

to be President of Czechoslovakia and was reincarnated as President of the shortened Czech Republic.<sup>23</sup>

Whether divorce was good for the two partners remained unclear for some time—neither the Czech Republic nor Slovakia flourished in the initial post-Communist decade. Klaus's 'shock therapy' and Mečiar's national-Communism both failed, albeit in different ways. But although Slovaks came to regret their dalliance with Vladimír Mečiar, and Klaus's star waned in Prague, nostalgia for Czechoslovakia was never much in evidence. The Czechoslovak divorce was a manipulated process in which the Czech Right brought about what it claimed not to seek while Slovak Populists achieved rather more than they had intended; not many people were overjoyed at the result, but nor was there lasting regret. As in the break up of the Soviet Union, the power of the state and the political machinery it had spawned were not threatened; merely duplicated.

The division of Czechoslovakia was a product of chance and circumstances. It was also the work of men. With other people in control—with different outcomes at the elections of 1990 and 1992—the story would not have been the same. Contagion played a small part as well: the example of the Soviet Union—and events unfolding in the Balkans—made a schism between the two 'national republics' of one small central European state seem less absurd or impermissible than it might otherwise have appeared. Had a federal state treaty been agreed upon by 1992—had Czechoslovakia endured for a few years longer—it is highly unlikely that anyone in Prague or Bratislava would have seen much point in pursuing their quarrels, with the prospect of admission to the European Union absorbing their attention and the bloody massacres in nearby Bosnia concentrating their minds.

## The Reckoning

'If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans.'

Otto von Bismarck

'It seems as if these feuding peasants could hardly wait for the invasion of their country so they could hunt down and kill one another.'

Milovan Djilas, *Wartime* (1977)

'We've got no dog in this fight.'

James Baker, *US Secretary of State* (June 1991)

'The worst thing about Communism is what comes after.'

Adam Michnik

'Truth is always concrete.'

G. W. Hegel

The peaceful fragmentation of Czechoslovakia contrasts dramatically with the catastrophe that befell Yugoslavia in the same years. Between 1991 and 1999 hundreds of thousands of Bosnians, Croats, Serbs and Albanians were killed, raped or tortured by their fellow citizens; millions more were forced out of their homes and into exile. Struggling to account for massacres and civil war on a scale not seen since 1945—in a country long regarded by Western radicals as something of a model socialist society—foreign commentators have typically proposed two contrasting explanations.

One view, widely circulated in Western media and taken up in the public statements of European and American statesmen, presents the Balkans as a hopeless case, a cauldron of mysterious squabbles and ancient hatreds. Yugoslavia was 'doomed'. It consisted, in the words of a much-cited *bon mot*, of six republics, five nations, four languages, three religions and two alphabets, all held together by a single party. What happened after 1989 was simple: the lid having been removed, the cauldron exploded.

According to this account, 'age-old' conflicts—in what the Marquis de Salaberry had described in 1791 as 'the unpolished extremities' of Europe—bubbled over much as they had done in centuries past. Murderous animosities, fuelled by mem-

<sup>23</sup>The political split proved easier to manage than the economic one—it was not until 1999 that agreement over the division of Czechoslovakia's federal assets was finally reached.

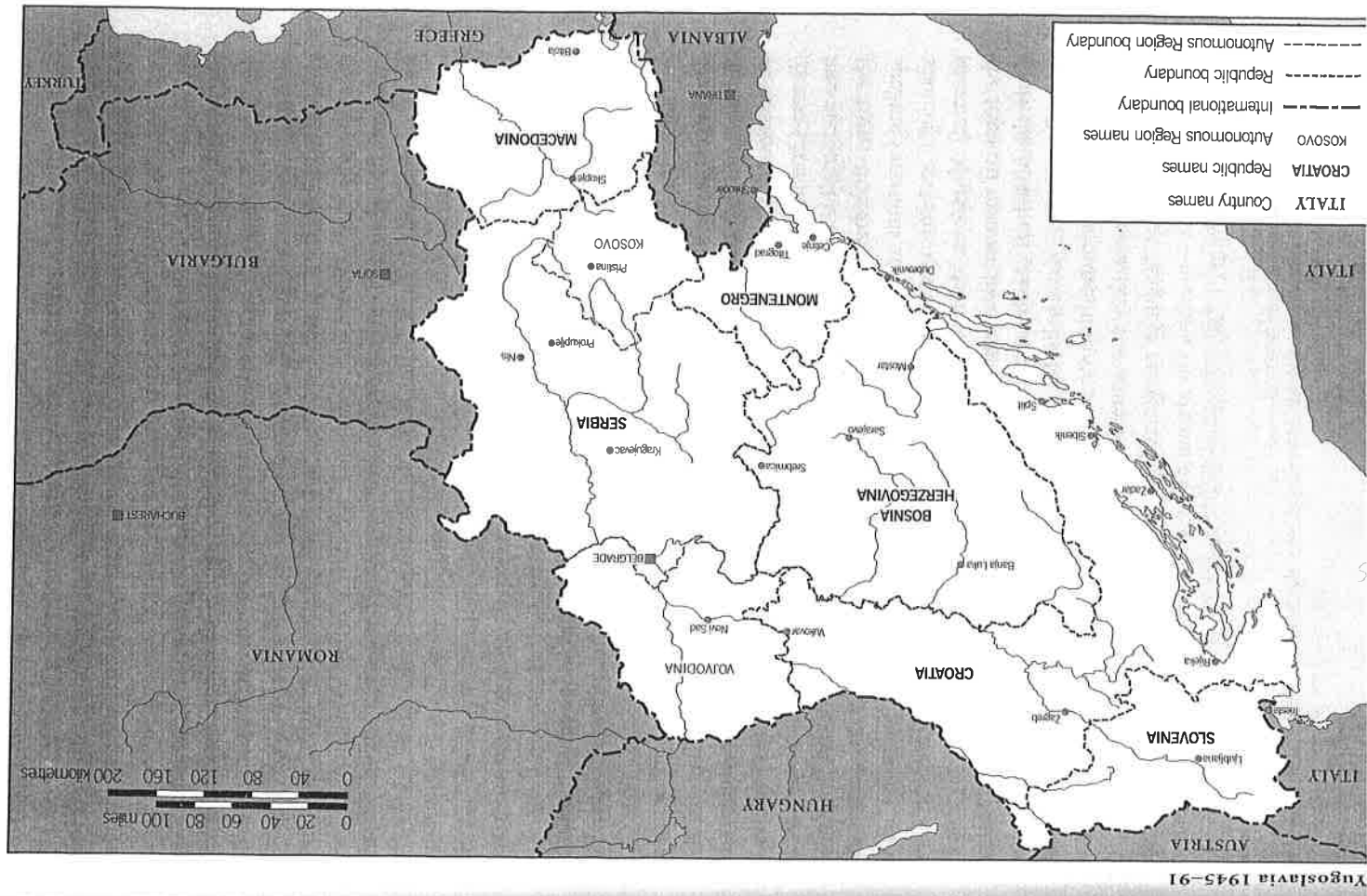
ories of injustice and vengeance, took over a whole nation. In the words of the US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, speaking in September 1992: 'Until the Bosnians, Serbs and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it'.

In a contrasting interpretation, some historians and foreign observers asserted that—on the contrary—the Balkan tragedy was largely the fault of outsiders. Thanks to outside intervention and imperial ambition, the territory of former Yugoslavia had over the course of the past two centuries been occupied, divided and exploited to the advantage of others—Turkey, Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Italy and Germany. If there was bad blood between the peoples of the region it should be traced to imperial manipulation rather than to ethnic hostility. It was the irresponsible interference of foreign powers, so the argument runs, that exacerbated local difficulties: had the German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, for example, not insisted in 1991 on 'prematurely' recognizing the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, the Bosnians might never have followed suit, Belgrade would not have invaded, and a decade of disaster could have been averted.

Whatever one thinks of these two readings of Balkan history, it is striking to note that despite their apparent incompatibility they have one important feature in common. Both diminish or ignore the role of the Yugoslavs themselves, dismissed as victims either of fate or the manipulations and mistakes of others. To be sure, there was a lot of history buried in the mountains of the former Yugoslavia, and many bad memories too. And outsiders did indeed contribute crucially to the country's tragedy, though mostly through irresponsible acquiescence in local crimes. But the break up of Yugoslavia—resembling in this respect the dismantling of other former Communist states—was the work of men, not fate. And the overwhelming responsibility for Yugoslavia's tragedy lay not in Bonn or any other foreign capital, but with the politicians in Belgrade.

When Josip Broz Tito died in 1980, at the age of 87, the Yugoslavia he had re-assembled in 1945 had a real existence. Its constituent republics were separate units within a federal state whose presidency comprised representatives from all six republics, as well as two autonomous regions (the Vojvodina and Kosovo) within Serbia. The different regions had very different pasts. Slovenia and Croatia in the north were primarily Catholic and had once been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as too, albeit for a shorter time, had Bosnia. The southern part of the country (Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia) was for centuries under Ottoman Turkish rule, which accounts for the large number of Muslims in addition to the predominantly Orthodox Serbs.

But these historical differences—though genuine enough and exacerbated by the experience of World War Two—had been attenuated in subsequent decades. Economic change brought hitherto isolated rural populations into sometimes uneasy contact in towns like Vukovar or Mostar; but the same changes also accelerated integration across old social and ethnic boundaries.



Yugoslavia 1945-91

Thus although the Communist myth of fraternal unity required turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to wartime memories and divisions—the history textbooks of Tito's Yugoslavia were prudently unforthcoming about the bloody civil wars that had marked the country's common past—the benefits of such official silences were real. The rising post-war generation was encouraged to think of itself as 'Yugoslav', rather than 'Croat' or 'Macedonian'; and many—especially the young, the better educated and the burgeoning number of city-dwellers—had adopted the habit.<sup>1</sup> Younger intellectuals in Ljubljana or Zagreb were no longer much interested in the heroic or troubled past of their ethnic forebears. By 1981 in cosmopolitan Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, 20 percent of the population described themselves as 'Yugoslavs'.

Bosnia had always been the most ethnically variegated region of Yugoslavia and was thus perhaps not typical. But the whole country was an interwoven tapestry of overlapping minorities. The 580,000 Serbs living in Croatia in 1991 were some 12 percent of the population of that republic. Bosnia in the same year was 44 percent Muslim, 31 percent Serb and 17 percent Croat. Even tiny Montenegro was a mix of Montenegrins, Serbs, Muslims, Albanians and Croats—not to speak of those who opted to describe themselves to census-takers as 'Yugoslavs'. Residents of ethnically mixed regions often had little sense of their friends' or neighbors' nationality or religion. 'Inter-marriage' was increasingly common.

Indeed the 'ethnic' fault-lines within Yugoslavia were never very well defined. The linguistic distinctions can serve as a representative illustration. Albanians and Slovenes speak distinct languages. Macedonians speak Macedonian (i.e. Bulgarian, with minor variations). But the differences between the 'Serb' and 'Croat' forms of 'Serbo-Croatian' as spoken by the overwhelming majority of the population were, and are, small indeed. Serbs use the Cyrillic alphabet and Croats (and Bosnians) the Latin alphabet; but beyond some literary and scholarly terms, occasional spelling variations and a different pronunciation of the letter 'e' ('ye' in the 'Ékavian' or Croat form, 'e' in the 'Ekavian' or Serb variant) the two 'languages' are identical. Moreover, Montenegrins write in Cyrillic (like Serbs) but pronounce in the 'Ékavian' manner, like Croats and Bosnians—as do the Serb residents of Bosnia. Only the historical inhabitants of Serbia proper use the 'Ekavian' variant—and when Bosnian Serb nationalist leaders sought after 1992 to impose official 'Serbian' (i.e. 'Ekavian') pronunciation on their fellow Bosnian Serbs in the zone they had carved out of Bosnia, they encountered overwhelming resistance.

Thus the 'Croat' language recognized in 1974 as the official language of the republic of Croatia—meeting the demands of a 1967 'Declaration on Language' drawn up by a group of Zagreb intellectuals—was above all an identity tag: a way

for Croats to protest against Tito's suppression of all expressions of national identity in his federation. The same was true of certain Serb writers' obsession with preserving or re-affirming 'pure' Serbian. It seems fair to conclude that—in contrast to conventional differences between dialects of a single national language, where indigenous usage varies widely but educated élites tend to share a common 'correct' form—in former Yugoslavia it was the mass of the population who actually spoke an interchangeable single language, while a minority of nationalists sought to differentiate themselves by accentuating the narcissism of small differences.

The much invoked religious differences are no less misleading. The distinction between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs, for example, mattered far more in earlier centuries—or in World War Two, when the Ustashe in Zagreb wielded Catholicism as a weapon against Serbs and Jews alike.<sup>2</sup> By the 1990s religious practice in the fast growing cities of Yugoslavia was on the wane and only in the countryside did the correspondence between religion and national sentiment still count for something. Many ostensibly Muslim Bosnians were thoroughly secularized—and in any case had little in common with Muslim Albanians (by no means all Albanians were Muslim, though this fact passed largely unnoticed by their enemies). Thus while there is no doubt that the old Ottoman practice of defining nationality by religion had left its mark, mostly by exaggerating the place of Orthodox Christianity among the southern Slavs, the evidence of this was increasingly attenuated.

Although an older generation of Yugoslavs continued to hold many of the prejudices of an earlier time—the future Croatian President Franjo Tuđman was notoriously ecumenical in his prejudices, despising Muslims, Serbs and Jews alike—probably the only generalized discrimination in recent years was the one directed at the Albanian minority in the south, castigated by many Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians and Montenegrins as criminal and shiftless. These sentiments were strongest in Serbia.<sup>3</sup>

There were various reasons. Albanians were the fastest growing group in the country. Whereas in 1931 Albanians had been just 3.6 percent of the population of Yugoslavia, they were already 7.9 percent by 1948 (thanks to post-war immigration from neighbouring Albania proper). By 1991, thanks to their far higher birthrate (eleven times that of the Serb or Croat communities), the estimated 1,728,000 Albanians in Yugoslavia constituted 16.6 percent of the federal total. Most of the Albanian citizens of Yugoslavia lived in Serbia, in the autonomous region of Kosovo,

<sup>2</sup>'We shall kill some Serbs, deport others, and oblige the rest to embrace Catholicism'—thus the Ustashe Minister of Religion in Zagreb, July 22nd 1941.

<sup>3</sup>On a 'fact-finding' visit to Skopje just after the 1999 Kosovo war the present author was 'confidentially' informed by the Macedonian Prime Minister that Albanians (including his own ministerial colleague who had just left the room) were not to be trusted: 'You can't believe anything they say—they just are not like us. They are not Christian.'

<sup>1</sup>Zagreb, Belgrade and Skopje (the capital of Macedonia) were all among the fastest growing cities of Central Europe between 1910 and 1990.

where they made up 82 percent of the local population and vastly outnumbered the 194,000 Serbs—although it was the latter who enjoyed the better jobs, housing and other social privileges.

Kosovo had historic significance for Serb nationalists as the last holdout of medieval Serbia against the advance of the Turks and the site of a historic battlefield defeat in 1389. The local Albanian predominance was thus regarded by some Serb intellectuals and politicians as both demographically troubling and historically provocative—especially since it echoed the Serbs' displacement by Muslims as the largest minority in the adjacent Bosnian republic. Serbs, it appeared, were losing out—to hitherto subservient minorities who had benefitted from Tito's rigorous enforcement of federal equality.<sup>4</sup> Kosovo was thus a potentially explosive issue, for reasons linked only tenuously to 'age-old' Balkan feuds: as André Malraux shrewdly advised a Yugoslav visitor to France back in the Sixties, '*Le Kosovo c'est votre Algérie dans l'Orléanais*'.

Whereas Serb dislike of Albanians fed on proximity and insecurity, in the far north of Yugoslavia the growing distaste for feckless southerners was ethnically indeterminate and based not on nationality but economics. As in Italy, so in Yugoslavia, the more prosperous north was increasingly resentful of impoverished southerners, sustained—as it seemed—by transfers and subsidies from their more productive fellow citizens. The contrast between wealth and poverty in Yugoslavia was becoming quite dramatic; and it correlated provocatively with geography.

Thus while Slovenia, Macedonia and Kosovo all had approximately the same share (8 percent) of the national population, in 1990 tiny Slovenia was responsible for 29 percent of Yugoslavia's total exports while Macedonia generated just 4 percent and Kosovo 1 percent. As best one can glean from official Yugoslav data, per capita GDP in Slovenia was double that of Serbia proper, three times the size of per capita GDP in Bosnia and eight times that of Kosovo. In Alpine Slovenia the illiteracy rate in 1988 was less than 1 percent; in Macedonia and Serbia it was 11 percent. In Kosovo it stood at 18 percent. In Slovenia by the end of the 1980s the infant mortality rate was 11 deaths per 1,000 live births. In neighbouring Croatia the figure was 12 per 1,000; in Bosnia, 16 per 1,000. But in Serbia the figure was 22 per 1,000, in Macedonia, 45 per 1,000 and in Kosovo, 52 per 1,000.

What these figures suggest is that Slovenia and (to a lesser extent) Croatia already ranked alongside the less prosperous countries of the European Community, while Kosovo, Macedonia and rural Serbia more closely resembled parts of Asia or Latin America. If Slovenes and Croats were increasingly restive in their common Yugoslav home, then, this was not because of a resurfacing of deep-rooted religious

or linguistic sentiments or from a resurgence of ethnic particularism. It was because they were coming to believe that they would be a lot better off if they could manage their own affairs without having to take into account the needs and interests of underachieving Yugoslavs to their south.

Tito's personal authority and his vigorous repression of serious criticism kept such dissenting opinion well out of public view. But after his death the situation deteriorated fast. During the Sixties and early Seventies, when the West European boom was sucking in Yugoslav labor and sending back substantial hard currency remittances, over-population and under-employment in the south posed less of a problem. From the end of the Seventies, however, the Yugoslav economy started to unravel. Like other Communist states Yugoslavia was heavily indebted to the West: but whereas the response in Warsaw or Budapest was to keep borrowing foreign cash, in Belgrade they resorted instead to printing more and more of their own. Through the course of the 1980s the country moved steadily into hyper-inflation. By 1989 the annual inflation rate was 1,240 percent and rising.

The economic mistakes were being made in the capital, Belgrade, but their consequences were felt and resented above all in Zagreb and Ljubljana. Many Croats and Slovenes, Communists and non-Communists alike, believed that they would be better off making their own economic decisions free of the corruption and nepotism of the ruling circles in the Federal capital. These sentiments were exacerbated by a growing fear that a small group of *apparatchiks* around Slobodan Milošević, the hitherto obscure President of the League of Communists in his native Serbia, was making a bid for power in the political vacuum that followed Tito's death—by arousing and manipulating Serb national emotions.

Milošević's behavior was not inherently unusual for Communist leaders in these years. In the GDR the Communists, as we have seen, sought to curry favor by invoking the glories of eighteenth-century Prussia; and 'national Communism' had been on display for some years in neighboring Bulgaria and Romania. When Milošević ostentatiously welcomed a patriotic Memorandum from the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1986, or visited Kosovo the following year to show his sympathy for Serb complaints about Albanian 'nationalism', his calculations were not very different from those of other East European Communist leaders of the time. In the era of Gorbachev, with the ideological legitimacy of Communism and its ruling party waning fast, patriotism offered an alternative way of securing a hold on power.

But whereas in the rest of eastern Europe this resort to nationalism and the attendant invocation of national memories only risked arousing anxiety among *for-eigners*, in Yugoslavia the price would be paid at home. In 1988 Milošević, the better to strengthen his position within the Serbian republic, began openly encouraging nationalist meetings at which the insignia of the wartime Chetniks were on public display for the first time in four decades—a reminder of a past that Tito had sup-

<sup>4</sup>This was not, of course, the way things appeared to Croats and others, who could point to Serb domination of the national army (60 percent of the officer corps was Serb by 1984, a fair reflection of Serb presence in the population at large but no more reassuring for that) and Belgrade's disproportionate share of investment and federal expenditure.

Nationalism was Milošević's way of securing a hold over Serbia—confirmed in May 1989 with his election to the Presidency of the Serbian republic. But to preserve and strengthen Serbia's influence over Yugoslavia as a whole he needed to transform the federal system itself. The carefully calculated balance of influence between the various constituent republics had been fostered first by Tito's charismatic leadership and then by a revolving presidency. In March 1989 Milošević set out to topple this arrangement.

By forcing through an amendment to Serbia's own constitution he 'absorbed' the hitherto autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina into Serbia proper—while allowing them to retain their two seats in the federal presidency. Henceforth Serbia could count on four of the eight federal votes in any dispute (Serbia, Kosovo, Vojvodina and the compliant pro-Serbian republic of Montenegro). Since Milošević's goal was to forge a more unitary (Serb-led) state, something that the other four republics would naturally resist, the federal system of government was effectively stalemated. From the perspective of Slovenia and Croatia especially, the course of events pointed to only one possible solution: since they could no longer expect to advance or preserve their interests through a dysfunctional federal system, their only hope was to take their distance from Belgrade, if necessary by declaring complete independence.

Why, by the end of 1989, had matters already reached this pass? Elsewhere the route out of Communism was 'democracy': party functionaries and bureaucrats from Russia to the Czech Republic transformed themselves in a matter of months from *nomenklatura* yes-men into glib practitioners of pluralist party politics. Survival depended upon re-calibrating one's public allegiances with the conventional party alignments of a liberal political culture. However implausible the transition in many individual cases, it worked. And it did so because there was no alternative. In most post-Communist countries the 'class' card was discredited and there were few internal ethnic divisions on which to prey: accordingly a new set of public categories—'privatization' or 'civil society' or 'democratization' (or 'Europe', which encompassed all three) occupied most of the new political terrain.

But Yugoslavia was different. Just because its various populations were so very intermingled (and had not undergone the genocides and population transfers that had re-arranged places like Poland or Hungary in earlier decades), the country offered fertile opportunities for demagogues like Milošević, or Franjo Tuđman, his Croat counterpart. In fashioning *their* exit from Communism around a new political constituency they could play an ethnic card no longer available elsewhere in Europe—and substitute it for a concern with democracy.

In the Baltic states, or Ukraine, or Slovakia, post-Communist politicians could resort to national independence as a route out of the Communist past—building a new state and a new democracy all at once—without having to worry unduly about the presence of national minorities. But in Yugoslavia, the break-up of the federation into its constituent republics would in every case eventuate in a

a significant minority or group of minorities stranded in someone else's country. Under these circumstances, once one republic declared itself independent, others would feel bound to follow suit. In short, Yugoslavia now faced the same intractable issues that Woodrow Wilson and his colleagues had failed to resolve at Versailles seventy years earlier.

The catalyst, as many had foreseen, was Kosovo. Throughout the 1980s there had been sporadic Albanian demonstrations and protests at Belgrade's mistreatment of them, notably in the local capital Pristina. Their institutions had been closed down, their leaders dismissed, their daily routines constrained by harsh policing and, from March 1989, by a curfew. The Serbian constitutional amendments effectively stripped the Albanians, already a depressed and deprived underclass, of any autonomy or political representation—a course of events celebrated and underscored by Milošević's visit to the province in June 1989 to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the 'Battle of Kosovo'.

In a speech to a crowd estimated at nearly one million people, Milošević reassured the local Serbs that they had once again 'regained their state, national, and spiritual integrity.... Hitherto, thanks to their leaders and politicians and their vassal mentality [Serbs] felt guilty before themselves and others. This situation lasted for decades, it lasted for years and here we are now at the field of Kosovo to say that this is no longer the case'. A few months later, following bloody clashes between police and demonstrators with many dead and injured, Belgrade shut down the provincial Kosovo Assembly, placing the region under direct rule from Belgrade.

The course of events in the far south of the country directly affected decisions made in the northern republics. At best mildly sympathetic to the Albanians' plight, Ljubljana and Zagreb were far more directly concerned at the rise of Serbian authoritarianism. At the Slovene elections of April 1990, although a majority of the voters still favoured remaining in Yugoslavia they gave their backing to non-Communist opposition candidates openly critical of existing federal arrangements. The following month, in neighboring Croatia, a new nationalist party won an overwhelming majority and its leader, Franjo Tuđman, took over as President of the republic.

The last straw, revealingly, came in December 1990 when—under Milošević's direction—the Serbian leadership in Belgrade seized without authorization 50 per cent of the entire drawing rights of the Yugoslav federation to cover back pay and bonuses for federal employees and state enterprise workers. The Slovenes—whose 8 per cent of the population contributed one-quarter of the federal budget—were especially incensed. The following month the Slovene Parliament announced that it was withdrawing from the federal fiscal system and proclaimed the republic's independence, though without initiating any moves to secede. Within a month the Croat Parliament had done likewise (the Macedonian Parliament in Skopje duly followed suit).

Serb minority in south-eastern Croatia—notably in a long-established frontier region of Serb settlement, the Krajina—was already clashing with Croat police and calling upon Belgrade for help against its 'Ustashe' repressors. But Slovenia's disaffection from Belgrade, and the presence of less than 50,000 Serbs in the republic, gave grounds for hope that a peaceful exit might be engineered. Foreign opinion was divided: Washington, which had suspended all economic aid to Yugoslavia because of the Serbian measures in Kosovo, nevertheless publicly opposed any moves to secede.

Anticipating President Bush in Kiev a few weeks later, Secretary of State James Baker visited Belgrade in June 1991 and assured its rulers that the US supported 'a democratic and unified Yugoslavia'. But by then a 'democratic and unified' Yugoslavia was an oxymoron. Five days after Baker spoke both Slovenia and Croatia took control over their frontiers and initiated unilateral secession from the federation, with the overwhelming support of their citizens and the tacit backing of a number of prominent European statesmen. In response the federal army moved up to the new Slovene border. The Yugoslav war was about to begin.

Or, rather, the Yugoslav wars, for there were five. The Yugoslav attack on Slovenia in 1991 lasted just a few weeks, after which the army withdrew and allowed the secessionist state to depart in peace. There then followed a far bloodier war between Croatia and its rebellious Serb minority (backed by the army of 'Yugoslavia'—in practise Serbia and Montenegro) that lasted until an unsteady cease-fire brokered by the UN early the following year. After the Croats and Muslims of Bosnia voted for independence in March 1992, the Serbs of Bosnia declared war on the new state and set about carving out a 'Republika Srpska', again with the backing of the Yugoslav army, laying siege to a number of Bosnian towns—notably the capital, Sarajevo.

Meanwhile, in January 1993, a separate civil war broke out between the Croats and Muslims of Bosnia, with some Croats attempting to carve out an ephemeral statelet in the Croat-dominated region of Herzegovina. And finally, after these other conflicts had been brought to an end (though not before the Croat-Serb war broke out afresh in 1995 with a successful move by Zagreb to recapture the Krajina, lost to Serb forces three years before), came the war in and over Kosovo: having effectively lost everywhere else, Milošević turned back to Kosovo and was only prevented from destroying or expelling its Albanian population by an unprecedented attack on Serbia itself by NATO forces in the spring of 1999.

In each of these conflicts there was both an internal dynamic and external engagement. Slovenian and Croatian independence was driven forward by well-founded domestic considerations, as we have seen. But it was the hasty German—and subsequently European Community—recognition of the two new states that confirmed their official existence for friend and foe alike. Because an independent Croatia now existed, hysterical propaganda on radio and television stations in Belgrade could start to play on the fears of Serbs resident in the new state,

invoking memories of wartime massacres and urging Serbs to take up arms against their 'Ustashe' neighbors.

In Bosnia, where Serbs were present in far larger numbers, the prospect of an independent Bosnia with a Croat-Muslim majority aroused similar anxieties. Whether Bosnian independence was unavoidable remains unclear: this was the most integrated of the pre-war republics, with the most to lose from any move to separate by force its constituent communities who were spread like a patchwork all across its territory, and before the rise of Milošević none of its ethnic or religious minorities had shown any sustained desire for institutional separation. But once its northern neighbors had seceded, the issue was moot.

After 1991 the Croats and Muslims of Bosnia were bound to prefer sovereign independence to minority status in what remained of Milošević's Yugoslavia, and they voted accordingly in a referendum at the end of February 1992. However the Serbs of Bosnia, now exposed for some months to talk from Belgrade not merely of *Ustashe* massacres but of a coming Muslim *jihad*, were no less understandably disposed to prefer union with Serbia, or at least their own autonomous region, to minority status in a Muslim-Croat state ruled from Sarajevo. Once Bosnia (or rather its Muslim and Croat leaders—the Serbs boycotted both the referendum and the parliamentary vote) declared itself independent in March 1992 its fate was sealed. The following month Bosnian Serb leaders declared the Republika Srpska and the Yugoslav army marched in to help them secure territory and 'cleanse' it.

The Serb-Croat and Serb-Bosnian wars wrought a terrible toll on their peoples. Although there was initially some open warfare between more or less regular armies, particularly in and around strategic cities like Sarajevo or Vukovar, much of the fighting was conducted by irregulars, notably Serb irregulars. These were little more than organized bands of thugs and criminals, armed by Belgrade and led either by professional felons like 'Arkan' (Zeljko Raznatovic), whose 'Serb Volunteer Guard' (the 'Tigers') massacred hundreds in eastern districts of Croatia and Bosnia; or else by former Yugoslav Army officers like Lt. Colonel Ratko Mladić (described by American diplomat Richard Holbrooke as 'a charismatic murderer'), who placed himself in charge of the Bosnian Serb forces from 1992 and helped organize the first attacks on Croat villagers living in majority-Serb communities in the Krajina.

The primary strategic objective was not so much the defeat of opposing forces as the expulsion of non-Serb citizens from their homes, land and businesses in the territories claimed for Serbs.<sup>5</sup> This 'ethnic cleansing'—a new term for a very old practice—was engaged in by all sides, but Serb forces were far and away the worst offenders. In addition to those who were killed (an estimated 300,000 by the end

<sup>5</sup>Since ethnic identity in Yugoslavia could not be ascertained from appearance or speech, roaming militias relied on villagers 'fingering' their neighbours—families with whom they had often lived at peace, sometimes as friends, for years and even decades.

of the Bosnian war), millions were forced into exile. Applications to the European Community for asylum more than tripled between 1988 and 1992: in 1991 Germany alone faced requests for asylum from 256,000 refugees. In the first year of the war in Croatia and Bosnia there were 3 million people from Yugoslavia (one in eight of the pre-war population) seeking refuge abroad.

The international community was thus hardly unaware of the Yugoslav tragedy—which in any case was unfolding in real time on the television screens of the world, with harrowing pictures of starving Muslims in Serb prison camps and worse. The Europeans were the first to try and intervene, sending an EC ministerial team to Yugoslavia in June 1991—it was on this occasion that the unfortunate Jacques Poos, foreign minister of Luxembourg, unburdened himself of the deathless claim that 'the hour of Europe' had dawned. But despite establishing high-level commissions to enquire and arbitrate and propose, the European Community and its various agencies proved quite helpless—not least because its members were divided between those, like Germany and Austria, who favored the seceding republics and others, led by France, who wanted to retain existing borders and states and who for this reason among others were not altogether unsympathetic to Serbia.

Since the US (and therefore NATO) remained resolutely above the fray, that left only the United Nations. But beyond imposing sanctions on Belgrade, there appeared little the UN could do. Historically, soldiers under UN command were introduced into war-torn regions and countries to secure and keep a peace: but in Yugoslavia there was as yet no peace to keep, and there existed neither the will nor the means to bring it about on the ground. As in the comparable case of the Spanish Civil War, an ostensibly neutral international stance in practice favoured the aggressor in a civil conflict: the international arms embargo imposed on former Yugoslavia did nothing to restrain the Serbs, who could call on the substantial arms industry of the old Yugoslav federation, but it severely hampered the Bosnian Muslims in their struggles and goes a long way to account for their substantial military losses between 1992 and 1995.

The only practical achievement of the international community before 1995 was to install a 14,000-strong UN Protection Force in Croatia to separate Croats and Serbs after the fighting there had subsided, followed by the insertion into selected towns in Bosnia—designated as 'Safe Areas'—of a few hundred uniformed UN peacekeepers to protect the growing numbers of (mostly Muslim) refugees herded into these areas. Later came the establishment of UN-authorized 'no-fly zones' in parts of Bosnia, intended to restrict Yugoslavia's freedom to threaten civilians (or break UN-imposed sanctions).

Of greater long-term significance, perhaps, was the setting up in The Hague, in May 1993, of an International Tribunal for War Crimes. The mere existence of such a court confirmed what was by now obvious—that war crimes, and worse, were being perpetrated just a few score miles south of Vienna. But since most of the presumptive criminals, including Mladić and his fellow Bosnian Serb Radovan

Karadžić (President of Republika Srpska), were actively pursuing their crimes with impunity, the Court remained as yet a ghostly and irrelevant side-show.

The situation began to change only in 1995. Until then all talk of foreign intervention had been stymied by the claim—energetically propounded by French and British officers in and out of the UN forces—that the Bosnian Serbs were strong, determined and well armed. They should not be provoked: any serious attempt to enforce a peace settlement in Bosnia against their will or their interests, it was suggested, would not only be unfair but could make matters worse . . . a line of reasoning slyly encouraged from Belgrade by Milošević, who nevertheless claimed somewhat implausibly to play little part in the decisions of his fellow Serbs in Bosnia.

Thus accorded a virtual free hand<sup>6</sup>, the Bosnian Serbs proceeded nevertheless to overplay it. Even though it was broadly agreed by the international community (including a 'Contact Group' of foreign diplomats tirelessly seeking an agreement) that a 'Muslim-Croat' Federation (formed in March 1994 in a ceremony in Washington that put an end to Croat-Muslim fighting) should receive 51 percent of a newly federal Bosnia, with the Serbs getting 49 percent, the Serb leaders based in the town of Pale took no notice and continued their attacks. In February 1994 their forces had lobbed a mortar shell from the surrounding mountains into the marketplace of Sarajevo, killing sixty-eight people and wounding hundreds more. Following this NATO—with UN backing—threatened air strikes in the event of further attacks and there was a temporary lull.

But in May of 1995, in retaliation for some Bosnian military advances and Croatia's successful recapturing of the Krajina (putting the lie to the myth of Serbian military prowess), Serbian shelling of Sarajevo resumed. When NATO planes bombed Bosnian Serb installations in response, the Serbs seized 350 UN peacekeepers as hostages. Terrified for the fate of their soldiers, Western governments implored the UN and NATO to desist. The international presence, far from constraining the Serbs, now offered them additional cover.

Bolstered by this evidence of Western pusillanimity, on July 11th Bosnian Serb forces under Mladić brazenly marched into one of the so-called UN 'Safe Areas', the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica, by then overflowing with terrified Muslim refugees. Srebrenica was officially 'protected' not just by UN mandate but by a 400-strong peacekeeping contingent of armed Dutch soldiers. But when Mladić's men arrived the Dutch battalion laid down its arms and offered no resistance whatsoever as Serbian troops combed the Muslim community, systematically separating men and boys from the rest. The next day, after Mladić had given his 'word of honor as an officer' that the men would not be harmed, his soldiers marched the

<sup>6</sup>Between 1992 and 1994 the UN agencies in the Balkans were all but complicit with the Bosnian Serbs—allowing them, for example, an effective veto over what and who could enter and leave the besieged city of Sarajevo.

Muslim males, including boys as young as thirteen, out into the fields around Srebrenica. In the course of the next four days nearly all of them—7,400—were killed. The Dutch soldiers returned safely home to Holland.

Srebrenica was the worst mass murder in Europe since World War Two: a war crime on the scale of Oradour, Lidice or Katyn, carried out in full view of international observers. Within days the news of what appeared to have taken place at Srebrenica was broadcast worldwide. Yet the only immediate response was an official warning from NATO to the Serbs that there would be a resumption of air strikes if other 'safe areas' were attacked. It was not until August 28th, a full seven weeks later, that the international community finally responded—and only because the Bosnian Serbs, assuming reasonably enough that they had *carte blanche* to commit massacres at will, made the mistake of shelling the Sarajevo marketplace for a second time: killing another thirty-eight civilians, many of them children.

Now, at last, NATO acted. Overcoming a lingering reluctance on the part of the UN leadership, certain European leaders and even some of his own military, President Clinton authorized a serious and sustained bombing campaign designed to reduce and ultimately eliminate the Serbian capacity to cause further harm. It was late in coming, but it worked. The much-vaunted Serb fighting machine evaporated. Faced with a prolonged, open-ended assault on their positions and with no backing from Milošević (who now took great care to emphasize his distance from the men of Pale) the Bosnian Serbs folded.

With the Serbs out of the picture and the US now very much in, it proved surprisingly easy to introduce peace—or at least the absence of war—into the Balkans. On October 5th President Clinton announced a cease-fire, declaring that the parties had agreed to attend peace talks in the US. On November 1st the talks began, at a US Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio. Three weeks later they concluded with an agreement signed in Paris on December 14th 1995.<sup>7</sup> Tudjman represented Croatia, Alija Izetbegović spoke for the Bosnian Muslims and Slobodan Milošević signed on behalf of both Yugoslavia and the Bosnian Serbs.

The objective of Dayton, from the American perspective, was to find a solution to the Yugoslav wars that did not entail a partition of Bosnia. Partition would have represented a victory for the Serbs (who would then have sought to join their share to Serbia proper and forge the Greater Serbia of nationalist dreams); and it would have put an international *imprimatur* on ethnic cleansing as state-making. Instead, a complicated tripartite system of governance was established, in which the Serbs, Muslims and Croats of Bosnia all had a degree of administrative and territorial autonomy but within a single Bosnian state whose external boundaries would remain unaltered.

Formally, then, Bosnia survived its civil war. But the effects of terror and ex-

pulsion could not be undone. Most of those expelled from their homes (Muslims, above all) never returned, despite assurance and encouragement from local and international authorities. Indeed there were to be further 'cleansings'—this time of Serbs, systematically expelled by Zagreb from the newly retaken Krajina or else pressured by their own armed militias to leave their homes in Sarajevo and elsewhere and 'resettle' in predominantly Serb areas. But on the whole the peace was kept and Bosnia held together—by a 60,000-strong NATO army acting as an Implementation Force (later Stabilization Force) and a civilian High Representative empowered to administer the country until it could assume responsibility for its own affairs.

Both the High Representative and the international troops are still in Bosnia and continue to oversee its affairs at the time of writing (ten years after Dayton)—an indication of the calamitous condition of the country following the war and of the continuing ill-feeling and lack of cooperation among the three communities.<sup>8</sup> Bosnia became host to a raft of international agencies: governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental. Indeed the Bosnian economy after 1995 depended almost entirely upon the presence and expenditures of these agencies. A World Bank estimate of January 1996 suggested that in order to recover Bosnia would need \$5.1 billion over three years. This has proven wildly optimistic.

Once the Bosnian war ended, and with the various international agencies in place to help secure the peace, international interest subsided. The European Union, as usual, was transfixed by its own institutional concerns; while Clinton, taken up first with domestic election issues and then with NATO expansion and the instability of Yeltsin's Russia, ceased to focus on the Balkan crisis. But even though Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia were now ostensibly independent states, the Yugoslav problem had not been resolved. Slobodan Milošević was still in control of what remained of his country and the issue on which he had ridden to power in the first place was about to explode.

The Albanians of Serbia had continued to suffer discrimination and repression—indeed, with international attention deflected to the crisis farther north they were more vulnerable than ever. Following Dayton, Milošević's international fortunes had decidedly improved: although he had not succeeded in getting all sanctions removed (his chief purpose in cooperating so readily with the American peace moves in Bosnia), Yugoslavia ceased to be quite the pariah it had been. And so, with a series of defeats to his name and Serb nationalist politicians in Belgrade criticizing him for compromising with Serbia's 'enemies', Milošević turned back to Kosovo.

By the spring of 1997 Elisabeth Rehn, the UN special rapporteur for human rights, was already warning of impending disaster in the Kosovo province, as Bel-

<sup>7</sup>It was at French insistence that the signing ceremony was held in Paris—an exercise in ceremonial over-compensation that only drew attention to France's previous reluctance to act against the Serbs.

<sup>8</sup>The NATO-led Stabilization Force was replaced by the European Union's EUFOR on December 2nd 2004.



grade pressed down upon the Albanian majority there, rejecting all demands for local autonomy and depriving the local population of even the minimum of institutional representation. Bypassing the helpless and humiliated moderate leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, a younger generation of Albanians—armed and encouraged from Albania itself—abandoned non-violent resistance and turned increasingly to the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army).

Originating in Macedonia in 1992, the KLA was committed to armed struggle for Kosovo's independence (and perhaps union with Albania). Its tactics—consisting mostly of guerrilla attacks on isolated police stations—offered Milošević an opportunity to condemn *all* Albanian resistance as 'terrorist' and authorize a campaign of increasing violence. In March 1998, after Serb forces—armed with mortars and backed with combat helicopters—killed and wounded dozens of people in massacres at Drenica and other Albanian villages, the international community at last responded to pleas from Rugova and began to pay closer attention. But when both the US and the EU expressed themselves 'appalled by the police violence in Kosovo', Milošević's belligerent response was to warn that 'terrorism aimed at the internationalization of the issue will be most harmful to those who resorted to these means.'

By now all the Kosovo Albanian leadership—most of it in exile or in hiding—had decided that only complete separation from Serbia could save their community. Meanwhile the US and the ongoing 'Contact Group' countries continued to try to mediate between Milošević and the Albanians—partly to broker a 'just' solution, partly to head off a broader war in the south Balkans. This was not an unreasonable fear: if Yugoslavia could not be brought to treat its Albanian citizens decently—and they opted to secede—this could have serious consequences for neighboring Macedonia, with a large and unhappy Albanian minority of its own.

Newly independent Macedonia, known at Greek insistence as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)<sup>9</sup>, was a historically sensitive zone. Its frontiers with Bulgaria, Greece and Albania had all been disputed before and after both World Wars. It was looked upon with suspicion by all its neighbors—on whom the landlocked little state is utterly dependent for trade and access to the outside world. And its survival following the break-up of Yugoslavia was by no means a sure thing. But if Macedonia were to collapse, then Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and even Turkey might be drawn into the conflict.

Thus Milošević's continued mistreatment—massacres—of the Albanians in Kosovo was bound to bring down upon him the disapproval and ultimate inter-

vention of the Western powers. Curiously, he seems never fully to have grasped this, despite serial warnings through the summer of 1998 from the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (who said she would hold Milošević 'personally responsible'), President Jacques Chirac of France, and NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana. Like Saddam Hussein a few years later, Milošević was isolated and insulated from Western opinion and over-confident of his own ability to manipulate foreign statesmen and maneuver between them.

This was not entirely Milošević's fault. Flattered by frequent visits from certain American diplomats—vaingloriously over-confident of their negotiating prowess—Milošević had good reason to think that he was seen in the West not as an intransigent foe but as a privileged interlocutor.<sup>10</sup> And the Yugoslav dictator was well aware of the international community's overarching concern to avoid any further redrawing of international boundaries. As late as July 1998, despite clear evidence that the situation in Kosovo was now desperate, the Contact Group of foreign ministers publicly ruled out independence as a solution.

What Milošević quite failed to grasp was the transformative impact of the Bosnian catastrophe upon international opinion. Human rights—ethnic cleansing in particular—were now high on everyone's agenda, if only out of a gnawing collective guilt at the world's previous failure to act in time. In June 1998 the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague declared itself competent to exercise jurisdiction over crimes committed in Kosovo—Louise Arbour, the chief prosecutor, claiming that the scale and nature of the fighting in the province qualified it as an armed conflict under international law—and on July 19th the US Senate urged the Hague officials to indict Milošević with 'war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide'.

The plausibility of such charges was mounting fast. Not only were hundreds of Albanian 'terrorists' now being killed by special police units drafted in from Serbia, but there was growing evidence that under the cover of this conflict Belgrade was planning to 'encourage' the departure of the Albanian population, forcing them to flee their land and livelihoods in order to save their lives. Throughout the winter of 1998–99 there were reports of Serb police actions—sometimes in response to KLA attacks, more typically involving mass executions of one or more extended families—intended to terrorize whole communities into abandoning their villages and fleeing across the borders into Albania or Macedonia.

The international response was now increasingly divided. The US and most of its NATO partners openly favored some form of military intervention on behalf of the besieged Albanians as early as October 1998. But at the UN (which would have had to authorize such intervention in the ostensibly 'domestic' affairs of a sover-

<sup>9</sup>The ageing Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu, manipulating nationalist sentiment for electoral advantage, claimed that the term 'Macedonia' was part of his country's ancient heritage and could apply to only the northernmost region of Greece itself. If the Slav state carved out of southern Yugoslavia called itself by that name it must harbour irredentist ambitions. What Papandreu could not acknowledge was that many of the 'Greeks' of Greek Macedonia were themselves of Slav descent—albeit officially Hellenized for patriotic ends.

<sup>10</sup>In the winter of 1996, following palpably fraudulent results in local elections, Serb students demonstrated for three months in the streets of Belgrade, protesting Milošević's dictatorship and demanding change. They received no support or encouragement from the Western powers, however, who looked upon Milošević as a stabilizing factor in the post-Dayton years and did nothing to weaken his position.

own state) there was strong opposition from China and Russia—whose parliament passed a resolution labeling any future NATO action as 'illegal aggression'. Within the EU and NATO itself Greece, for its own reasons, opposed any intervention in Yugoslav affairs. Meanwhile Ukraine and Belarus offered 'unconditional solidarity' and 'moral support' to their fellow Slavs in Serbia.

The apparent stalemate might have continued indefinitely had Belgrade not upped the ante with a series of brutal mass murders in early 1999, first on January 15th at the village of Racak in southern Kosovo and then in March all across the province. The Racak attack, in which 45 Albanians were killed (23 of them apparently executed), served finally—like the marketplace massacre in Sarajevo—to stimulate the international community to action.<sup>11</sup> After fruitless negotiations at Rambouillet between Madeleine Albright and a Yugoslav delegation, which ended with a predictable refusal by Belgrade to withdraw its forces from Kosovo and accept a foreign military presence there, intervention became inevitable. On March 24th, and despite the absence of formal UN approval, NATO ships, planes and missiles went into action over Yugoslavia, in effect declaring war on the Belgrade regime.

The final Yugoslav war lasted just under three months, in the course of which NATO forces wrought serious damage in Serbia proper but had only limited success in preventing the ongoing expulsion of the Albanian population from Kosovo: in the course of the war 865,000 refugees (half the Albanian population of Kosovo) fled into makeshift camps across the border in Montenegro, Bosnia, Albania and the ethnically Albanian regions of western Macedonia. But in spite of President Clinton's imprudently public insistence that there should be no NATO ground troops engaged—obliging the alliance to conduct a war from the air with inevitable mishaps that played into Yugoslav propaganda and the Serb cult of victimhood—the outcome was a foregone conclusion. On June 9th Belgrade agreed to remove all its troops and police from Kosovo, NATO attacks were suspended, and the UN duly mandated a 'temporary' occupation of the province by a NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

The occupation of Kosovo marked the end of the decade-long cycle of Yugoslav wars—and also the beginning of the end for Milošević himself. His credibility undermined by this latest and worst setback for the Serb nationalist project, Milošević was overwhelmingly defeated in the Yugoslav presidential election of September 2000 by an opposition candidate, Vojislav Koštunica. When Milošević cynically conceded that Koštunica had more votes, but declared that the margin was so close that a runoff was needed, he at last aroused a storm of popular protest among the long-suffering Serbs themselves. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Belgrade and on October 5th Milošević finally conceded defeat and stepped down. Six months later the government of Serbia, increasingly desperate for West-

ern economic assistance, agreed to arrest Milošević and hand him over to the Hague Tribunal where he was charged with genocide and war crimes.

**Who was to blame for the tragedy of Yugoslavia?** There was certainly enough responsibility to go around. The United Nations showed little initial concern—its inadequate and unconcerned Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, described Bosnia as 'a rich man's war'—and when its representatives did arrive in the Balkans they spent most of their time blocking any decisive military action against the worst offenders. The Europeans were little better. France in particular displayed a distinct reluctance to place any blame for the course of events upon Serbia—and indeed a marked disinclination to get involved at all.

Thus when, in September 1990, Washington sought to place Yugoslavia on the agenda of an upcoming OSCE summit in Paris, François Mitterrand accused the Americans of 'over-dramatizing' and refused. Four months later, when the issue arose again, the French foreign office now claimed that it was 'too late' for foreign intervention . . . Paris remained similarly uncooperative even after international forces had been obliged to engage in the region: the French General Bernard Janvier, commander of the UN Protection Force in Bosnia, personally forbade air strikes against the Bosnian Serb forces at Srebrenica.<sup>12</sup> As for the Dutch government, it went so far as to veto *any* NATO strikes on Bosnian Serb strongholds until all Dutch soldiers were safely out of the country.

Other countries performed a little better, but not much. Although London eventually backed American pressure to intervene, the British authorities spent the first crucial years of the Yugoslav conflict quietly impeding any direct engagement on the part of the EC or NATO. And the British treatment of Yugoslav refugees was shameful: in November 1992, as the flow of desperate, homeless Bosnians built to its peak, London announced that no Bosnian could travel to the UK without a visa. This was perfidious Albion at its most cynical. Since there was no British embassy in Sarajevo to issue such visas, the only way a Bosnian family could secure them was by making its way to a British embassy in a third country . . . at which point the UK government would and did claim that since they had found asylum somewhere else, Britain need not admit them. Thus whereas Germany, Austria and the Scandinavian countries played generous host to hundreds of thousands of Yugoslav refugees between 1992 and 1995, the UK actually saw a *decline* in the number of asylum seekers in these same years.

Although it took Washington an extraordinarily long time to focus upon events in the Balkans, once the US did engage there its record is distinctly better. Indeed the fact that it was American initiative that drove forward each stage of interna-

<sup>11</sup>And as with the Sarajevo atrocity, Belgrade and its apologists insisted either that it never happened or, when that became untenable, that it was a staged 'provocation' by the victims themselves.

<sup>12</sup>Janvier's performance aroused demands in France and elsewhere that he be co-indicted for responsibility in the subsequent massacre.

tional intervention was a source of serial humiliation for the Western European allies. But the US, too, dragged its feet—for the most part because the American defense establishment was reluctant to take any risks and because many US politicians continued to believe that their country had 'no dog' in this war. The idea of deploying NATO in these novel circumstances—or that the US might unilaterally intervene in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state with which it had no quarrel—was not an easy sell. It was, as Secretary of State Warren Christopher observed at the height of the Bosnian war, 'a problem from hell'.

As for the Yugoslavs themselves, no-one emerges with honour. The failure of the Yugoslav federal system was precipitated by Belgrade, but Ljubljana and Zagreb were not sorry to see it go. Bosnian Muslims, it is true, had only restricted opportunities to commit war crimes of their own—for the most part they were on the receiving end of other people's aggression. Theirs is the saddest loss of all—and the destruction of Sarajevo a particular source of grief. On its restricted scale the Bosnian capital was a genuinely cosmopolitan city: perhaps the last of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, ecumenical urban centers that were once the glory of central Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. It will be rebuilt but it can never recover.

Armed Croats, on the other hand, were responsible for innumerable acts of violence against civilians—under direction from Zagreb and on their own initiative. In Mostar, a town in western Bosnia with an unusually high percentage of inter-faith marriages, Croat extremists deliberately set about expelling Muslims and mixed families from the western half of the city. They then replaced them with Croat peasants driven into the town and radicalized by their own experience of ethnic cleansing in the villages, and set siege to the Muslim eastern districts. In the meantime, in November 1993, they systematically destroyed the sixteenth-century Ottoman bridge across the Neretva river, a symbol of the town's integrated and ecumenical past.

The Croats, then, had little to boast of—and of all the post-Communist leaders who emerged from the rubble, Franjo Tudjman was one of the more egregiously unattractive. More than anyone else he made it a personal project to erase the Yugoslav past from his fellow citizens' memory: by March 1993 the very word 'Yugoslavia' had been removed from textbooks, readers, encyclopedias, book titles and maps published in the new Croatia. Only after Tudjman's death could the Croat state he had founded begin credibly to re-position itself as a candidate for membership of the international community.

But in the end the primary responsibility for the Yugoslav catastrophe must rest with the Serbs and their elected leader Slobodan Milošević. It was Milošević whose bid for power drove the other republics to leave. It was Milošević who then encouraged his fellow Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia to carve out territorial enclaves and who backed them with his army. And it was Milošević who authorized and directed the sustained assault on Yugoslavia's Albanian population that led to the war in Kosovo.

Belgrade's actions were a disaster for Serbs everywhere. They lost their land in the Krajina region of Croatia; they were forced to accept an independent Bosnia and abandon plans to carve from it a sovereign Serb state; they were defeated in Kosovo, from which most of the Serb population has since fled in justified fear of Albanian retribution; and in the rump state of Yugoslavia (from which even Montenegro has sought to secede) their standard of living has fallen to historic lows. This course of events has further exacerbated a longstanding Serb propensity for collective self-pity at the injustice of history and it is true that in the longer run the Serbs may well be the greatest losers in the Yugoslav wars. It says something about the condition of their country that today even Bulgaria and Romania rank above Serbia in present living standards and future prospects.

But this irony should not blind us to Serb responsibility. The appalling ferocity and sadism of the Croat and Bosnian wars—the serial abuse, degradation, torture, rape and murder of hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens—was the work of Serb men, mostly young, aroused to paroxysms of casual hatred and indifference to suffering by propaganda and leadership from local chieftains whose ultimate direction and power came from Belgrade. What followed was not so unusual: it had happened in Europe just a few decades before, when—all across the continent and under the warrant of war—ordinary people committed quite extraordinary crimes.

There is no doubt that in Bosnia especially there was a history upon which Serb propaganda could call—a history of past sufferings that lay buried just beneath the misleadingly placid surface of post-war Yugoslav life. But the decision to arouse that memory, to manipulate and to exploit it for political ends, was made by men: one man in particular. As Slobodan Milošević disingenuously conceded to a journalist during the Dayton talks, he had never expected the wars in his country to last so long. That is doubtless true. But those wars did not just break out from spontaneous ethnic combustion. Yugoslavia did not fall: it was pushed. It did not die: it was killed.

Yugoslavia was the worst case, but post-Communism was difficult everywhere. The path from authoritarianism to democracy in Portugal or Spain accompanied the accelerated modernization of a backward agrarian economy—a combination with which the rest of Western Europe was familiar from its own past. But the exit from Communism had no precedent. The much-anticipated passage from capitalism to socialism had been theorized *ad nauseam* in academies, universities and coffee bars from Belgrade to Berkeley; but no-one had thought to offer a blueprint for the transition from socialism to capitalism.

Of Communism's many encumbering legacies, the economic inheritance was the most tangible. The obsolescent industrial plant of Slovakia, or Transylvania, or Silesia, coupled economic dysfunction with environmental irresponsibility. The

two were closely related: the poisoning of Lake Baikal, the death of the Aral Sea, the acid rain falling across the forests of Northern Bohemia represented not just ecological catastrophe but a huge mortgage on the future. Before there could be investment in new industries the old ones would need to be dismantled and someone would have to make good the damage they had wrought.

In the eastern *Länder* of Germany the bill for undoing the damage of Communism was assumed by the Federal government. The *Treuhand* (see Chapter 17) spent billions of Deutschmarks over the next four years buying up and selling off obsolete industrial plants and factories, paying off their redundant employees and making good—so far as possible—the consequences of their activities. But even though the results were patchy and nearly bankrupted the Federal treasury, the former East Germans were fortunate nonetheless: *their* transition out of Communism was paid for by Western Europe's strongest economy. Elsewhere the cost of reinventing economic life had to be borne by the victims themselves.

The basic choice facing post-Communist governments was either to attempt a one-time, overnight transformation from subsidized socialist economies into market-driven capitalism—the 'big bang' approach—or else proceed cautiously to dismantle or sell off the more egregiously malfunctioning sectors of the 'planned economy' while preserving as long as possible those features which mattered most to the local population: cheap rents, guaranteed jobs, free social services. The first strategy conformed best to the free-market theorems beloved of an emerging generation of post-Communist economists and businessmen; the second was more politically prudent. The problem was that either approach must in the short term (and perhaps the not-so-short term) cause significant pain and loss: in Boris Yeltsin's Russia, where *both* were applied, the economy shrank dramatically for eight years—the biggest peacetime setback for a major economy in modern history.

It was in Poland, under the determined supervision of Leszek Balcerowicz (first as finance minister, later as head of the country's central bank), that the 'big bang' approach was applied earliest and with the greatest consistency. Obviously, Balcerowicz argued, his country—insolvent in all but name—could not recover without international aid. But that aid would not be forthcoming unless Poland put in place credible structures of the kind that would reassure Western bankers and lending agencies. It was not the International Monetary Fund that was forcing harsh measures on Poland; rather, by anticipating IMF strictures, Poland would merit and receive the help it needed. And the only way to do this was *fast*, during the post-Communist honeymoon and before people realized how painful the process would be.

Thus on January 1st 1990 the first post-Communist government of Poland embarked on an ambitious program of reforms: building up foreign reserves, removing price controls, tightening credit and cutting subsidies (i.e. allowing enterprises to fail)—all at the expense of domestic real wages, which immediately fell some 40 percent. Except for the explicit recognition of the inevitability of unemployment

(softened by the establishment of a fund to support and help retrain those forced out of work) this was not very different from what had twice been unsuccessfully attempted during the 1970s. What had changed was the political climate.

In neighboring Czechoslovakia, under the guidance of finance minister (later Prime Minister) Václav Klaus, a similarly ambitious program was pursued—with an additional emphasis upon currency convertibility, the liberalization of foreign trade, and privatization, all in keeping with Klaus's openly avowed 'Thatcherism'. Like Balcerowicz and some of the young economists in the Kremlin, Klaus favoured 'shock therapy': finding nothing worth preserving in socialist economics he saw no benefit in delaying the switch to capitalism.

At the other extreme stood men like Slovakia's Mečiar, Romania's Iliescu or Ukraine's Prime Minister (and subsequently President) Leonid Kuchma. Wary of upsetting their constituents they delayed the introduction of change as long as possible—Ukraine's first 'economic reform program' was announced in October 1994—and proved singularly reluctant to liberalize domestic markets or reduce the state's share in the economy. In September 1995 Kuchma would defend his position—in terms familiar to historians of the region—by warning against 'blindly copying foreign experience'.

After passing through a slough of economic despond in the early 1990s the first tier of former Communist states re-emerged on a more secure foundation, able to attract Western investors and envisage an eventual ascent into the European Union. The relative success of the Polish or Estonian economic strategies when compared to the fortunes of Romania or Ukraine is obvious to any visitor—indeed, at the level of small business activity or even public optimism, the more successful eastern European countries have fared better than former East Germany, for all the latter's apparent advantages.

It is tempting to conclude that the more 'advanced' post-Communist states like Poland—or the Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia and perhaps Hungary—were thus able in the course of a few uncomfortable years to bridge the gap from state socialism to market capitalism, albeit at some cost to their older and poorer citizens; meanwhile a second tier of countries in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union was left to struggle in their wake, held back by an incompetent and corrupt ruling elite unable and unwilling to contemplate the necessary changes.

This is very broadly true. But even without Klaus or Balcerowicz or their Hungarian and Estonian counterparts, some former-Communist states were always going to do better than others in the passage to a market economy: either because they were already embarked upon it before 1989—as we have seen—or else because their Soviet-era distortions were not as pathological as those of their less fortunate neighbours (the comparison between Hungary and Romania is telling in this respect). And of course the miracles of economic transformation on offer in the capital cities of certain countries—in Prague or Warsaw or Budapest, for example—are not always replicated in their distant provinces. As in the past so today the

boundaries in central and eastern Europe are not between countries but between prosperous urban centers and a neglected and impoverished rural hinterland.

Rather more revealing than the differences between the post-Communist experiences of these lands are their similarities. In every country, after all, the new ruling elites faced the same strategic choices. The 'market-economic romance', as Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin termed it dismissively in January 1994, was universal.<sup>13</sup> So, too, were the general economic objectives: liberalization of the economy, transition to some form of free market and access to the European Union—with its seductive promise of foreign consumers, investment and regional support funds to ease the pain of dismantling the command economy. These were outcomes that almost everyone sought—and in any case there was, as it seemed to most informed opinion, no alternative.

If there were deep differences in public policy in post-Communist societies, then, it was not because of any widespread division of opinion over where these countries had to go or how to get there. The real issue was how to dispose of resources. The economies of the Communist states may have been distorted and inefficient, but they included vast and potentially lucrative assets: energy, minerals, arms, real property, communications media, transportation networks and much else. Moreover, in post-Soviet societies the only people who knew how to manage a laboratory, a farm or a factory—who had experience of international trade or of running a large institution—and who knew how to get things done were the Party's own people: the intelligentsia, the bureaucracy and the *nomenklatura*.

These were the people who would be in charge of their countries after 1989 no less than before—at least until a new, post-Communist generation could emerge. But they would now be operating under a new guise: instead of working for the Party they would be in various political parties competing for power; and instead of being employed by the state they would be independent operators in a competitive market for skills, goods and capital. When the state sold its interest in everything from drilling rights to apartment blocks, these were the men (and they were mostly men, Ukraine's future prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko being a notable exception) who would do the selling—and the buying.

Capitalism, in the gospel that spread across post-Communist Europe, is about markets. And markets mean privatization. The fire-sale of publicly owned commodities in post-1989 eastern Europe had no historical precedent. The cult of privatization in western Europe that had gathered pace from the late Seventies (see Chapter 16) offered a template for the helter-skelter retreat from state ownership in the East; but otherwise they had very little in common. Capitalism, as it had

emerged in the Atlantic world and Western Europe over the course of four centuries, was accompanied by laws, institutions, regulations and practices upon which it was critically dependent for its operation and its legitimacy. In many post-Communist countries such laws and institutions were quite unknown—and dangerously underestimated by neophyte free-marketers there.

The result was privatization as kleptocracy. At its most shameless, in Russia under the rule of Boris Yeltsin and his friends, the post-transition economy passed into the hands of a small number of men who became quite extraordinarily rich—by the year 2004 thirty-six Russian billionaires ('oligarchs') had corralled an estimated \$110 billion, one quarter of the country's entire domestic product. The distinction between privatization, graft and simple theft all but disappeared: there was so much—oil, gas, minerals, precious metals, pipelines—to steal and no-one and nothing to prevent its theft. Public assets and institutions were pulled apart and re-allocated to one another by officials extracting and securing quite literally anything that moved or could be legally re-assigned to private parties.

Russia was the worst case, but Ukraine came a close second. Kuchma and other politicians were elected with huge cash backing from 'businessmen' in the form of down payments on future income: in post-Soviet Ukraine, as these people well understood, power led to money, not the other way around. Public goods, state loans or subsidies passed directly from the hands of government to the pockets of a few clans, much of it then transiting on to private accounts overseas. The new 'capitalists' in these countries did not actually make anything; they merely laundered public assets for private benefit.

Nepotism flourished, much as it had under Communism but for far greater private gain: when Ukraine's Kryvorizhstal, one of the largest steel plants in the world—with 42,000 employees and an annual pre-tax profit of \$300 million (in a country whose average income was \$95 a month)—was belatedly put up for sale in June 2004, no-one in Kiev was surprised to learn that the successful 'bidder' was Viktor Pinchuk, one of the country's wealthiest businessmen and the son-in-law of the Ukrainian President.

In Romania and Serbia, state assets suffered a similar fate or else were not sold off at all, local political chieftains riding out the initial talk of privatization and preferring to maintain their power and influence the old way. Like Albanians at about the same time, Romanians seeking instant market gratification were offered pyramid schemes instead, promising huge short-term gains without risk. At its peak one such operation, the 'Caritas' scam, which ran from April 1992 to August 1994, had perhaps four million participants—nearly one in five of the Romanian population.

Like 'legitimate' privatization, these pyramid schemes (they were common in Russia, too) mostly functioned to channel private cash into mafias based in old Party networks and the former security services. Meanwhile, fourteen years after the fall of Ceaușescu, 66 percent of Romanian industry was still in state ownership, although some of the more profitable and attractive enterprises had changed hands.

<sup>13</sup> Among a younger generation, business-oriented and impatient to escape their country's encumbering past; it even brought forth a new conformism to substitute for the wooden public language of Communism: uncritical adulation for the mantras of neo-classical economics blissfully unclouded by any familiarity with their social cost.

Foreign investors remained for many years understandably wary of risking their capital in such countries: the prospect of substantial returns had to be offset against the chronic absence of legal protections.

Elsewhere in Central Europe the balance of risk favoured foreign investors, if only because the prospect of EU membership was accelerating the necessary institutional reform and legislation. Even so, much of the initial privatization in Hungary or Poland consisted either of the transformation of Communist-era black market activities into legitimate business; or else a quick sale of the more obviously viable bits of state enterprises to local entrepreneurs backed by foreign cash. Three years after the revolution only 16 percent of Poland's state-owned businesses had been sold into private hands. In the Czech Republic an ingenious voucher scheme, offering people the chance to purchase stock in state enterprises, was supposed to transform the citizenry into a nation of capitalists: but its main effect over the next few years was to lay the groundwork for future scandals and a political backlash against rampant 'profiteering'.

One reason for the distortions attendant upon privatization in post-Communist Europe was the virtual absence of Western engagement. To be sure, Moscow or Warsaw was initially awash in young American economists offering to teach their hosts how to build capitalism, and German firms in particular showed an early interest in relatively upscale Communist companies like the Czech car manufacturer Škoda.<sup>14</sup> But there was virtually no engagement by foreign governments, no Marshall Plan or anything remotely resembling it: except in Russia, where considerable sums in grants and loans flowed in from Washington to help shore up the Yeltsin regime—and flowed out again into the pockets of Yeltsin's friends and backers.

Instead, foreign investment resembled not the sustained post-World War Two effort that helped reconstruct Western Europe but rather the piecemeal private-sector involvement that had followed the Versailles settlement: invested in good times and withdrawn when the going got tough.<sup>15</sup> As in the past, therefore, eastern Europeans have had to compete with the West on a markedly uneven playing field, lacking local capital and foreign markets and able to export only low-margin foods and raw materials or else industrial and consumer goods kept cheap thanks to low wages and public subsidy.

Unsurprisingly, many new post-Communist governments were tempted, like their inter-war predecessors, to shield themselves against the political costs of this

situation by instituting protections—in this case, laws restricting foreign ownership of land and companies. Somewhat unreasonably castigated by foreign critics as 'nationalist', these echoes of earlier efforts at autarky predictably achieved little: by inhibiting outside investment and distorting the local market they merely tweaked the privatization process still further towards corruption.<sup>16</sup>

Thus for every crooked Russian oligarch with a second home in London or Cannes, or enthusiastic young Polish businessman with a BMW and a cell phone, there were millions of disgruntled pensioners and laid-off workers for whom the transition to capitalism was at best an ambiguous benefit—not to speak of the millions of peasants who could neither be redeployed nor rendered economically self-sustaining: in Poland by the end of the twentieth century agriculture generated only 3 percent of GDP—but still occupied one-fifth of the working population. Unemployment remained endemic in many places—and with the loss of a job went the cheap facilities and other benefits that had traditionally accompanied work in these countries. With prices rising steadily, whether from inflation<sup>17</sup> or in anticipation of European entry, anyone on a fixed income or a state pension (which meant most of the teachers, doctors and engineers who had once been the pride of Socialism) had good cause to wax nostalgic for the past.

Many people in Eastern Europe—above all those over forty—complained bitterly of what they had lost in material security and cheap board, lodging and services; but this did not mean that they were necessarily longing to return to Communism. As one fifty-year-old retired Russian military engineer living with her pensioner husband on \$448 a month explained to foreign journalists in 2003: 'What we want is for our life to be as easy as it was in the Soviet Union, with the guarantee of a good, stable future and low prices—and at the same time this freedom that did not exist before.'

Opinion polls of Latvians, who would be horrified to imagine a return to Russian rule, nevertheless suggest that peasants especially are convinced they were better off in Soviet times. And they may be right, and not only if they are peasants. In the late Eighties, before the revolutions, East Europeans were avid cinemagoers. By 1997 cinema attendance in Latvia had fallen by 90 percent. The same was true everywhere—in Bulgaria it was down 93 percent, in Romania it was down by 94 percent, in Russia it had fallen 96 percent. Interestingly, cinema attendance in Poland in the same years was only down by 77 percent, in the Czech Republic by 71 percent, in Hungary by 51 percent. In Slovenia it had hardly fallen at all. These data suggest a direct relationship between prosperity and film-going and confirm the explanation offered in one Bulgarian poll for the decline in local cinema at-

<sup>14</sup>And inefficiency—one irony of ritualized privatization in eastern Europe was that once collective farms were broken up into tiny plots they could no longer be worked by tractor but only by hand.

<sup>15</sup>It is estimated that inflation in post-Communist Ukraine reached an annual rate of 5,371 percent in 1993.

tendance: since the fall of Communism there was a better choice of films . . . but people could no longer afford the tickets.

In the circumstances, the difficult and incomplete economic transformation of Eastern Europe prompts the Johnsonian observation that though it was not done well, one is surprised to find it done at all. Much the same might be said of the transition to democracy. With the exception of Czechoslovakia, none of the formerly Communist societies between Vienna and Vladivostok had any living memory of genuine political freedom and many local commentators were pessimistic about the chances for pluralist politics. If capitalism without legal restraints descends readily into theft, then—in the absence of agreed and understood boundaries to public rhetoric and political competition—democracy, it was feared, risks slipping into competitive demagoguery.

This was not an unreasonable fear. By concentrating power, information, initiative and responsibility into the hands of the party-state, Communism had given rise to a society of individuals not merely suspicious of one another and skeptical of any official claims or promises, but with no experience of individual or collective initiative and lacking any basis on which to make informed public choices. It was not by chance that the most important journalistic initiative in post-Soviet states was the appearance of newspapers devoted to providing hard information: *Facts and Arguments* in Moscow, *Facts in Kiev*.

It was older people who were least equipped to negotiate the transition to an open society. The younger generation had better access to information—from foreign television and radio and, increasingly, from the internet. But while this made many young voters in these countries more cosmopolitan and even sophisticated, it also opened a breach with their parents and grandparents. A survey of young Slovaks taken a decade after their country's independence revealed a clear generation gap. Young people were utterly disconnected from the pre-1989 past, of which they had little knowledge; conversely they complained that in the brave new world of post-Communist Slovakia their parents were adrift and helpless: they could offer neither help nor advice to their children.

This generation gap would have political consequences everywhere, with older and poorer voters proving periodically susceptible to the appeal of parties offering nostalgic or ultra-nationalist alternatives to the new liberal consensus. Predictably, this problem was worst in parts of the former Soviet Union, where the disruption and dislocation was worst and democracy hitherto unknown. Grindingly poor, insecure, and resentful at the conspicuous new wealth of a tiny minority, elderly—and not-so-elderly—voters in Russia and Ukraine especially were easily attracted to authoritarian politicians. Thus while it proved easy enough in post-Communist lands to invent model constitutions and democratic parties it was another matter altogether to forge a discriminating electorate. Initial elections everywhere tended to favour the liberal or right-of-center alliances that had brokered the overthrow of the old regime; but the backlash brought on by economic hardships and inevitable

disappointments frequently worked to the advantage of the former Communists, now recycled in nationalist guise.

This transformation of the old *romenklatura* was less bizarre than it might have appeared to outside observers. Nationalism and Communism had more in common with one another than either had with democracy: they shared, as it were, a political 'syntax'—while liberalism was another language altogether. If nothing else, Soviet Communism and traditional nationalists had a common foe—capitalism, or 'the West'—and their heirs would prove adept at manipulating a widespread envious egalitarianism ('at least back then we were *all poor*') into blaming post-Communist woes on foreign interference.

There was thus nothing especially incongruous about the rise of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, for example: a well-known literary sycophant at the court of Nicolae Ceaușescu who devoted himself to writing odes to the glory of the *Conducator* before switching from national communism to ultra-nationalism. In 1991, backed by *émigré cash*, he founded the Greater Romania Party, whose platform combined irredentist nostalgia with attacks on the Hungarian minority and openly espoused anti-Semitism. In the presidential elections of December 2000, one Romanian voter in three opted for Tudor over the only available alternative, the former Communist *apparatchik* Ion Iliescu.<sup>18</sup>

Even when nationalist politicians began as critics of Communism—as in the case of the Russian 'national-patriotic' movement *Pamyat* ('Memory')—they slipped comfortably enough into a symbiotic sympathy for the Soviet past, blending a sort of nationalist *ressentiment* with nostalgia for the Soviet heritage and its monuments. The same conflation of patriotic rhetoric with regret for the lost world of Soviet-style authoritarianism accounted for the popularity of the new nationalists in Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia and Slovakia—and has its counterparts in the various farmers' and 'popular' parties that sprang up in Poland at the end of the Nineties, notably Andrzej Lepper's widely supported Self-Defence Party.

Although recycled Communists made alliances everywhere with genuine nationalists<sup>19</sup>, the appeal of outright nationalism proved strongest and most enduring in Russia. This was not surprising: in the words of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a fiery new public figure who built his electoral appeal on unapologetic old-Russian xenophobia, 'The Russian people have become the most humiliated nation on the planet'. Whatever its limitations, the Soviet Union had been a world power: a territorial and cultural giant, the legitimate heir and extension of Imperial Russia. Its disintegration was a source of deep humiliation to older Russians, many of whom shared the resentment of the Soviet military at NATO's absorption of the Russian

<sup>18</sup>But Romania is perhaps unique. In the Bucharest mayoral elections of 1998 the Romanian Workers' Party blanketed the city with posters of Nicolae Ceaușescu. 'They shot me', the posters read. 'Do you live any better? Remember all I did for the Romanian people.'

<sup>19</sup>And even on occasion with unreconstructed Fascists, nostalgic for the better days of World War Two—notably in Croatia.

'near West' and their country's inability to prevent it. The wish to recover some international 'respect' drove much of Moscow's post-Soviet foreign policy and accounts both for the nature of the presidency of Vladimir Putin and the broad support on which Putin could draw, despite (and because of) his increasingly illiberal domestic policies.

For obvious reasons the citizens of Russia's former empire in central Europe were not disposed to nostalgia in this form. But the lost world of Communism held some appeal even in East Germany, where polls in the mid-'90s showed a widespread belief that, except for travel, the electronic media and freedom of expression, life had been better before 1989. In other countries even the old Communist-era media aroused a certain affection—in 2004 the most popular program on Czech television was re-runs of *Major Zeman*, an early Seventies detective series whose scripts were little more than propaganda exercises for post-'68 'normalization'.

Only in the Czech Republic (together with France and the states of the former USSR) did the Communist Party brazenly retain its name. But in every post-Communist country of central Europe roughly one voter in five could be found supporting comparable 'anti-' parties: anti-American, anti-EU, anti-Western, anti-privatization . . . or more commonly all the above. In the Balkans especially, 'anti-Americanism' or 'anti-Europeanism' was typically a code for anti-capitalism, a cover for ex-Communists who could not openly express nostalgia for the old days but traded on it just the same in their disguised public pronouncements.

This protest vote indirectly illustrated the unavoidable consensus which bound the political mainstream: there was only one possible future for the region, and that was in the West, in the European Union, and in the global market, whatever it took. On these goals there was little to distinguish the major competing parties, all of which would win elections by criticizing the 'failed' policies of their opponents and then proceed to implement a strikingly similar program. The result in Central and Eastern Europe was a new 'wooden' language of public policy—'democracy', 'market', 'budget deficit', 'growth', 'competition'—of very little meaning or concern to many citizens.

Voters who wished to register their protest or express their pain were thus drawn to the margins. In the early Nineties observers saw in the rise in post-Communist Europe of national-populist fringe parties and their demagogic leaders a dangerously anti-democratic reaction, the atavistic retreat of a backward region imprisoned for half a century in a time-warp. In more recent years, however, the success of Jörg Haider in Austria, Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and their close counterparts everywhere from Norway to Switzerland has tended to dilute the patronizing tone of Western European commentary. Atavism is no respecter of frontiers.

The success of political democracy in many former Communist countries had ambiguous consequences for the intellectuals who had done so much to bring it about. Some, like Adam Michnik in Poland, maintained an influential voice through journalism. Others, like János Kis in Hungary, passed from intellectual dis-

sent into parliamentary politics (in Kis's case as leader of the Free Democrats) only to move back into academic life after a few turbulent years in the public eye. But most of the opposition intellectuals of earlier years did not make a successful conversion into post-Communist politicians or public figures, except as transitional figureheads, and many who tried proved sadly inept. Václav Havel was unique—and even he was not particularly successful.

As Edmund Burke had dismissively observed of an earlier generation of revolutionary activists: 'The best were only men of theory'. Most of them were quite unprepared for the messy political and technical issues of the coming decade. They were also quite unprepared for the dramatic fall in the public status of intellectuals in general, as reading habits changed and a younger generation turned away from traditional sources of guidance and opinion. By the mid-Nineties some of the once-influential periodicals of an older intellectual generation had become sadly marginal.

Barbara Toruńczyk's *Zeszyty Literackie*, a widely admired literary journal published from Paris by a '68 generation Polish exile, had played a major role in sustaining Polish cultural debate before 1989. Now, after its triumphant establishment in the capital of its liberated homeland, it struggled to maintain a readership of 10,000. *Literární Noviny*, the oldest and most influential Czech cultural weekly, did barely better, with a circulation of less than 15,000 by 1994. These figures, pro-rated to population, would not have seemed so unworthy to the publishers of literary magazines and periodicals in most Western countries; but in Central Europe their increasingly marginal place represented a traumatic shift in cultural priorities.

One of the reasons for the decline of the intellectuals was that their much remarked-upon emphasis on the *ethics* of anti-Communism, the need to construct a morally aware civil society to fill the anomic space between the individual and the state, had been overtaken by the practical business of constructing a market economy. Within a few short years 'civil society' in Central Europe had become an archaic notion, of interest only to a handful of foreign sociologists. Something rather similar had happened after World War Two in western Europe (see Chapter 3), when the high moral tone of the wartime Resistance had been dispelled and displaced first by the practical business of reconstruction and then by the Cold War. But whereas French or Italian writers in those years still had a sizeable audience—thanks in part to their loudly advertised political engagement—their Hungarian or Polish counterparts were not so fortunate.

The intellectuals who *did* make a successful leap into democratic public life were usually 'technocrats'—lawyers or economists—who had played no conspicuous part in the dissenting community before 1989. Not having performed a hitherto heroic role they offered more reassuring models for their similarly un-heroic fellow citizens. Shortly after he succeeded Havel as Czech President in 2003, Václav Klaus put the point very bluntly in a presidential address: 'I am a bit like all of you. Neither a former communist nor a former dissident; neither a henchman nor a



moralist, whose very presence on the scene is a reminder of the courage you did not have: your bad conscience.

Allusions to bad conscience raised the troubling question of retribution—of what people had done in the Communist past and what (if anything) should happen to them now. This was to prove a traumatic dilemma for almost every post-Communist regime. On the one hand there was broad agreement, and not just among moralizing intellectuals, that political crimes committed in the Soviet-era should be brought to light and their perpetrators punished. Unless the truth about the Communist past was publicly acknowledged the already difficult transition to freedom would be made harder still: apologists for the old regime would whitewash its sins and people would forget what 1989 had been about.

On the other hand, Communists had been in government for over forty years in all these countries—fifty years in the Baltic states, seventy in the Soviet Union itself. The party-state had exercised a monopoly of power. Its laws, its institutions and its police had been the only force in the land. Who was to say, in retrospect, that Communists had not been the legitimate rulers? They had certainly been recognized as such by foreign governments, and no international court or tribunal had ever declared Communism to be a criminal regime. How, then, could someone be punished retroactively for obeying Communist laws or working for the Communist state?

Moreover, some of those who were most prominent in early calls for vengeance against Communist tyranny were of doubtful provenance themselves—anti-Communism in the confused mood of the early '90s often overlapped with a certain nostalgia for the regimes the Communists had replaced. Separating condemnation of Communism from rehabilitation of its Fascist predecessors was not always going to be easy. Many reasonable people conceded that it would be necessary to draw a line under the Stalinist era: it was too late to punish those who had collaborated in the coups and show trials and persecutions of the 1950s, and most of their victims were dead.

Such matters, it was felt, were best left for historians, who would now have access to archives and could get the story right for the benefit of future generations. Concerning the post-Stalinist decades, however, there was wide agreement that there ought to be some public reckoning with the most egregious crimes and criminals: Czech Communist leaders who had collaborated in the overthrow of the Prague Spring; Polish policemen responsible for the assassination of Father Popieluszko (see Chapter 19); East German authorities who ordered the shooting of anyone trying to scale the Berlin Wall, and so on.

But this still left unresolved two much harder dilemmas. What should be done with former Communist Party members and police officials? If they were not accused of specific crimes, then should they suffer any punishment at all for their past acts? Should they be allowed to participate in public life—as policemen, politicians, even prime ministers? Why not? After all, many of them had cooperated actively

in the dismantling of their own regime. But if not, if there were to be restrictions placed on the civic or political rights of such people, then how long should such restrictions apply and how far down the old *nomenklatura* should they reach? These questions were broadly comparable to those faced by Allied occupiers of post-war Germany trying to apply their program of de-Nazification—except that after 1989 the decisions were being taken not by an army of occupation but by the parties directly concerned.

This was one thorny problem. The second was in some ways more complicated still, and only emerged over the course of time. The Communist regimes did not merely force their rule upon a reluctant citizenry; they encouraged people to collude in their own repression, by collaborating with the security agencies and reporting the activities and opinions of their colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances, friends and relations. The scale of this subterranean network of spies and informers varied from country to country but it was present everywhere.

The consequence was that while the whole society thus fell under suspicion—who might not have worked for the police or the regime at some moment, even if only inadvertently?—by the same token it became hard to distinguish venal and even mercenary collaboration from simple cowardice or even the desire to protect one's family. The price of a refusal to report to the Stasi might be your children's future. The grey veil of moral ambiguity thus fell across many of the private choices of helpless individuals.<sup>20</sup> Looking back, who—save a handful of heroic and unwavering dissidents—could pass judgment? And it is striking that many of those same former dissidents—Adam Michnik prominent among them—were the most vigorously opposed to any retribution for their fellow citizens.

For all that these difficulties were common to every post-Communist state, each country dealt with them in its own way. In places where there never really was a transition—where Communists or their friends remained in power under a new nomenclature and with freshly laundered 'Western' agendas—the past remained untouched. In Russia, as in Ukraine or Moldova or what remained of Yugoslavia, the issue of retribution never really arose and high-ranking officials from the old regime were quietly recycled back into power: under Vladimir Putin, Communist-era *siloviki* (prosecutors, police, and military or security personnel) constituted over half the President's informal cabinet.

In Germany, on the other hand, revelations concerning the size and reach of the state security bureaucracy had astonished the nation. It turned out that in addition to its 85,000 full-time employees the Stasi had approximately 60,000 'unofficial collaborators', 110,000 regular informers and upwards of half a million 'part-time' informers, many of whom had no means of knowing that they even fell into such

<sup>20</sup>Though not, perhaps, across the self-serving moves of certain prominent writers—who would have risked little by declining their services: e.g. Christa Wolf, whose much-vaunted literary ambivalence appears somehow less admirable in the light of later revelations of her cooperation with the Stasi.

a category.<sup>21</sup> Husbands spied on wives, professors reported on students, priests informed on their parishioners. There were files on 6 million residents of former East Germany, one in three of the population. The whole society had in effect been infiltrated, atomized and polluted by its self-appointed guardians.

To lance the boil of mutual fear and suspicion, the Federal Government in December 1991 appointed a Commission under the former Lutheran minister Joachim Gauck to oversee the Stasi files and prevent their abuse. Individuals would be able to ascertain whether they had a 'file' and then, if they wished, come and read it. People would thus learn—sometimes with devastating domestic consequences—who had been informing on them; but the material would not be open to the public at large. This was an awkward compromise but, as it turned out, quite successful: by 1996, 1,145,000 people had applied to see their files. There was no way to undo the human damage, but because the Gauck Commission was trusted not to abuse its powers the information it controlled was hardly ever exploited for political advantage.

It was fear of just such exploitation that inhibited similar procedures elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In Poland, accusations of past collaboration became a familiar way of discrediting political opponents—in 2000, even Lech Wałęsa was accused of collaborating with the former special services, though the charge never stuck. One post-Communist Interior Minister even threatened to publish the names of all his political opponents who were tarnished by the brush of collaboration; it was in anxious anticipation of just such behaviour that Michnik and others had favoured simply drawing a final line under the Communist past and moving on. Consistent with this view, Michnik even opposed efforts in 2001 to try the former Communist President Jaruzelski (then aged 78) for giving orders back in 1970 to shoot striking workers. In 1989 the recent memory of martial law and its aftermath had made it seem unwise to open up the past and assess guilt; by the time it was safe to do so the opportunity had passed, popular attention was elsewhere and the quest for belated retroactive justice looked more like political opportunism.

In Latvia it was decreed that anyone with a record of KGB involvement would be barred from public office for ten years. From 1994 Latvian citizens were at liberty, following the German model, to see their own Communist-era police files; but the contents were made public only if a person ran for office or sought employment in law enforcement. In Bulgaria the new government, drawing on the practice of post-Vichy France, established tribunals with the authority to impose 'civic degradation' upon those guilty of certain offenses associated with the previous regime.

In Hungary, the benign role of the Communist Party in its transition out of

power made it hard to justify purging or punishing it for earlier sins—particularly since in post-Kádár Hungary the main point of contention was of course 1956, a date which would soon be ancient history for a majority of the population. In neighbouring Romania, where there were indeed ample recent grounds for retribution, efforts to mount a local version of the Gauck Commission foundered for some years on the firm opposition of the post-Communist political elite, many of whose luminaries (beginning with President Iliescu himself) would certainly be implicated in any serious interrogation of the Ceaușescu regime's activities. Eventually a National College for the Study of the "Securitate" Archives<sup>22</sup> was inaugurated, but it could never aspire to the authority of the German original.

In none of these countries was the problem of coming to terms with the Communist past resolved to everyone's satisfaction or with complete fairness. But in Czechoslovakia the solution that was adopted aroused controversy reaching well beyond the country's borders. Stalinism here had come later and lasted longer than elsewhere, and the ugly memory of 'normalization' was still very much alive. At the same time Communism had a firmer political basis in the Czech region than anywhere else in Eastern Europe. Finally, there was a certain national discomfort at the memory of Czechoslovakia's apparent serial failure to resist tyranny—in 1938, in 1948 and after 1968. For one reason or another, the whole country—as it seemed to its more uncompromising domestic critics—suffered from a bad conscience. Václav Klaus knew whereof he spoke.

The first post-Communist Czechoslovak legislation—a 1990 law rehabilitating everyone illegally sentenced between 1948 and 1989 and eventually paying out 100 million euros in compensation—provoked little debate. But it was followed by a 'lustration'<sup>23</sup> law (renewed for five years in 1996 and renewed again when it expired early in the twenty-first century) whose purpose was to vet all public officials or would-be public officials for links to the old security services. This legitimising sounding objective led, however, to widespread opportunities for abuse. Many of the names found on the old secret police informer lists were, it transpired, merely 'candidates': men and women whom the regime was hoping to force into compliance. They included a number of the best-known Czech writers, some of them not even resident in the country.

The secret police lists soon found their way into the press, published and publicized by politicians and parliamentary candidates hoping to discredit their opponents. In the course of the mud-slinging even Havel was mentioned as a one-time candidate for recruitment into the police network of spies. And, as some critics had warned, while the secret police files furnished copious data about those they sought to recruit they were all but silent on the identities of the policemen doing the recruiting. A cartoon in the daily *Lidové Noviny* showed two men talking in front of

<sup>21</sup>By way of comparison, the Gestapo in 1941 had a staff of fewer than 15,000 to police the whole of greater Germany.

<sup>22</sup>From the Czech *lustrace*, meaning 'bringing to light', though the translation carries purgative connotations as well.

the parliament in Prague: I am not worried about lustrations,' says one of them. 'I was not an informer. I was just giving orders'.<sup>23</sup>

Lustration was not a penal procedure, but it did cause acute embarrassment to many of its victims, unjustly named and shamed'. More seriously, perhaps, it was from the outset an overtly political device. It was one of the issues on which the old Civic Forum alliance broke up—longstanding dissidents (Havel included) opposed the new law while Klaus enthusiastically supported it as a way 'to clarify who stands where' (and embarrass his ex-dissident critics, some of them erstwhile reform Communists). It is noteworthy that Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia also opposed the lustration law, not least because of his own widely rumored links to the former secret police—though once he had taken his country into independence he made copious use of the information in police files for his own political ends.

In the first twelve years of its application, the lustration law did relatively little direct damage. It was applied to some 300,000 people who applied for clearance: an estimated 9,000 of them did not pass, a strikingly small number compared to the half a million Czechs and Slovaks who lost their jobs or were purged from the Party after 1968. But the more lasting impact of the legislation was the bad taste it left behind, contributing to a widespread cynicism in Czech society about the way in which the 'velvet revolution' had played itself out. 'Lustration' in the Czech Republic seemed to be more about legitimizing an incoming elite than dealing honestly with the outgoing past.

In July 1993 the Czech parliament adopted a 'Law on the Illegality of and Resistance to the Communist Regime', in effect declaring the Communist Party a criminal organization. In theory this should have criminalized millions of former Party members, but its impact was purely rhetorical and no action followed. Far from discrediting Communism and legitimizing its overthrow, the law merely reinforced the skeptical detachment of the public at whom it was directed. Ten years after the law was passed, opinion polls revealed that one Czech voter in five favored the unreconstructed (and perfectly legal) Communist Party, which remained the largest political organization in the country, with 160,000 members.

<sup>23</sup>I am indebted to Dr Jacques Rupnik for the reference.

## The Old Europe—and the New

'You have to wonder why Europe does not seem capable of taking decisive action in its own theatre.'

Richard Holbrooke

'Si c'était à refaire, je commencerais par la culture' ('If I were starting over, I would begin with culture'.)

Jean Monnet

'It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.'

Sigmund Freud

'What is the explanation of this curious combination of the permanent unemployment of eleven percent of the population with a general sense of comparative prosperity on the part of the bulk of the population?'

Beatrice Webb (1925)

The fissile political temper of the Nineties was not confined to the countries of the former Communist East. The same urge to escape the bonds of centralized rule—or else to relinquish responsibility for impoverished fellow citizens in distant provinces—was felt in the West. From Spain to the United Kingdom the established territorial units of Western Europe were subjected to extensive administrative decentralization, though they all managed more or less to retain at least the form of the conventional national state.

In some places this centrifugal propensity had already surfaced decades earlier, as we saw in Chapter 16. In Spain, where the longstanding demand for autonomy in Catalonia or the Basque region had been recognized by the new constitution, Catalonia especially had emerged within a generation as virtually a state-within-a-state, with its own language, institutions and governing councils. Thanks to a 1983 Law of Linguistic Normalization (*sic*), Catalan was to become the 'dominant language of instruction'; ten years later the Generalitat (Catalan parliament) decreed the exclusive use of Catalan in kindergarten and infant schools. Not surprisingly, even though Castilian Spanish remained in use everywhere, many younger people were more comfortable speaking Catalan.