to submit an application for membership. Once that was accepted and I presented our application on 1 April 1994 it was ensured that when the IGS would be over talks would start with the formerly Communist-dominated countries. Of course there is more than economic considerations which should tell in favour of expanding the frontiers of prosperity and stability eastward. Security both for the western and for the eastern half of Europe requires that the present vacuum in the heart of Europe should be filled. That involves gradually admitting the ex-Communist countries into the WEU and primarily into NATO.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe want to become members of the Atlantic Alliance in order to be secure from the traditional and new threats, in order to make the changes really irreversible. Their admission would greatly contribute to the stability of the whole continent, including that of Russia. Russian arguments about

expansion being a threat to Russia or at least seen by its people as such is insincere. The argument must be reversed: the expansion of the area of stability and security to Central Europe will make the Western border zone of Russia stable and safe. That would enable Russia to deal with the real threats to its security, which appear to exist rather in the South and the East. A stable and eventually prosperous Central Europe will be also very advantageous for the countries east of it as it will improve their chances for following suit quickly. It will encourage the democratic forces of Russia and Ukraine because Central Europe has long been seen by them as a testing ground, as a model within reach. Today - as a recent survey shows¹⁰ - the majority of Russians do not consider themselves and their country as part of Europe. If the real Europe, the institutionalized one, moves closer to them, they are more likely to discover the advantages of partnership than while their isolation continues. Today there is a *de facto* cordon sanitaire between Russia and the West. Is it in the interest of anyone that it would remain there?

Once there was a westward moving Frontier in America which greatly contributed to the consolidation and prosperity of a continent. Today there is a kind of eastward moving frontier in Europe, and that can help solving many of the problems of the present and the future. That new frontier must be helped to move quickly, not restrained. The process of enlarging western institutions could have, should have started long ago. The democracies and the democrats of Central and Eastern Europe are the friends and supporters of democracy in Russia. They can support the latter best by their own rapid success, but that requires adequate policies by the western world.

NATO has proved to be an excellent educational institution in bringing together countries with a long tradition of mutual suspicions and even conflicts. A similar role is badly needed in Central and Eastern Europe. Left alone those states, without guidance and help, might again end up not simply in petty quarrels, but being reincorporated in a new sphere of influence, even in a restored military bloc. Plans for such have obviously not died yet, and that must be the real explanation for the growing opposition shown by Russia to its former satellites acceding to the Washington Treaty. The former members of the Soviet bloc cannot help seeing that opposition as a most serious challenge to their sovereignty. It should not be answered by a policy which shows elements of appeasement.

Democracy, human and minority rights, stability and prosperity are interdependent. They can spread eastward only gradually. First it is the heart of Europe which is to be cured. When the new eastern frontier zone of stability and prosperity will pass Central Europe to reach Kiev and Moscow, then the centre of Europe will be able to capitalize on its geographical position. This is the precondition for Europe to compete successfully with the rapidly growing economies of Asia. Only a Europe united with itself and in close alliance with the United States can continue and fulfil its mission, what a Hungarian author once described as proving that "reason and solidarity is mightier than the terror of passions". It is only in this way that we can deal successfully with such international problems like the threat of fundamentalist intolerance, backwardness and aggressive nationalism in the East and anarchy, poverty, famine, disease in the South. By restoring Central Europe and linking it to the Euro-Atlantic community we will have a much better chance to deal successfully with global problems, like the reckless pollution of the environment, population growth, unemployment, drugs, crime, terrorism. That is the way to utilize the results of *annus mirabilis* 1989, so that the 21st century could be better than the 20th was. ■

1 Hugh Seton-Watson, *The "Sick Heart" of Modern Europe; the Problem of the Danubian Lands*, Seattle, 1975.

2 Charles Sproxtton, *Palmerston and the Hungarian Revolution*, Cambridge, 1919. pp. 77-8.

3 *The Austro-Hungarian problem*. Memorandum by Leo S. Amery, 20 October 1918. Public Record Office, London. FO 371/3136/17223.

4 Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*. R.W. Seton-Watson and the last Years of Austria-Hungary, London, 1981. p. 324.

5 Walter Lippmann's *American Foreign Policy* published in 1944 was a clear exposition of that approach. It came out in a Hungarian translation in 1946, but its many readers did not want to believe that American decision-makers apparently shared most of the author's views about U.S. interest being confined to the Atlantic rim of Europe.

6 Minister for Foreign Affairs G. Jeszenszky to H. van den Broek, Foreign Minister of the Netherlands and Chairman of the ECONOMY, 15 Nov. 1991.

7 Prime Minister J. Antall to President G. Bush, October 28, 1991.

8 G. Jeszenszky to Lord Carrington, H. van den Broek ad C. Vance, December 8, 1991.

9 G. Jeszenszky on 12 January 1993.

10 *The Economist*, March 2, 1996, p. 49.