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# ONE THOUSAND YEARS AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY: History and the Politics of Transition

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Géza Jeszenszky

## I. The Sick Heart of Europe

Twenty-one years ago the distinguished British historian Hugh Seton-Watson delivered a series of lectures at the University of Washington–Seattle. In his opening statement, he said, “Europe remains the heart of the human race, and the heart of Europe is sick.” Central Europe—the lands and peoples between Western Europe and the Russians—has been rather unwell at least since the First World War. Some would say the sickness goes back to the destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary in the sixteenth century by the Ottoman Turks and the troubles that began in the eastern borderland area of Poland soon thereafter. The theme of this essay is the cause and the nature of this sickness, and how this European heartland has played such a uniquely important role in the history of the world.

Today, we can safely say that with the sudden collapse of the communist utopia in 1989 and the failed coup attempt in Moscow in 1991, the post-Second World War period came to an end, and a new era in world history began. Thus, this century’s third historic turning point came in 1989–91 (the first two being 1918–20 and 1945–47), and, as with the previous ones, the borderland between Western Europe and the Russian heartland found itself the scene of the most decisive events.

*Annus mirabilis*, 1989, still echos in our minds. With the end of the Cold War and the accompanying danger of a nuclear holocaust, 1989 was a watershed year. The Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall collapsed, and democracy was introduced to the

central heartland of the European continent. It was the end of the twentieth century, the century of the great disappointment. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama's prediction, however, it did not turn out to be the end of history, but rather the end of brutal, open dictatorship and terror in the former communist countries. It was the end of the term "East Europe" — which the inhabitants of the Soviet dependencies always thoroughly disliked because it was the equivalent of Communist Europe — the end of the Age of Newspeak, and the end of the Age of Lies. Nothing that has happened since 1989, and nothing that the future might bring, will ever take away from those who lived and participated in the memory of that glorious year. It was a time of great hope, a moment of bliss.

## **II. From East Europe to Europe**

Since the term "Europe" was born in ancient Greece, there was only one Europe; however, its borders, especially on the east, were not clear. In the Roman Empire, the border of the province of Pannonia was the Danube, from Bratislava to Belgrade. Charlemagne's power extended approximately to the present Austria-Hungary border. Two hundred years later, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and Croatia emerged as independent Christian kingdoms with chancelleries, priests, politicians, and poets using Latin and with Gothic churches and cathedrals being constructed throughout countries. What is today Central Europe was an integral part of the Occident (the West) in a political, legal, and cultural sense.

The Ottoman Conquest of Hungary in the fourteenth century brought the Orient (the East) to the gates of Vienna, but after falling prey to the most successful Crusade launched by Christian armies, the Ottomans were expelled from Hungary by the beginning of the eighteenth century. A revival of economy and culture followed, with Western political thought penetrating the Polish and Hungarian nobility, gentry, and the growing middle class. Before World War I, the frontiers of Europe reached towns such as St. Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa, Sofia, and Athens. At that time there was no such term as East Europe, and the Balkans were often referred to as the Near East. During this period, the notion of a Central Europe appeared in order to distinguish the

lands of the Hapsburg Monarchy from the Balkans and the Russian Empire.

With the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the end of World War I and the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia, a Europe governed by the rule of law emerged and the market economy picked up by the late 1920s. The dividing line was with Soviet Russia, which became the so-called *cordon sanitaire* because of the brutal Stalinist social experiment that claimed millions of lives and violated most of our traditional norms of civilized human behavior. After the Second World War and the communist takeovers orchestrated from Moscow, the Eastern world penetrated deeply into Europe. Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Zagreb—all truly European capitals—and their well-educated inhabitants soon found themselves in a totally different world, cut off by an Iron Curtain from those centers and circles, from Italy to France and England, where their ancestors studied, made friends, and bought books and goods.

But in 1989, the largely artificial federations — the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia — ceased to exist, nations and states emerged from decades of oblivion, and parliaments in Kiev and Moscow (not to mention Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn) became real centers of debate and power. Even Western business, fast food, and music found their way into the major cities of Russia.

How many of the hopes of 1989–91 will be realized? How can the values of Europe, the traditions of decent behavior, and the rule of law be established in Central Europe? What about the price for economic freedom? Already a great disappointment has set in, leading to the adoption of false gods that may bring new dangers, new tragedies. Is the brutal and senseless war in the former Yugoslavia an aberration or a warning of things to come? The answers require a more thorough analysis of the latest social and political developments in the former communist countries and of the responses by “the West.” This paper focuses on Hungary, the center of the heart of Europe, but speaks to the region as a whole and to the European continent.

### III. The Painful Past: The Case of Hungary

The life of every people is influenced by its historical antecedents. In the case of Hungary and its neighbors, the effects of historical forces on everyday life were far more apparent than in Western Europe. As an example Hungary is a convincing enough case, but just as telling are the impact of the partitions in Poland and the centuries of foreign domination over the Czechs and the Balkan nations.

The Hungarian community, Finno-Ugric in language but resembling the Turkic peoples in their way of life and political and military organization, was molded in the Eastern steppe zone of Europe in the sixth and seventh centuries, arriving at the end of the ninth century in its present homeland, the fertile basin surrounded by the defending mountain chains of the Carpathians. Wedged between the Germanic and Slavonic peoples in an alien environment, the Hungarians were saved only by a series of wise political decisions from the fate of oblivion that afflicted far stronger and larger peoples in the age of migrations, such as the Huns, the Avars, the Cumans, and the Petchenegs. Between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, Hungary (*Magyarország*, in the native tongue) developed into one of the most prosperous states in Europe. The secret of this success was the adoption of Christianity and an active involvement in the intellectual and political mainstream of Europe. The great European intellectual movements—Humanism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Liberalism—all became formative and integral parts of Hungarian development. On the other hand, Hungary (like the other Central European kingdoms that adopted the Western version of Christianity) remained a peripheral area of Europe. Its eastern border was commonly referred to as “the last bastion of Christendom.” Involvement in numerous wars against invaders from the East cemented the relationship between the Hungarians, Poles, and Czechs on the one hand, and the rest of Europe on the other. After the Turkish wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and right up until 1848, Hungary was submerged de facto, if not de jure, in the Hapsburg Empire.

In 1896, Hungary celebrated the country’s foundation, the one thousandth anniversary of “the Conquest” of the Carpathian

Basin. Visitors from across the country and from abroad expressed their admiration for the spectacular national exhibition in Budapest. The *Times* of London, the most influential paper in the world at the time, praised the Kingdom of Hungary in a leading article, stating that she “represents the success of the liberal ideas . . . proving that by their aid [she] can march to increased population and prosperity.” The high standard, prosperity, and mentality of *fin-de-siècle* Hungary are reflected faithfully today in the monumental neo-Gothic Parliament building on the banks of the Danube in the center of Budapest. The carved stones, murals, and statues, as well as the entire interior reflect not only the centuries of struggle but perhaps also the most fundamental characteristics of the Hungarian nation. For here, at the meeting place of the Eastern and Western halves of Europe and of the great linguistic families and religions, the Hungarians have managed to blend the rich variety of Europe’s traditions and values into their own unique synthesis.

Hungary’s ideal geographical position at the crossroads of the traditional East–West and North–South trading routes, coupled with its fine climatic conditions and natural endowments, has made it a frequent target for attempts at conquest. Hungary has had to struggle hard not just for national independence but for her very existence. For 450 years, from the fall of the capital city Buda to the Ottoman Empire in 1541 until the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1991, foreign forces were stationed continuously in the country, with the exception of a brief twenty-three-year interlude beginning in 1921.

The twentieth century brought a particularly dire fate to the Hungarian community. Compelled to take part in two world wars—to a decisive extent against its own interests and will—it suffered huge losses of life and, despite considerable mitigating circumstances, ended up being punished with members of the losing side. Hungary, one of Europe’s oldest kingdoms, ceased to exist after the First World War. The peace treaty dictated by the victorious powers took from Hungary not only the territories where the majority of the population was non-Hungarian, but one-third of all ethnic Hungarians. More than three million people, Hungarian in their language and self-identity, involuntarily became citizens of the newly established states of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania (which tripled in size).

In the four decades between 1918 and 1958, the country became a theater of war three times, and each time the people were ravaged by foreign troops. The army of Nazi Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944 (to prevent its joining the Allies) and, aided by Hungarian collaborators, sent more than half a million Hungarian Jews to the death camps. The Soviet Red Army, which ousted the Germans by spring of 1945, imposed on the Hungarian people an irrational and criminal system that damaged the country economically, politically, and spiritually. Second only to the peoples of the former Soviet Union itself, Hungarians may well have been those most severely affected by communism, due to the exceptionally brutal and servile henchmen of the regime. This, in part, explains the force of the popular revolution that erupted in 1956. The purity, discipline, and common sense of that revolution was decisive evidence of the sobriety, maturity, and generosity of the Hungarian people, and it elicited an outpouring of sympathy around the world.

Hungary's modern history has been seriously affected by Europe's assessment of it. Hungary was noticed mainly in connection with particular historical dramas such as those of 1848–49, 1919–20, the Second World War, 1956, and, finally, the historic changes of 1989. Western Europeans have often perceived the Hungarians (and their fellow Central Europeans) as a freedom-loving people, unselfishly sacrificing for their own independence as well as others', receptive to efforts at self-correction and improvement, and in the forefront in declaring religious toleration. At the same time, however, there have been frequent charges of nationalism, of intolerance toward the neighboring peoples and those now residing with the Hungarians, of a deep rift between the ruling elite and the common people, and of entry into bad alliances. These conflicting assessments are not simply the result of changing historical circumstances. They are connected to the political conflicts and territorial disputes of Central Europe and to the fact that the Hungarians shared a destiny—and, on many occasions, conflict—with the Germans, Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs, and Croatians. The peoples of Central Europe often were the object of the rivalries of the neighboring great powers.

Hungary has been a country, rather magnanimous by temperament, that welcomed settlers, refugees, knights, and merchants during almost eleven centuries, allowing them privileges through the kings and the landowning classes. Hungary had no witch trials, pogroms, or ghettos. So long as the country was able to control its own affairs, no group was expelled for its religion or ethnic origin. The Hungarian ethnic community, which constituted approximately 80 percent of the population prior to the onslaught of the Ottomans, made up less than 40 percent by the end of the eighteenth century, a consequence of the constant warfare and a kind of "ethnic cleansing." However, the liberal and tolerant climate of public opinion and law in the nineteenth century, accompanied by a booming economy and a cultural revival, led to a situation (not unlike that of the United States) where, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the newly immigrated Jews as well as the established Germans (and, to a lesser extent, a narrow, upper layer of other non-Hungarian peoples of the country) willingly became culturally and linguistically Hungarians, always claiming to be proud Hungarian patriots.

On the other hand, as a result of defeat in the wars of independence, the Nazi and Communist dictatorships, and difficult economic circumstances, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians have fled their country. The Hungarian diaspora today numbers well over a million (not including the nearly three-and-one-half million Hungarians living in the states neighboring Hungary). Hundreds of thousands of Hungarians live widely dispersed in the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and several South American countries. Economic conditions, as well as the advance of the Red Army and the communist takeovers, have prompted millions of Poles and Ukrainians along with a considerable number of Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Romanians, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians to emigrate to the Americas and Australia. These "hunkies," "Polacks," and their fellow immigrants were often ridiculed and abused. They intermarried first among themselves and later with the natives, eventually becoming citizens of the host countries. Today, they act as pressure groups on the governments of their adopted countries.

For Hungarians, history has been a series of setbacks accompanied by ill luck and misjudgment in politics. The mood of the



nation is encapsulated in the ode that became the national anthem: "In ill luck's place that long has rent us, bring instead a happy year!"

Along with setbacks, Hungary has also experienced revivals. In the twentieth century, after suffering major humiliation, the nation still had the strength to start anew in 1920, 1945, and 1956. These efforts brought considerable positive results, but there was no opportunity for longer periods of consolidation and fulfillment. Other Central Europeans also showed great energy and ingenuity once they became independent nations, but all too often, the periods of promise were abruptly ended by war, conquest, and abandonment.

#### **IV. The Change of 1989**

The change of system brought about after the peaceful revolutions of 1989 confronts Hungarians and other Central Europeans with one of the hardest, yet potentially finest tasks in their history: control of their own destiny. Hungary has not enjoyed such a favorable conjunction of political circumstances for five hundred years. The present favorable moment, however, may soon pass. Both the government and the people have a responsibility to live up to the great opportunity of these times. The task at hand is to renew the political, social, and economic system and to render it capable of integration into the established economic and political organization of Western Europe. This requires not only the successful conduct of domestic and foreign policy, but the patience and willingness on the part of the general public to make sacrifices. The same patience, along with the willingness to assist Hungary and her neighbors, is required of successful democratic countries of the world. No people can prosper today if left alone to their own devices.

#### **V. The Legacy of Communism**

In 1989, what Hugh Seton-Watson called the "Political Ice Age" came to an end, but the meltdown continues to be fraught with many dangers. The transition from a communist dictatorship to a democracy and market economy is an uncharted journey. The legacy of communism has turned out to be much more grave

than anybody had imagined. Just as the wars of the Middle Ages claimed many fewer casualties than did the epidemics that followed, the dead body of communism is poisoning the air over Eastern and Central Europe and continues to take a heavy toll. In addition to redundant industries, inefficient management, and terrible pollution (so terribly symbolized by Chernobyl), the mental damage has been almost crippling.

The political and economic consequences of the communist system are relatively well known, but the impact of forty-five years of totalitarian dictatorship on the thinking of people who grew up in it is far less noticed. After the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the "Prague Spring" of 1968, and the Solidarity movement in Poland in 1981, people in these countries learned the art of survival and advancement: opportunistic behavior, silence, and care for only their own individual, short-term interests. Not having been taught the basics of social and political behavior — or rather, having been conditioned to condone any immoral conduct—they developed a perverted idea of right and wrong. This attitude paid off, and since the 1970s, people in Hungary had modest economic safety without real responsibilities. There was full employment in subsidized industries, largely dependent upon cheap energy imported from the Soviet Union. In return, Hungary provided an undemanding but safe market for Soviet goods. All that was possible only through accumulating an enormous external debt. By the 1980s, the citizens of Hungary were living in a fool's paradise. Poland was in much the same situation until 1980, when the attempt to place the burden of external debt on the population led to the birth of the Solidarity trade union movement. Romania paid back its heavy debt, incurred by financing Ceausescu's ludicrous projects, by the end of the 1980s at an enormous sacrifice; but it cost the throne of the dictator. Bulgaria went bankrupt while experiencing political changes, while the rigidly orthodox Czechoslovakia kept clear of massive foreign loans in order to keep foreign influence away.

Communism homogenized and "proletarianized" its society by maintaining low standards and low aspirations. At the same time, there developed in Central Europe, particularly in Hungary, what sociologists call "a premature welfare state," where social benefits were relatively high, the retirement age was low

(fifty-five and sixty for women and men, respectively), medical care was free (although of a very low quality unless the doctors and nurses were given extra payment), and the prices of basic food and medicine were kept artificially low. All of these factors compensated for the low incomes and lack of freedom.

Meanwhile, the gap between Eastern Europe and the advanced countries was rapidly widening. When the communist leaderships reached the end of the road and admitted some of their past mistakes, such as the previously concealed debt, it became obvious that they were running out of ideas. Everyone, including the previously very loyal (i.e., handpicked and relatively well-paid) journalists, began to speak of the need for change, but few were aware of the costs.

## **VI. No Plan for Reconstruction**

The average citizen of the former communist countries does not understand what happened to the authoritarian world in which he or she learned the harsh rules of survival. Of course, most people were happy in 1990 with the disappearance of fear and constraints, but they knew neither how to take advantage of a free, competitive system nor what were the demands of the market economy. As Aristotle said, "It is easier to be a slave than to be a free man," so under freedom, many people soon found it hard to see the value of the changes and began to show some longing for a world that was impossible to resurrect.

Western Europe and the United States were also unprepared for these changes. This was first pointed out by the late Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall, who warned at the Paris Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) summit in November 1990 that perhaps the greatest danger for the new Europe lay in the continued division of the continent with the replacement of the Iron Curtain by a Welfare Wall that would separate the victims of communism from their more fortunate fellow Europeans. While NATO soldiers spent four decades preparing for a war that was successfully averted, NATO politicians created no contingency plan in the case of victory. During both world wars, extensive preparations were made for postwar reconstruction, yet none seems to have been made for the post-Cold War period.

## VII. Achievements and Disillusion

Three years ago, after the failed coup in Moscow and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, everyone (except the communists of Yugoslavia) thought that communism was dead and the communists discredited. But today, while democratic constitutions have been established in most of the former communist countries, the very communists (namely the younger echelon of the *apparatchiks*) are back in office, only this time not because of the brutal force of the Soviet Red Army, but because of a proper electoral system and a press mainly in their hands. "How was the East lost?" asked Adrian Karatnycki in the *National Review*, attributing the blame to the Western leaders. "The Fall and Rise of the Communists," was the title of an eye-opening article by Anne Applebaum in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Even in the *New York Times*, A. M. Rosenthal wrote about the return of "the ghost people." How did it all come about?

Before offering an explanation of how the Poles and Hungarians, who put up such a spectacular resistance to communism in 1956 and 1980–81, voted former communists into power in 1992 and 1994, respectively, it is important to reiterate some of the historic achievements for which these two nations are largely responsible. Victory in the Cold War, without a single shot fired, was the outcome of the peaceful political transformation in Poland and Hungary in 1989. That led to the fall of the other communist dominoes: East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and, finally, the Soviet Union itself. In the wake of the free elections, Hungary, joined by Poland and Czechoslovakia, brought about the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and later COMECON. Former enemies became new allies as freedom was restored over vast territories in Central and Eastern Europe. Closed markets opened for export and import, creating new jobs in the United States and elsewhere. The investment-friendly climate of Budapest, Warsaw, and Prague enabled new businesses to start in those historic places, and President Bush even proposed the conclusion of free trade agreements between the U.S. and Central Europe.

Unfortunately, the newfound freedom was no compensation for the hardships of the transition to a market economy. Ignorance about the prerequisites for a smoothly functioning, devel-

oped society gave rise to unrealistic expectations in 1990. Communism, which was characterized by shortages, created a perverted consumerism and an incredible preoccupation with material goods. When goods appeared in the previously empty shop windows, many people were ready to do almost anything to obtain them. It was not obvious to the average citizen of the former communist countries how the high standard of living so manifest in Western countries was attainable. People became frustrated and despondent, and they quickly blamed their new problems and disappointments on their new, democratically elected leaders. To some extent, they also blamed their foreign supporters, who failed to provide a new Marshall Plan and to support the victory of our common European values.

The intellectuals who came to power in the newly liberated communist countries relied on their political and moral convictions and their experiences under the dictatorial regime. Havel represented the intellectual approach of a moralizing writer, but he was also able to capitalize on his well-earned popularity in the international media. In Hungary, Prime Minister Antall and his team of historians hoped that leaders of both East and West would apply the lessons taught by history. *Historia est magistra vitae* — History is the master of life — or, as Bolingbroke said, “History is a philosophy which teaches through examples.” However, during the last five years, the most obvious lessons of the twentieth century have not been understood in either the East or the West.

In the wake of inflation and mass unemployment, it was inevitable that the governments and political forces directing the first phase of the transition would lose popularity. The new, democratic politicians, who had intellectual backgrounds but little administrative experience, accepted the conversion of communists into democrats and free-marketers. They faced a hostile press that is, for the most part, still the mouthpiece of the old communist regime and is now situated in newspapers purchased by West European capitalists. The mistakes committed by the new political elite were magnified by the skills of their more experienced New-Leftist opponents.

The first noncommunist governments of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and, to a lesser degree, of Bulgaria and Romania achieved a great deal in four

years by introducing many unpleasant but necessary measures and laws. The following is a brief outline of the major measures passed in Hungary.

- Regulation of property rights to allow for compensation to victims of illegal “nationalization” and collectivization, as well as for those who (or whose family) suffered from judicial crimes such as execution, deportation, forced labor, imprisonment, or torture.
- Regulation of a market economy.
- Privatization. Today, more than 50 percent of the GNP comes from private firms.
- Encouragement of foreign investments. In Hungary alone, seven billion dollars arrived; this equals half of all investments in ex-communist countries.
- Foundation of a legal system based on European standards.
- Regulations to assist victims of the transition, e.g., unemployment benefits.
- Special benefits for the poorest in order to prevent deprivation-increased crime, with special attention given to families with children (in view of the very low fertility rate inherited from communism).
- Maintenance of the value of pensions in times of relatively high inflation.
- Provisions for expanding education, particularly at the university level, where the country was falling behind most European nations.
- Substantial investments in telecommunications and road construction (including hundreds of miles of bike paths). This was combined with privatization.

In foreign policy, Hungary took the lead in dismantling the Warsaw Pact and COMECON and was the first to be admitted into the Council of Europe, the community of democratic European states. Simultaneously with Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary negotiated an agreement with the European Community and submitted an application in April of 1995 for full membership in the European Union. Hungary was also building solid political and economic relations with Russia and the

Ukraine, and initiated the political and economic cooperation of the Central European countries, named the Visegrad Three (Four, after the split between the Czechs and Slovaks). Hungary preserved peace while the brutal Southern Slav war was fought along its southern border, inundating the country with refugees. Last but not least, Hungary supported the cause of three and a half million Hungarians in the neighboring states in their struggle for survival.

Notwithstanding all the results, the majority of the ten and a half million Hungarian citizens “proletarianized” during forty-five years of communism resented that while the traditional shortage of goods was over, affluence spread only to a small section of the population. Under communism people learned that life was a zero-sum game—one person’s gain was seen in direct correlation with another person’s loss—and, so, they believed that the arrival of the new rich meant that they would become poorer.

Perhaps if Hungarians and the people of other formerly communist countries had been better educated in the basics of democracy, if they had more knowledge about how democracy and the market economy function, if they had had a better understanding of the hardships of the transition, and if the governments had communicated better with the population, then the people might have better appreciated their countries’ achievements. Only a massive educational campaign, assisted and supported from outside, could have successfully completed this eye-opening exercise. The energy and optimism of 1990 was undermined by a negative campaign to denigrate all achievements, to discredit well-meaning governments, and to extirpate all hope and idealism. A population whose only weapon under the communist ideology was cynicism was unprotected against the negative campaign.

### **VIII. The New Dangers and the Responsibility of the West**

For centuries, Central and Eastern Europeans blamed their foreign masters—the Russians, the Turks, and the Hapsburgs—for their misfortune. Today, the responsibility for good or bad decisions lies within themselves. But their friends in the West also

could have shown more understanding for the plight of the new democracies.

The former "captive nations" found themselves akin to the hero of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, a man who was given a hero's welcome, but who, when the air around him began to cool down, realized he had been out in the cold too long to fit into the cozy world. Apart from the smell of poverty, the Western countries became frightened by the deadly passions that engulfed the Balkans. They found no recipe for containing aggression, reconstructing the Eastern European economies, or curing those societies' ills.

Too many people expected immediate improvements in their lives once communism had been defeated. Liberation from fear and even the freedom to misbehave could not prevent disillusionment from becoming the prevailing mood of the people. Much of the faith they previously had in the West, in democracy, and in the changes that began in 1989 has been lost. Many have become passive, while others turn to extremists of both the Left and Right. The success of aggressive forces in the Balkans have induced many throughout the former Soviet Union to turn to force. Intolerance toward communities whose language, culture, and traditions differ from the majority (such as the Tartars, Chechens, and many others in Russia; Albanians, Hungarians, and Croats in Yugoslavia) has grown to alarming proportions. The one-time victims of Russian/Soviet imperialism feel increasingly threatened, especially as many see Western appeasement in policies toward Russia. Hunger, exasperation, and the outbreak of long-forgotten epidemics throughout the former Soviet Union could lead to a new version of imperialism. The previously tightly controlled population has turned into a high number of refugees in the Caucasus area, added to Bosnian and Croatian refugees. This could become a serious situation, not only for Central Europeans but for Western Europeans as well. The principal question is how to transform the victory of freedom and democracy into secure governments for the benefit of the whole of Europe.



## **IX. The Eastern Frontier and the Way Out**

I believe the best way to achieve this security is for Western institutions to open their ranks and expand eastward so that stability and prosperity can be established. It was not the Hungarian people or their neighbors who did not accede to the Washington Treaty of 1949 or the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Soviet domination could not allow it. The peoples of the former Soviet bloc have suffered greatly, and today they seek guarantees and pledges that they will not be abandoned as they were after 1945, and again in 1956, 1968, and 1981. The victims of the communist utopia are not asking to join the European institutions in order to present a common front against an enemy, but rather to work jointly for the European utopia that is emerging today.

Nor does the expansion of stability and security eastward pose a threat to Russia. On the contrary, a stable and prosperous Central Europe would be advantageous for countries to the east, as it would improve their chances for following suit quickly. It would encourage the democratic forces of Russia and Ukraine because Central Europe has long been seen by them as a testing ground, a model within reach.

Of course, a great deal of work must be done by the former communist countries themselves. But in order to put their economies and social systems in order, they need stability, protection from outside threats, and membership in Western institutions. In 1994, NATO announced that it would be ready to accept well-qualified new members. This decision, although somewhat late, would contribute to the solution of many problems.

In 1996, the European Union will hold an intergovernmental conference to decide on its future, including eastward expansion. Both Hungary and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe hope that by 1996, they will have surmounted the difficulties of the transition from dictatorship to democracy and from an ill-planned economy to a well-functioning market economy. This hope may be over-ambitious. The positive results that began in 1989 are not likely to be unequivocally manifested by that date.

Today, there is a social and political system that assures life of a higher quality than ever before in the history of mankind. That system is attainable for what has traditionally been a very

stormy zone in Europe. Democracy, human and minority rights, stability, and prosperity are interdependent, and their eastward spread can only occur gradually. This new eastern frontier zone must one day pass through Central Europe and reach Kiev and Moscow so that it can end up in Vladivostok and the western coast of the Pacific. Then, the center of Europe will be able to capitalize on its geographical position. This is also the precondition for dealing seriously with global problems such as backwardness in the East, poverty in the South, reckless pollution, aggressive nationalism, and the threat of fundamentalist intolerance. Only a Europe united with itself and in close alliance with the United States can prove, as a Hungarian author once said, that "reason and solidarity are mightier than the terror of passions." It is only in this way that we can utilize the results of that *annus mirabilis* so that the twenty-first century might be better than the twentieth.