

Epilogue

Postrevolutionary Paradoxes

Central Europe Since 1989

During the last six months of 1989 the Communist regimes in the Eastern bloc came down one by one: in July in Poland, in Hungary in September, in East Germany in November, and in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria in December. One thing all these revolutions had in common was that they obviously displaced the old Communist order, and the coincidence of 1989 with the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution in 1789 was an appropriate historical accident. François Furet, one of the premier French historians of the French Revolution, drew parallels between 1989 and “the ideas of 1789 or the American Revolution: human rights, the sovereignty of peoples, free elections, markets” and compared the Communist regimes with the ancien régime of late-eighteenth-century France: hated, immobile, and incompetent.

Furet also took this opportunity to criticize the European left, which traditionally interpreted the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 as a legitimate expression of French revolutionary ideals. The revolutions of 1989 represented the belated victory of “old ideas”—the moderate, late-eighteenth-century principles of liberal democratic revolutions—over the radically modern ideas of early-twentieth-century “Bolshevik-Jacobinism”:

We are witnesses to revolutions, which are simultaneously counter-revolutions: uprisings by the people in the name of the establishment or reestablishment of liberal democracy; we are seeing the end of the revolutionary idea that has determined the horizons of the Left, far beyond strictly Marxist-Leninist circles, for two hundred years.

According to Furet, in 1989 the future of communism and socialist planned economies ironically became democracy and capitalist market economies.

The driving forces between the revolutions of 1989 were “the contradictory but inseparably related virtues of market economics and human rights.”¹

The fact that the guiding principles of the various revolutions of 1989 were fundamentally the same and that revolutionary synergy helped topple six Communist regimes in the region within the relatively short period of six months actually obscures how different each of these revolutions were. The moral and political (or human rights) dimensions of these revolutions and the role that the ideas of market economics played were different in each country; the durations of their “prerevolutionary” phases varied widely; and the dynamics of the interaction among different actors in these revolutionary dramas—such as Mikhail Gorbachev, the regimes in power, intellectuals and dissidents, organized opposition, and the populace at large—were dissimilar.

On November 23, 1989, the seventh day of the Czechoslovak revolution, the British historian and journalist Timothy Garton Ash met Václav Havel in Prague and commented: “In Poland it took ten years, in Hungary it took ten months, in East Germany it took ten weeks: perhaps in Czechoslovakia it will take ten days!”² His quip was remarkably accurate. The Czechoslovak revolution ran its course in twenty-four days. Romania’s bloody revolution of December 1989 was even shorter, figuratively it took “ten hours.” One of the amazing characteristics of the revolutions of 1989, with the notable exception of Romania, was the absence of violence, bloodshed, and vengeance.

There were at least four different revolutionary patterns in East Central Europe.³ Poland’s “negotiated transition” was carried by Solidarity, a well-organized coalition of antiregime forces that enjoyed broad popular support, and it occurred from the bottom up. In Hungary, a new generation of liberal reform Communists initiated a transition from the top down, by inviting oppositional dissidents and intellectuals to participate in a dialogue about restructuring the system under circumstances considerably different from those in Poland. There was neither widespread popular protest against the regime in Hungary nor an identification of the populace with dissidents and intellectuals, or vice versa. Furthermore, there was a unique and, in some cases, almost symbiotic relationship between opposition intellectuals and the Communist Party in Hungary, which was by far the most open, liberal, democratic, and reform minded of all the Communist parties in Eastern Europe. For the most part, the Hungarian revolution took place without the mass protest of “the people” in the streets.

The revolutions in the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia fall into a third category. They were Gorbachev inspired to a certain extent. They were not, however, instigated by reform Communists but by numerically small groups of dissidents and sudden popular protest. Gorbachev had openly criticized the repressive regimes of Erich Honecker in the GDR and Gustav Husák in Czechoslovakia for their lack of preparedness to reform, and popular protest organized by regime critics interested in truly reforming socialism (in the case of the GDR) and by students and dissidents (in the case of Czechoslovakia) dislodged the old guard. In both cases, new

Communist leaders, who quickly endorsed a Gorbachevite agenda, could not contain the dynamics of popular protest and virtually capitulated to the “democratic forces” that had helped bring them to power.

Romania and Bulgaria represent a fourth, southeastern European category of Gorbachev-style revolutions based on the replacement of the old party leadership by reformers, followed by constrained electoral competition. Yugoslavia was an exceptional case of national, though not necessarily democratic, revolution. Ivo Banac called 1989/1990 a period of “Yugoslav non-revolutions.”⁴

Preceding the Polish elections in July 1989, the Solidarity movement in Poland negotiated a “round table” power-sharing agreement with the Jaruzelski regime, which provided for elections to the Polish parliament, the Sejm. The electoral procedures were complicated and rigged in favor of the Communists, who were willing to give Solidarity part of the power but not to compete with the opposition in a free and democratic election. Although the Communists reserved the position of president for Jaruzelski and technically “won” the elections, Solidarity emerged as the moral and political victor. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Catholic intellectual and Solidarity activist, was elected Poland’s prime minister by an overwhelming parliamentary majority at the end of August, and this marked the beginning of Poland’s transition from Communism to democracy.

Poland had the first revolution, and if one wishes to explain the events of 1989 in terms of a “domino effect,” it was the most important. Furthermore, Poland also had the longest revolution—it started with the “Solidarity revolution” in 1980—and the largest anti-Communist movement. It was the biggest country in the East bloc and therefore the biggest problem in the East bloc. Poland had the weakest tradition of collaboration of all the states in the region, not only with the Nazis during World War II, but also with the Communists thereafter. In addition, Poland had the strongest tradition of resistance which was based partly on the spiritual and institutional strength of Poland’s Roman Catholic Church, the most formidable anti-Communist institution in the Eastern bloc.

Hungary’s revolution was substantially different, and some Hungarians maintain that it actually was much longer than Poland’s. It started in 1956 or during the initial liberalization of Hungary under the Kádár regime in the 1960s. By 1988, when Kádár was eased out of office, Hungary had a record of at least twenty years of political liberalization and experimentation with market economics. By June 1989, a dynamic, younger triumvirate—Imre Pozsgay, Rezső Nyers, and Miklós Németh—had taken control of key party and state offices, and they revolutionized Hungarian foreign and domestic policy.

On May 2, 1989, Hungarian border guards started taking down the barbed wire along the Austrian–Hungarian frontier. In the summer of 1989, Hungarian border officials barely prevented hundreds of East Germans, who were vacationing in Hungary, from fleeing to Austria, and in September the Hungarian government stopped observing an old East bloc agreement, by allowing citizens from other Communist countries in the region to

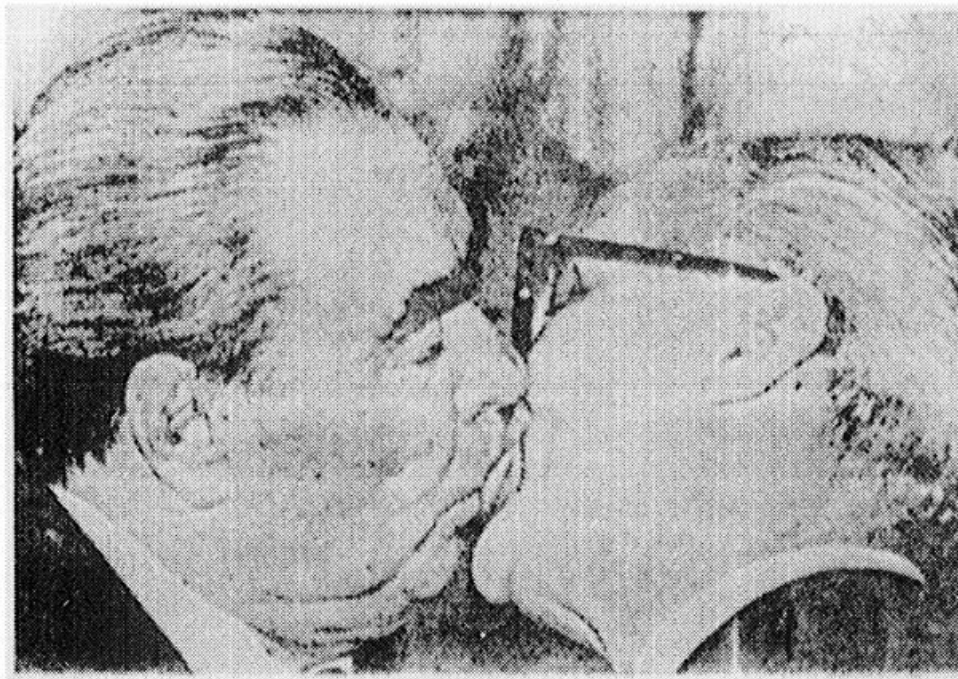
leave Hungary for Austria. Thousands of "vacationing" East Germans began leaving Hungary legally, and this hole in the Iron Curtain helped bring down the Berlin Wall in November. Hungary maintained that a United Nations convention on refugees, which it had signed as the first East bloc state in March 1989, had abrogated its obligations to prevent GDR citizens from leaving the country.

In June 1989, the Hungarian Communist Party also started round-table negotiations with opposition groups, which by Polish standards were small, poorly organized, and, to a certain extent at ideological odds with one another. Urban liberals and rural nationalists and conservatives already had good (and different) ideas about what they wanted. The strategy behind the Hungarian round table was to work out a program of major political and economic liberalization, and the initiation of these negotiations reflected the party's tradition and strategy of paternalism: power sharing "from above." The Hungarian opposition groups proved to be tough negotiators, and after Hungary's reform Communists saw how the Polish electorate had responded to elections that had been rigged in favor of Poland's Communists in July, they abandoned the idea of limited compromise in favor of unfettered electoral competition.

Hungary's reform Communists enjoyed genuine popular support in the summer of 1989. They assumed that they could not only compete with the opposition but also beat it at the ballot box. The reform Communists concluded a round-table agreement with opposition groups in September, which provided for free and democratic elections in the spring of 1990. They officially abandoned Marxism as a party doctrine in October and changed the party's name to "Socialist." Then they suffered a devastating defeat in the 1990 elections, receiving only 9 percent of the vote. The Hungarian revolution of 1989 was relatively fluid and nonconfrontational, and Hungarians, like Poles, can claim substantial responsibility for the demise of the East bloc. They reformed Communism to death and opened the Iron Curtain in the process.

The maverick foreign policy of Hungarian reform Communists had domestic political consequences for the German Democratic Republic, whose leaders were surprised by the sheer number of GDR citizens who wanted to flee the country. The Honecker regime increased the political pressure in the GDR by quarantining East Germans with travel restrictions, and it addressed the issue of fleeing GDR citizens with a combination of arrogance and "socialist self-confidence," by branding those who left as morally inferior renegades whose loss was not to be lamented. The exodus of tens of thousands of East Germans and the contemptuous and restrictive conduct of the Honecker regime led in September 1989 to the formation of a home-grown protest movement in the GDR which crystallized around intellectuals, artists, peace activists, environmentalists, and Protestant pastors and churches.

The first wave of protest in East Germany was inspired by the idea of radically reforming the GDR and creating a truly democratic socialist society, not anti-Communism or German unification. At increasingly larger demonstrations in September and October, protesters chanted Gorbachev's nick-



TESSÉK VÁLASZTANI



FIATAL DEMOKRATAK SZOVETSÉGE

Tessék Választani (Please Choose), a poster of the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ), a Hungarian liberal party founded by young people that initially limited its membership to people under thirty-five, from Hungary's first free election campaign in 1990. Above: Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev (left) giving East German leader Erich Honecker a kiss that was part of the "fraternal socialist" ritual between Communist heads of state in the Eastern bloc. Below: Young Hungarians with oversized FIDESZ buttons. (Courtesy of the Alliance of Young Democrats [FIDESZ], Budapest)

name, "Gorbi, Gorbi," "We are staying here," and "We are the people." At the beginning of October, the GDR celebrated the fortieth anniversary of its establishment with a series of pompous and pathetic events. Two weeks later Erich Honecker resigned from his offices and was replaced by a younger functionary, Egon Krenz. But there were irreconcilable tensions among the "stayers" (*Dableiber*) in the GDR's new opposition movements, with their sense of solidarity, socialist vision, and newly felt empowerment; the "leavers" (*Weggehen*), who wanted to get out in one way or another; and the party authorities, who were confounded by the challenges that both groups presented.

The Berlin Wall came down on November 9, 1989, for the same reason it went up in 1961: to keep people in the GDR. The strategy of the GDR's new leadership was that liberalizing travel restrictions would not only enhance the credibility of the new government but also keep the East Germans at home by giving them a chance to travel back and forth. It backfired. Krenz's political career lasted just seven weeks, and after his resignation a new reformer, Hans Modrow, formed a government that began a wide-ranging dialogue with critics of the regime. Hundreds of thousands of East Germans, especially members of the younger generation, distrusted the government, decided to "vote with their feet," and left for the Federal Republic of Germany, and the slogan "We are *one* people" began appearing at demonstrations. (This phrase also meant "We want one currency," the West German Mark, and "We want the West German standard of living.")

Public scrutiny of the regime by citizens' investigatory committees led to sensational revelations about the luxurious and self-aggrandizing lifestyles of party leaders, widespread corruption, and the unimaginable reach of the state security police's surveillance, networks of informants, and records on individuals in the country. The idea of reforming the GDR faded rapidly, and by the time the first free elections in the former Eastern bloc were held in East Germany in March 1990, reforming the GDR was a minority proposition. German unification was on its way and a reality within six months.

Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution" was preceded in 1989 by an increasing amount of popular protest on symbolic dates. On August 21, 1989, the twenty-first anniversary of the Warsaw Pact intervention that ended the Prague Spring, police broke up a peaceful demonstration of students in Prague and arrested more than 350 people. On October 28, the seventy-first anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, the police forcibly dissolved the largest organized protest the country had seen in over twenty years and arrested another 350 people. On November 17, students transformed an officially sanctioned rally to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Jan Opletal, a student killed by the Nazis, into an antiregime protest, and the police and special antiterrorist squads reacted brutally with tear gas and truncheons. The escalating conflicts between students and the state and the ruthlessness with which the state dealt with its own citizens helped coalesce Czech and Slovak dissidence and broad antiregime sentiment, which was fueled in turn by the success of protest elsewhere in East Central Europe.

Two citizens' organizations formed by dissidents, artists, and students, the Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence, emerged almost simultaneously in Prague and Bratislava, and they articulated the empowerment of a citizenry that took virtual control of the streets in regular and increasingly larger demonstrations. Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution contained elements of the Polish, Hungarian, and East German revolutions that preceded it, and it represented a distillation of their essences. Within weeks, nonviolent, mass protest led to a negotiated power-sharing arrangement with the Communist regime that culminated in its abdication. On December 29, the representatives of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic's Federal Assembly elected Václav Havel—playwright, dissident, former political prisoner, and mastermind of the revolution—president. This was an appropriate symbolic ending for the astonishing, exhilarating, and happy year of 1989.

After the revolutions of 1989, grand plans for a cooperative or confederative reorganization of Central Europe were popular. The pending unification of Germany was something all politicians in the region officially greeted, but it also awoke long-standing and deep-seated fears. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was still intact, and the assumption at the time that Gorbachev's experiment could fail and that he might be replaced by a much more orthodox and aggressive Communist leader also was more widespread in East Central Europe than in the West. Under these circumstances, it seemed only reasonable for the countries in the region to find ways of cooperating that would offset the burgeoning influence of a future united Germany and the potential threat the Soviet Union still represented.

The assumption that Europe that would find new modes of regional cooperation after the disintegration of the military and economic blocs that had dictated the division of Europe, as well as the scenario that Central Europe as a region would play an important role in the "new Europe," enjoyed a brief heyday after 1989. For example, at a meeting of the foreign ministers of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, held in Bratislava in April 1990, Václav Havel envisioned a Baltic confederation consisting of Poland, the Baltic states, and Finland and perhaps also Sweden and Norway. Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Italy could form a second Danube-Adriatic confederation, and Czechoslovakia would provide the "logical nexus"⁵ between these two regional associations which, by virtue of their collective sizes and geopolitical affinities, would peacefully offset the influence of large neighbors like a unified Germany and the Soviet Union. (The absence of Romania and Bulgaria here is both striking and symptomatic of Central European perceptions of Central Europe. Havel's vision for the region also had remarkable similarities to Thomas Masaryk's ideas about Central Europe in 1918.)

Czechoslovak, Polish, and Hungarian heads of state also held a Central European summit in Visegrád in 1990. The meeting site on the Danube north of Budapest, a magnificent medieval castle of the Louis the Great, was full of symbolism. In 1335, the kings of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland had met there for a medieval regional summit to discuss multilateral coopera-

tion and regional concerns. Age-old patterns of cooperation among these states, which subsequently were labeled the "Visegrád group," were being revived. The pending dissolution of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact (in January and March 1991) made it necessary to investigate new forms of cooperation. Furthermore, Czechoslovak, Polish, and Hungarian politicians saw great advantages in coordinating the region's "return to Europe." They assumed, for example, that they would have more political leverage if they demonstrated solidarity by acting as a group.

The idea of Central European cooperation was not merely an inspiration for former Eastern Europeans. In May 1990 at meetings held in Vienna and Bratislava, the foreign ministers of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, Yugoslavia, and Italy discussed the idea of "pentagonal" cooperation among the five states: a split-site agenda that symbolically demonstrated the end of the East-West division of Europe and the promise of new forms of regional cooperation. In 1991, Poland joined the "pentagon," thereby creating a "hexagon," and after the breakup of Yugoslavia this multilateral forum for regional cooperation was renamed the Central European Initiative in 1992. (The Central European Initiative floundered after the deterioration of Yugoslavia. Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina are its ex-Yugoslav members.)

After 1989, unrealistic expectations were an understandable part of the postrevolutionary euphoria in the former Eastern bloc. But visions of new modes of Central European and Pan-European cooperation have died hard since then. Three different processes have determined the prospects and the position of Central Europe in Europe since 1989: the wars that accompanied the deterioration of Yugoslavia, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the economic and political integration of Western Europe.

The fall of Yugoslavia is a complicated and tragic story that testifies to the success of indigenous nationalism and the failures of international diplomacy.⁶ Slovenia managed to extricate itself from the Yugoslav mess most elegantly in 1991; Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina did not. The combination of Croatian independence, resurgent Croat and Serb nationalism, and Serbian minorities in Croatia created an explosive situation. The Yugoslav prime minister (and Serb) Slobodan Milošević used the breakup of Yugoslavia as an excuse to begin two wars of Serbian territorial expansion: first in Croatia and then in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has become the main battlefield and has suffered the greatest losses in this fratricidal war. It emerged along the overlapping historical fault lines between Central Europe and Southeastern Europe, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Croatia and Serbia, or "West" and "East." No one ever expected that the old Habsburg military frontier would be a site of warfare again.

Between the outbreak of hostilities in 1991 and the end of 1995, an estimated 300,000 people were killed in the wars in the former Yugoslavia that turned over 3.7 million inhabitants of the region into refugees. They were partly victims of the Western European and international diplomatic community's inability from the start to deal decisively with Serbian aggression.

Only after massive NATO airstrikes on Serbian positions in Bosnia in 1995 and considerable U.S. pressure were the Serbs willing to seek a “diplomatic” solution with Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The agreements the warring parties reached at negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995, combined with the deployment of large NATO peacekeeping force in the region, may mark the end of armed hostilities. However, the resolution of the conflicts in the region will undoubtedly take years.

The end of the Soviet Union’s “internal empire” in 1991 was a logical consequence of the demise of its “external empire” in East Central Europe in 1989, and although the social, economic, and political structures of the Soviet Union as well as the dynamics of protest were considerably different from those in East Central Europe, the collapse of the USSR may be interpreted as a belated 1989 revolution. Many of the same ideas were at work, such as human rights, democracy, and national self-determination. In the spring of 1990, declarations of independence by the Soviet Union’s Baltic republics—Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia—marked the beginning of a process that ended eighteen months later with the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Well over half the Sovietologists in the West thought that some kind of liberalization or systematic reform was possible in the Soviet Union, and roughly one-quarter of the others assumed that the system could keep stumbling along because that is what it had done in the past. One minority in the profession envisioned the deterioration of the system leading to collapse at some point in an undetermined future, and another minority, usually dismissed for being either émigrés or alarmists, feared a worse case scenario: the possibility of a reactionary backlash combined with a reversion to old Soviet policies.⁷ The intellectuals and dissidents who were members of the first generation of leaders in the fledgling democracies of the former East bloc shared fundamentally the same assumptions, but in inverted proportions and the reverse order. Based on their experiences with Communism and the Soviet Union, they viewed the pessimistic scenarios as more probable than the optimistic ones. No one expected the Soviet Union to collapse rapidly and completely as a result of the failure of Gorbachev’s reforms and the failure of a reactionary counterreform putsch. But this is exactly what happened.

The implosion of the Soviet Union changed the relationships of the new democracies of the former Eastern bloc to the East as well as with the West. As long as a Soviet threat existed, many Poles, Czechs and Slovaks, and Hungarians assumed that the West would move quickly to fill the vacuum created by the demise of the Soviet empire and to incorporate or “reincorporate” East Central Europe into the West where it belonged. The Visegrád states considered themselves not only historical but also logical economic, political, and strategic partners of the European Community and NATO, two organizations caught completely off guard by the events of 1989.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the sense of urgency in the region dissipated somewhat, and the reform governments in East Central Europe suddenly found themselves in the strange position of compet-

ing for Western political attention and Western economic aid with the states and reform governments that emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Union. Conflicts among the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union are one of the biggest problems in the former Communist East, and Russia, despite its loss of prestige and power, is still a superpower.

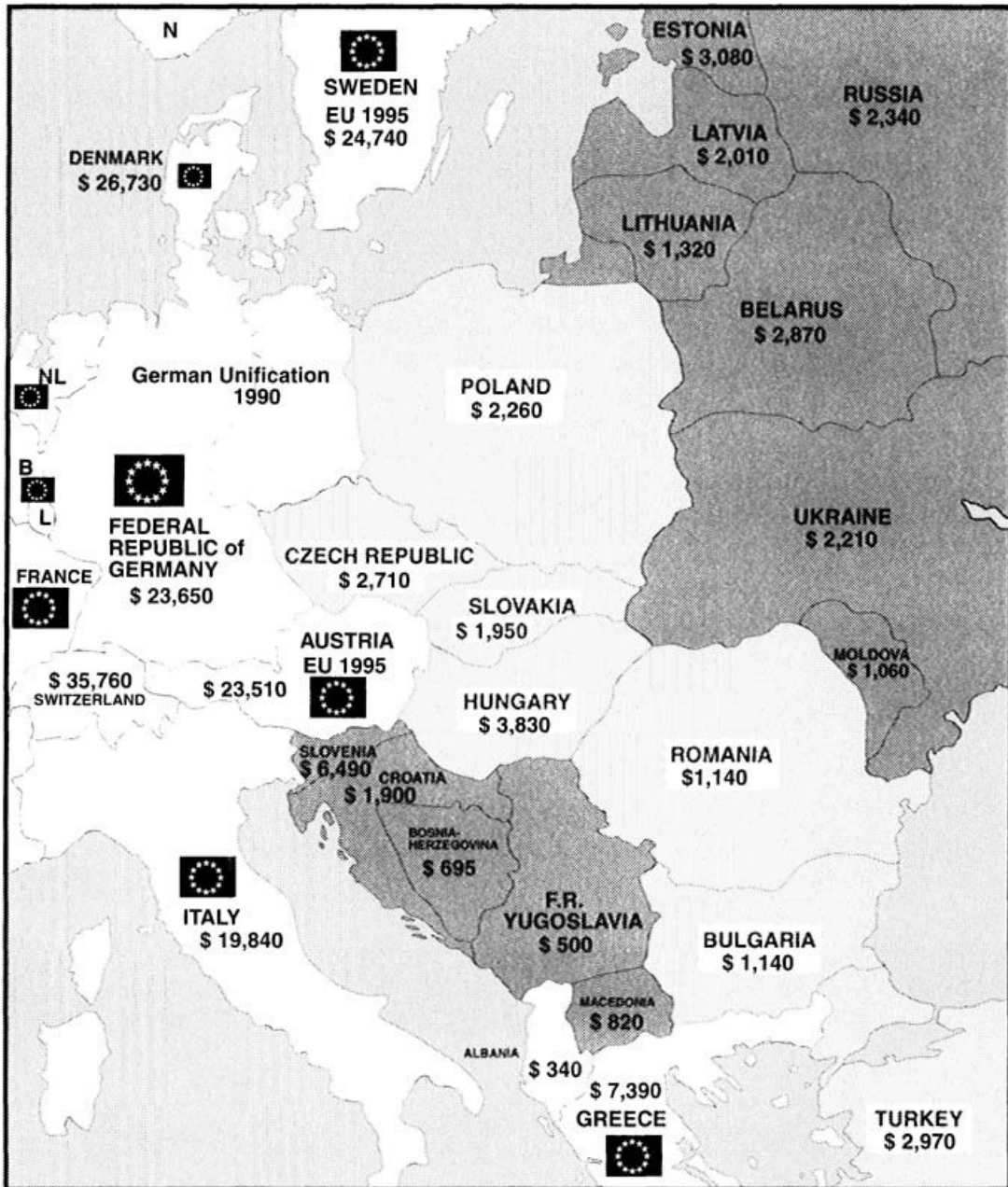
The European Community (EC) was a product of the Cold War, and its plans for intensifying Western European integration were based on the East–West division of Europe, not an *extensive* development or foreseeable enlargement of the Community. After the mid-1980s, the twelve EC member states began discussing strategies for the next phase of European integration. The creation of an economic and monetary union was the central objective, and the pursuit of this goal stimulated debates about the intermediate-range “political dimension” of European integration and the long-range dimensions of collective defense, security, and foreign policies. However, after the denouement of the East–West conflict, two new groups of states showed great interest in participating in the Western European integration: the prosperous, nonaligned, and neutral democracies that had been situated “between” the EC and the old East—Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland—as well as Norway, a NATO but not an EC member, on one side, and the “new democracies” of the former Eastern bloc, on the other.

Negotiations among the twelve EC members on increasing the breadth and depth of integration, which began before 1989, led to the conclusion of the “Treaty on the European Union” in Maastrich in 1992, and the “Community” became the European Union at the end of 1994. Between 1989 and 1992, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Norway expressed their interest in accession, and on January 1, 1995, Austria, Finland, and Sweden became full members of the European Union.⁸ The accession of these three states to the EU in 1995 increased the number of its member states from twelve to fifteen and, along with German unification in 1990, moved its frontiers east, but there have been no real attempts to move them farther in that direction soon.

After 1989, the European Community initiated a series of programs designed to help the countries of “Central and Eastern Europe,” and by 1995 it had concluded association agreements with six of them: first with Hungary and Poland, then with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and finally with Bulgaria and Romania. The official EU terminology is a bit confusing because the term “Central and Eastern Europe” not only excludes the former Soviet Union, but it also officially refers to one region (despite the “and”), not two. (Sometimes the abbreviation CEE-6 is used. By the end of 1995, the European Union also had negotiated, but not ratified, bilateral association agreements with Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania that may turn the CEE-6 into the CEE-10 in the course of the 1990s.)

The European Union has initiated a “structured dialogue” with associated countries and stated that “accession will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required.” Among these conditions are the “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, hu-

CENTRAL EUROPE IN TRANSITION, 1989–1995



Member states of the European Union



States associated with the European Union (Europe Agreements in force), 1995



Newly independent states in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, 1991-1992

\$ 1,140 Per capita gross domestic product, 1993

man rights and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy; [and] the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union." Given the disparities between the political and economic structures of the EU member states and those of the new democracies in "Central and Eastern Europe" with their new market economies, it is clear that it will take quite some time for them to qualify for membership in the EU. Furthermore, "the Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration."⁹ In other words, Western European integration is obviously the EU's main priority, and it will decide who gets into the EU and when on a case-by-case basis. The most successful reform states to date—Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia—appear to be the most logical candidates for the next phase of EU expansion, whenever it may come. If and when they join the EU, they will assume the responsibility of maintaining the EU's "external frontier" and once again become "bulwarks of the West."

The Iron Curtain went down in 1989, and as far as many East Central Europeans are concerned, the "Golden Curtain" went up shortly thereafter. The European Union and its member states have introduced restrictive immigration and trade policies designed to keep competitive products—such as agricultural produce, textiles, and steel—and people from East Central Europe (and beyond) out of Western Europe while at the same time it is exporting well over twice as much to the region as it imports from it. Customs and immigration officials in Germany, some of them former soldiers of the German Democratic Republic's "National People's Army" that policed the Iron Curtain, now help patrol the German–Polish border, and Austria has deployed army units along its frontiers to help its understaffed border personnel prevent illegal immigration. The initially high, post-1989 expectations of the West held by many people in the old East bloc have been disappointed, and they now feel that the EU association treaties are not instruments for getting them into the European Union as soon as possible but, rather, mechanisms for keeping them out as long as possible.

The same feelings apply to NATO's "Partnership for Peace" initiative which has loosely affiliated just about every state in Europe with NATO without actually bringing any new states into the alliance. The Visegrád states would be logical candidates for an expanded NATO, but there is no consensus among NATO decision makers in the West about increasing the alliance's membership. Under these circumstances, many East Central Europeans feel that the West's old foreign policy priority—not to antagonize Russia—makes measures that would enhance the security of their newly gained freedom and independence into issues of secondary importance. "The former East Bloc countries, convinced that integration is essential to their interests, have proposed a series of steps or trials in the direction of membership [in the European Union and NATO]," the former Hungarian dissident and essayist, György Konrad, pointed out, "but all they receive for their pains is a mysterious *mañana* [tomorrow]. . . . 'Now! Now! Now!' says the East. 'No! No! No!' says the West."¹⁰

The fact that the West has not come up with big solutions to the big problems of post-Communism in the East is partly related to the fact that most theories of East–West relations or Soviet studies relied on the premise that the Communist system would not change dramatically. It might stagnate, deteriorate, or be reformed, but it would not collapse. Although democrats and capitalists in the West were convinced of the superiority of the democratic and capitalist system, they never expected to see its superiority demonstrated in such a sudden and complete victory and therefore were completely unprepared to deal with its consequences. Whereas Communists wrote incessantly on the “transition from capitalism to socialism,” anti-Communists wrote virtually nothing on the “transition from communism to democracy” or “the transition from socialism to capitalism.” After 1989, there was a virtual absence of theories for addressing the problems of post-Communist societies. Therefore, “transformation” has been a trial-and-error process. As one Polish joke goes: “Socialism is the longest possible path from capitalism . . . to capitalism.”

The guiding principles of the revolutions of 1989—national self-determination, democracy, and market economics—naturally became the objectives of gigantic transformation projects. But the perceptions of the indigenous problems confronting each state in the region varied because each country had its own national experience with “building socialism”: a Communist heritage ranging from the realm of individual attitudes to the sectoral structure of economies. Therefore, the project of “dismantling socialism” or “building democracy and market economies” has proceeded along the lines of different “national paths” which in turn have been influenced by heated domestic political debates among politicians, economists, and social scientists. Experts disagree about priorities, which methods are most appropriate for achieving which objectives, and the costs and risks of individual and global transformation strategies.

In addition, all post-Communist countries face the “dilemma of simultaneity”¹¹—a myriad of unanticipated problems that must be addressed at the same time. In Western Europe, the development of independent nation-states, capitalistic market economies, and democracy was basically a sequential process spanning two centuries. Nation-states arose that gradually developed capitalist economies and democratic institutions. Although these three processes overlapped, they occurred more or less in that order. In East Central Europe, however, people expected these three processes to take place simultaneously in a relatively short period of time. “Sequencing” is another complicated and related issue. If everything cannot be done at once, what should be done first?

The best recent examples of the rapid modernization of underdeveloped economies to which reformers in the East Central Europe could refer are either politically undesirable or economically unfeasible. Military juntas in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Chile did a relatively good job of modernizing the economies of these countries before they made their transitions to democracy in the 1980s. The “Asian tigers” or “newly industrialized countries,” such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, are another good ex-

ample of rapid economic modernization without much democracy, and their success is even more problematic because it was based on a high degree of state planning, a concept that has the status of a dirty word in East Central Europe. Many people seem to assume that capitalism and democracy go together. But there are enough counterexamples that show that "capitalism first, democracy later" is a normal sequence of development.

One of the first big post-1989 surprises in the region was a result of the achievement of national independence: the return of nationalism. In Poland and Hungary, national and Christian national parties emerged right of center on the political spectrum. Theoretically, they were the Eastern counterparts of the Western European Christian Democratic parties, but their political vocabularies and prejudices were reminiscent of interwar populism, anti-Semitism, and authoritarianism.

For example, these new parties accused liberals and free-marketeers of "cosmopolitanism," an anti-Semitic slur peculiar to the political culture of the region; propagated the importance of "national values"; and openly questioned the status and desirability of Gypsies and other minorities. Slovak nationalism, tinged with post-Communist authoritarianism and an interest in the maintaining the established political and economic structures, played a considerable role in the Czech-Slovak confrontation leading to the "Velvet Divorce," the breakup of the Czechoslovak Republic, in 1993. Czech nationalism was an essential player in this process, too. Both Slovene and Croatian nationalism contributed to the deterioration of Yugoslavia's multinational federal state and its ensuing wars. The Milošević regime in former Yugoslavia has demonstrated that Serbian nationalism is compatible with post-Communist authoritarianism. Nationalism was an important source of anti-Communist sentiment before 1989, and since then its illiberal manifestations have been an ongoing cause of concern.

Democracies and markets are complicated institutions, and although the absence of Communism is a prerequisite for their emergence, the demise of Communism did not naturally create democrats and capitalists, nor did it automatically decentralize state institutions or spontaneously create a framework for market economies. Communist states were based on the party's control of the state and the state's control of the economy. The revolutions of 1989 in East Central Europe broke the Communist monopolies on state power, but they left intact the monolithic state institutions and massive state involvement in the economies. "Less state and more market" has been a basic recipe for reform, but dismantling or "rolling back" the institutions of the totalitarian and paternalistic state and privatizing state property have been exceedingly difficult.

Some leaders of the movements that toppled Communism in the region initially hoped that the experience of anti-Communist solidarity would provide the foundation for a new, specifically East Central European form of democratic political culture, and they speculated that they might even be able to engineer a new form of political and economic organization, a "third way" between the extremes of capitalism and socialism.

These fantasies faded quickly. The crumbling of Solidarity in Poland,

for example, was an acrimonious affair, and the Czech Civic Forum and the Slovak Public Against Violence experienced similar fates in their respective halves of the Czechoslovak Republic in the course of its demise. The diversification of the political spectrum was one of the first signs of the “normalization” of postrevolutionary politics in east Central Europe. It led to a “remarginalization” of the dissidents and intellectuals—who had been important as moral authorities during the heyday of the revolutions—and a brief blossoming of Western European liberal political theory and American-style free-market economic theory. “Marketism” succeeded Marxism as an economic dogma, and great hopes were placed in the spontaneity and creative potential of market forces.

All this sounded fine in theory, but it was unrealistic in practice because it did not take into account the virtual absence of private property, private capital, capital markets, and a class of entrepreneurial capitalists as well as “capitalistic” laws governing investment, banking, property, taxes, and businesses. The absence of capitalistic institutions and laws has ironically slowed the West–East flow of aid and investments. According to a study by the New York–based Institute for East–West Studies, less than one-third of the aid committed to East Central Europe between 1990 and 1994 had been actually disbursed by 1995 because the conditions stipulated by the granting (capitalist) countries have not been fulfilled by the receiving (reform) countries.

The German Democratic Republic was not confronted with these problems because it ceased to exist as an independent state after German unification. The “old GDR” became the “five new *Länder*” of the “new” Federal Republic of Germany, and unification entailed the introduction of West German institutions and laws in East Germany. In this respect, East Germany as a region did not have to cope with many of the problems of reform and innovation that trouble the other “new democracies”—in particular, deep structural change, such as the creation of new public and private institutions and bodies of law that correspond to the demands of “market democracy”—because West Germany superimposed its legal system and structures on the region. The new Federal Republic of Germany also sent officials and experts from the “old FRG” into the “five new *Länder*” to assume leading positions in the gigantic project of *Aufbau-Ost*: “(re)building the East.”

Furthermore, in comparison with the other former Communist states, there has been no shortage of investment in East Germany. Massive public funds have been transferred from the German west to the German east in various forms, ranging from infrastructure improvement programs to social security and retirement payments. In the five years following unification in 1990, the gross public expenditure of the Federal Republic of Germany in the regions of the former GDR totaled more than 800 billion deutsche marks (over \$500 billion), a figure that does not take private investment into account.

In this respect, the East Germans are in an envious structural and financial position in comparison with the other peoples of the former East bloc. However, German unification has been an ambiguous affair. Due to

the speed of economic and structural change, the high level of regional unemployment in the former GDR is a great problem. There also are considerable tensions between Germans in the west and in the east, *Wessis* and *Ossis*, and resentment on both sides. West Germans have a variety of biases about Germans from the east and accuse them of being lazy, passive, sullen, and expensive for taxpayers. East Germans find Germans from the west condescending, self-complacent, insensitive, and selfish.

Unlike other people in the "new democracies" after 1989, East Germans did not have an opportunity to take their collective future into their own hands. After unification, West Germany and West Germans assumed responsibility for the east to a great extent. For a fair number of East Germans, unification has been a humiliating experience, and there is a certain quiet pride among some East Germans, especially in their thirties and older, about being "former citizens of the GDR." Germans from the "old FRG" and the "old GDR" have problems with the fact that two fundamentally different German national cultures evolved between 1949 and 1989, and the psychology of German unification will undoubtedly continue to be a problem in the future.

The theoretical and practical aspects of the transition from Communism to capitalism are complex,¹² and they are best illustrated by a joke popular among economists in East Central Europe. "The transition from capitalism to socialism is like taking a fish and making fish soup; the transition from socialism to capitalism is like taking fish soup and trying to make a fish." The great "achievements" of the socialist planned economies were the abolition of private property for all practical purposes¹³ (or its transformation into "collectively owned" state property) and the replacement of market economies with centrally planned state or command economies. One of the biggest problems for the post-Communist states is privatizing state property, that is, transferring the ownership and control of assets from the state to the private sector and diversifying ownership.

The so-called small privatization in the retail trade and service sector appears to have been more or less successful in East Central Europe, and the market is functioning for consumers, if the quality of food and service at restaurants or the density of electronic goods or video rental shops can be used as an indicator. Prices are high by local standards, but there are no shortages of commodities, many of which are imported and thus contribute to negative trade balances. Nonetheless, East Central European cities, once renowned for being monotone, drab, and dreary, today make a vibrant impression on visitors. Everything looks much better than in the 1980s.

Conversely, large-scale privatization—"a radical reallocation of available productive resources, a restructuring of the institutional setting in which production takes place, and the introduction of new methods of corporate governance, freed from the most noxious kinds of political interference"¹⁴—has been a slow and ambiguous process. Most East Central Europeans in industrial sectors are still employed by large state-owned companies or conglomerates. Despite the many innovative schemes for transferring titles, the introduction of holding companies, cross-ownership, "give-away" voucher

schemes, and the like, this form of privatization has been primarily on paper because it has not broken up the concentration of ownership or economic interest.

It also has been difficult for the states to find buyers for their largest industries, many of which are cost inefficient and not competitive. The shortage of domestic capital and the lack of large-scale foreign investment have forced states to hold their assets, whether or not they want to. Furthermore, the managers of large enterprises and the unions of the laborers employed at them have vested interests in keeping things as they are, as well as considerable political clout. Privatization has been much more difficult than initially expected and represents one of the most perplexing problems.

Those economies that have emerged are unprecedented hybrids: post-socialist but not yet capitalist. György Konrad described the structural peculiarities of the region after more than forty years of communism and five years of freedom: "It is neither East nor West; it is both East and West."¹⁵

It has been somewhat easier for the post-Communist state to extricate itself from structural legacy of Communism in terms of government—or too much government. Extensive "cradle to grave" social services were part of the old Communist social contract. Socialist states provided their citizens with guaranteed employment, cheap housing, stable prices, universal medical care, and retirement benefits, and there has been a some retrospective glorification of how good the actually poor and inequitable social services were under the Communist regimes as well as some nostalgic yearning for the security of the "good old days."¹⁶ The pressure to perform under the old system and the rewards for performance were not great, and egalitarian mediocrity was one of the characteristics of the socialist societies of East Central Europe. Most people managed to get by, or as an old East bloc saying went: "They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work." Social differentiation is process that people find difficult to accept who are accustomed to egalitarian ideology and then are suddenly confronted with growing inequities.

It would be incorrect to confuse the popular rejection of socialism in East Central Europe in 1989 with a widespread affirmation or understanding of the game rules of participatory democracy or market capitalism. Participation in the electoral process throughout the region has been mediocre, and the "new democracies" have demanded considerable sacrifices from their citizens. For most people, economic hardship—high to hyperinflation and falling real incomes—was the immediate consequence of the collapse of socialism. Increasing unemployment has been one of the natural and unavoidable results of "marketization," and cutbacks in extensive social welfare programs and the dismantling of the paternalistic socialist state have been part and parcel of stabilization and austerity programs.

Economists view the processes of transformation from a rather detached macroeconomic level and recognize that "displacement" is a necessary part of structural change, and they have coined the term "transformational recession" to describe the unique state of affairs in post-Communist economies. But the recognition that things will have to get worse before they can get

better is seldom a source of solace for those confronted with microeconomic hardship, and economists, businesspeople, and politicians have been surprised by the dimensions of the economic decline.

During the initial years of the transition, the gross domestic products of the region's countries fell by around 20 percent, and industrial production, by 40 percent. Peacetime economies have not experienced such dramatic downturns in productivity since the Great Depression in the 1930s, and economic recoveries have been uneven and fragile.¹⁷ Furthermore, economists do not know when these economies in transition will bottom out or if they will make dramatic comebacks in terms of real growth in the future. They describe their expectations for the macroeconomic development of the economies in transition in terms of a "J-curve" that drops, bottoms out, and then comes up, but they do not know how long or shallow the trough of this J might be.

The insight that democracy may actually hinder the transformation of the economies in the region is another post-1989 paradox. When the former Communist Party won the elections in Lithuania in 1992, Central Europeans tended to dismiss this as an Eastern European phenomenon. However, in 1994 the socialist and social democratic parties (the reformed successor parties of the old Communist parties) emerged from the 1994 parliamentary elections in Poland and Hungary as the strongest single factions in their respective parliaments, partly because the Polish and Hungarian electorates were unhappy with having to bear the costs of transition. Although the reformed neo-Communist, socialist, and social democratic parties are substantially different from their historical predecessors in the region, some people see a threat of "re-Communization," and there is more genuine anticapitalistic sentiment in the region today than there was before 1989.

The winners and losers of the postrevolutionary period in east Central Europe can be defined in terms of generations, social groups, and regions. The old generations are among the big losers. Figuratively speaking, they spent their lives "building socialism." Now they are among the first victims of "building capitalism." Retired people living on the fixed incomes of modest state pensions have been confronted with two- to three-figure inflation and cutbacks in social services. Many people over forty, who are in the second half of their work careers, find intimidating or discouraging the insecurity inherent in their newly gained freedoms. Younger generations obviously are the big winners, and they are enthusiastic their the prospects. Nonetheless, some of the most talented and qualified younger people from the region have chosen to make their fortunes elsewhere, a "brain drain" that is a source of ongoing concern. Why stay home and help "build capitalism" if you can go somewhere else and enjoy it immediately?

Those social groups least prepared to cope with the political and economic transformation in East Central Europe have born a disproportionate amount of the related costs: the retired and the aging, women, unskilled labor, large families, the rural populations, and minorities, such as the Gypsies. These groups are at risk in most societies, and they do not have the kind

of political or economic influence necessary to improve their lot. Ironically, members of the former Communist elites in the region have been among the big winners, because their material assets, such as nice homes, and their social assets, such as university educations or important positions, which they or their children received because of their party membership before 1989, have increased in value since 1989. In other words, the winners under the Communist system have become the big winners of democracy and marketization insofar as they have succeeded in converting their old political privileges into new economic ones.¹⁸

Although there was some talk about “re-Communization” immediately after 1989, it has failed to materialize, with the notable exception of East Germany. (The Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Polish situations were different because they themselves had to deal with the problems of complicity. After German unification, West Germans came in and dealt self-righteously with the problem of East German Communists.) Exceptionally few people can maintain to not have collaborated with the system in some shape, way in the past, and qualified people, regardless of their political pedigree, are in great demand. It thus would be inexpedient to exclude former Communists from positions in public administration or industrial management, where their experience and skills are needed most,¹⁹ and some of them have actually turned out to be plausible democrats and good entrepreneurial capitalists.

Since 1989, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary have been the big regional winners of the former Eastern bloc, and each of them can claim to be the most successful “transformer” to date, depending on which indicators are used. Poles refer to the best statistics in terms of real economic growth; Czechs are proud of their privatization programs and low unemployment; and Hungarians have the highest per capita rate of foreign investment and the most sophisticated market. Although Slovenia does not receive nearly as much attention as this trio, it should be included among the leading reformers. Slovenia extricated itself from Yugoslavia in 1991 without becoming involved in the wars that have squandered lives and resources in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia. In many respects it has been the most successful reform state with by far the highest per capita income of the reformers. Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia not only have those strong traditions of western European orientation that are characteristic of being Central European; they also benefit from their proximity to the “economic West” of the European Union—Germany, Austria, and Italy, in particular.

This leading quartet of reformers is followed by Slovakia. The division of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1993 benefited the more highly developed regions of Czech Bohemia and Moravia than it did Slovakia, with its lopsided industrial profile based partly on armament production and traditionally underdeveloped agricultural regions. In comparison to other East Central European states, Slovakia’s transition to market economics and democracy has also been more incomplete. One of the dominant figures in post-1989 Slovakian politics, Vladimír Mečiar, a former Communist who has combined

Slovak nationalism with a penchant for authoritarian politics and retarded the process of marketization, is one of the most problematic political figures in the region.

Romania and Bulgaria form an intermediate southeastern European category of their own, and they are followed by the states that emerged from the former Soviet Union, which are "trailers" in the transformation process. Of all former Soviet republics, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are in the best position. Their Baltic neighbors, Finland and Sweden, joined the European Union in 1995, and they are the only countries from the former Soviet Union with which the European Union has negotiated preliminary association agreements.

In individual states, there also have been regional patterns of differentiation. Traditional national centers of political and economic power, such as capital cities and major urban centers, have been among the big winners, whereas "old" industrial regions with outdated capital bases and technologies (steel, heavy industry, textiles) as well as traditionally underdeveloped rural and agrarian regions have been among the big losers. Furthermore, regions in the west, such as western Bohemia and western Hungary, have been helped by their proximity to Germany and Austria.

Germany and Austria also have had special historical relationships with the states of East Central Europe, and they have been the most generous providers of aid and the most important sources of foreign investment for the region. For example, in 1992 Austria and Germany each committed 0.20 percent of their gross domestic products to aid and expenditures for Central and Eastern Europe (\$365 million and \$3.8 billion, respectively), which accounted for over half the \$8 billion that the world's twenty-four leading industrial nations (G-24 or OECD members) committed to the region. The United States, in comparison, committed 0.01 percent of its gross domestic product, or \$744 million. On a psychological level, German commitments also are belated reparation for the transgressions of the Third Reich. Austrians rely on a more pleasant and sentimental historical precedent: the Habsburgs. Central Europe, or *Mittleuropa*, is a term that both German and Austrian politicians use as an inclusive expression of solidarity with the reform states.

Germany and Austria have less altruistic and concrete economic interests in the region, too. Labor in the reform states is relatively well qualified, motivated, and cheap, and the ecological restrictions on production are often not nearly so rigorous as at home. Some East Central Europeans would like to see more diversified foreign investment and regard the high profile of German investment and capital as some kind of threat to their national interests. For example, in early 1990 Rita Klímová, the newly appointed Czechoslovak ambassador to the United States, expressed concern about the possibility of a "Germanization of Central and Eastern Europe with the peaceful and laudable methods of market economics" and feared that "the German-speaking parts of Europe, including Austria, may succeed, where the Habsburgs, Bismarck, and Hitler failed."²⁰

Based on their historical experience with the Germans, East Central Eu-

ropean anxieties are understandable. But it also is necessary to ask whether the contemporary Federal Republic of Germany is the same Germany that unleashed two world wars in this century or if German interests and investment in the region provide sufficient grounds for assuming that Germany will take another run at the imperialistic version of *Mittleuropa*. In light of its size and economic potential, Germany undoubtedly will play a large and an important role in the region in the future, just as Austria will play a smaller but important one. Germany, however, instead of being a major part of Central Europe's problems as in the past, most likely will be an integral part of the solutions to its problems in the future. German politicians are sensitive enough to understand their friends' and neighbors' apprehension about a renewed "Germanization" of Europe. At the same time, they reassuringly assert that German participation in European integration, a "Europeanization" of Germany, is their ultimate goal.

In the early 1980s, Milan Kundera defined Central Europe as "that of the part of Europe situated geographically in the center, culturally in the West, and politically in the East." Since 1989, Central Europe could perhaps be best defined as that part of the former Communist East that eventually will make it into the political and economic haven of the West. From the mid-nineteenth century until after 1989, many people in Central Europe assumed that some kind of confederation of small states situated *between* Germany and Russia ultimately would be the solution to the region's problems, but the desire of East Central European states to become members of the European Union, a Western European confederation of states that will enlarge to the east, definitely has displaced the idea of a Central European confederation.

Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia are the prime candidates for European Union membership, followed by Slovakia. If the next phase in the enlargement of the European Union entails the membership of this quartet or quintet of "new democracies"—and this seems most probable—the eastern frontier of the EU will, with the exception of Croatia, substantially correspond to the millennium-old fault line between Western (Catholic) Europe and Eastern (Orthodox) Europe. East Central Europeans historically and culturally have identified themselves with "the West," and an enlargement of the European Union eventually will put them where they feel they always have belonged.

It is symbolically significant that the European Economic Community was established in Rome in 1957. The Treaties of Rome laid the foundations for European integration, and the idea of an economically and politically unified Europe is in many respects catholic: It entails the application of certain "universal" principles. The old Roman Catholic idea of Western Europe was based on "one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church"; the new catholic idea of a unified Europe is based on economic and monetary unification—One Market and One Currency—as the basis for political unification in the future.

Looking back on the twentieth century, there are striking parallels between the years 1918 and 1989 in Central Europe. Both dates mark the demise of great empires, a recession of Russian influence in the region as a

consequence of domestic revolution and turmoil, the advent of democracy for oppressed peoples, and the beginning of national self-determination. But post-World War I Europe failed to integrate Germany into the new European order, and the relations among the "new democracies" of the region were full of strife. The lack of "European integration"—Germany as a free-floating malcontent in the middle of the continent—and "Central European integration"—effective cooperation among the smaller states in the region—were among the factors that ultimately led to World War II.

The post-1989 prospects for Central Europe are much better than they were in 1918. Russian imperial influence in the region has receded dramatically for a second time in this century, although the power and the unpredictability of this reclusive giant are still a source of great concern. Furthermore, Germany has been integrated thoroughly into the European Union, which, in turn, places considerable restrictions on Germany's ability to act as a completely independent player in European politics, and the European Union has explicitly stated its intention of incorporating the states of "Central and Eastern Europe" into its fold in the future. Nonetheless, being situated in the geopolitical center of Europe, Central Europeans continue to worry about the Russians and the Germans. They also continue to feel neglected by the West and threatened by the East. These are historical constants in the region.

For example, in a speech to the Sejm, the Polish parliament, on May 8, 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, Lech Wałęsa critically reflected on what this commemoration meant for most Poles, and he rhetorically asked whether Poland, which had been abandoned by the democratic West to the Soviet East after the defeat of Nazi Germany, should celebrate this event as a victory. He also took this occasion to point to Poland's precarious position between East and West, and he expressed his concern about the isolationistic policies of the West and the potential of a resurgent Russian empire in the East. This is Central European: reflecting on lessons from the past as a means of preparing for—or worrying about—the future.

The fact that Lech Wałęsa lost the Polish presidential election to the young former Communist Aleksander Kwásniewski in November 1995 might be a sign of normalization in the region. The sixty-two-year-old Wałęsa, one of the great heroes of the Solidarity movement, and Poland's Roman Catholic Church both attempted to portray the forty-one-year-old Kwásniewski, one of the leading figures in the social democratic party that emerged from the Polish Communist party after 1989, as a Communist threat. Kwásniewski, a handsome, telegenic, articulate, and well-dressed younger man as well as a sophisticated, smooth, and seasoned opportunist, conducted a Western-style political campaign based more on images than substance, and he emphasized his commitment to reform. He was also more popular than the old-fashioned Wałęsa among younger Polish voters and then won the election by a slim margin. Although immediately after the election Kwásniewski had to admit having misled the Polish electorate—he lied about being a university graduate during the election but never completed

his degree—and the fears that he will serve the economic and political interests of Poland's post-Communist social democrats are justified, the fact that he won the election can in its own way be seen as a vote for a modern Western democracy, as opposed to the post-Communist East Central European democracy Wałęsa represented. It may have been a vote for the future against the past. Younger people in the region are not interested in Communism or post-Communism. They want to lead normal Western lives.

Regardless of which historical agent or agents one chooses—God and the devil, fate, human error, or the blind forces of history—Central Europeans seem to have been put through more than their fair share of trials, and even if this is not the case, many of them tend to believe that it is. This is one source of Central European exceptionalism, and Central Europe has been an exceptionally conflict-prone and conflict-ridden region. History does not seem to want to let Central Europeans go, or more appropriately, Central Europeans do not show much inclination to want to let their histories go. Conflicts and tragedies are constituent parts of the region's national identities, and in some cases Central Europeans are deeply attached to the idea of having suffered or to the peculiar feeling of moral superiority that accompanies unjustified or inexcusable neglect. Despite the auspicious turn of events in the region since 1989, many Central Europeans prefer to view the future with caution or skepticism because history has rarely given them occasions for optimism. One may only hope that the Central European obsession with the past will not become an obstacle in the future.