

gime's internal rigidity and the closed nature of Soviet society, Russia is no worse now than it was in the thirties. Russia isn't worse, it's just more powerful and that's the whole problem. All the more reason, therefore, to heed the voice of common sense and not exclude Russia from Europe and European civilisation. However, try as I might, I am unable to put any other construction on the following sentences from Kundera's article: "...on the Eastern border of the West – more than anywhere else – Russia is seen not just as one more European power but as a singular civilisation, an other civilisation... totalitarian Russian civilisation is the radical negation of the modern West, the West created four centuries ago at the dawn of the modern era: the era founded on the authority of the thinking, doubting individual, and on an artistic creation which expressed his uniqueness." Were I a Russian, even an emigré Russian like Kopelev, not only would that sadden me, but I expect I'd also take offence. If Russia is an other civilisation, then I suppose it means that all is hopeless: all one can do is sigh, like they used to in the days long before communism – "East is East and West is West" ... Disparate civilisations inevitably are forced on to the defensive and we here on the eastern border of the West will just have to go on dutifully playing our role as the victims and outsiders of history.

Europe is undoubtedly in a very bad state at the moment, and anyway, the Central European Tragedy is not the only European tragedy ever. Europe has been a mass-producer of tragedies, and if things go on the way they are, we will be faced with the last and final one. The separation of Russia from Europe, even in a purely spiritual or cultural sense, doesn't improve Europe's chances one bit. The reconciliation of Russia and the West by whatever means of detente would be an act of self-preservation on Europe's part, and, in that sense, superior to the intellectual pastime of scoring points in a debate about whether Russia is a part of Europe or whether it represents a different civilisation. I know the arguments of either side off by heart, but precisely because I live on the frontier of East and West, I choose of my own free will to employ those arguments which do not exclude Russia from Europe and do not widen the gulf. The decision freely to opt for the thesis that Russia does not represent another civilisation has the added virtue of allowing one to examine dispassionately the processes involved in the Russian transformation of the western European legacy and make out glimmers of hope. Of course it's no easy job keeping to this decision when State Television undermines it day by day and unconsciously confirms Kundera's case. But when this happens, I pick up any Russian novel published here and have a read. Where else is one to find solace but in books?

Kundera's thesis about the area known as Central Europe makes good reading, but I find it depressing because of the sense of hopelessness it fosters. The last thing I'd do would be to persuade the Americans that the East is the total negation of the West: some of them believe it anyway, just like some of the Russians, no doubt. It is more hopeful to stress Russia's European traditions, rather than its isolationist tendencies, which Kundera and I have both experienced. Without distorting the facts, there is no reason why the West should not accept the idea that the transformation of communism did more than anything else to bring Russia closer to Europe; Russia has endured one historical option which the West was preparing for itself and which, by chance, it has been spared. As a thinking, doubting individual living on the western border of the East, I would merely add that everything that the Europeans have brought upon themselves so far has been of their own contriving, and likewise, there can be no white-washing our responsibility for any future misfortunes either.

CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

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Europe ceased to be a purely geographical term long ago. For some time now, the term has been employed to refer to a particular system of values and perhaps a way of thinking too. In recent decades, it has been used as a political term which excludes those nations that have been unable to realize the so called democratic political set-up in their countries. Western Europe seems to be acknowledging more and more that Europe and non-Europe are actually separated from one another by barbed wire fences put up by nations and peoples that exclude themselves or allow themselves to be excluded from Europe as a result of the post World War status quo.

Eastern Europe itself appears consciously to accept this exclusion. Russia seems to have resolved the long-standing disputes of the Russian intelligentsia. Russia is not part of Europe. (If it were it would undeniably be a backward one in many aspects of economy, society and culture). Russia is a world of its own. This way, the political boundaries simply provide the ideological confirmation of a real cultural division. Communism no longer seems to be present in Europe, not even as a ghost. The recent decline of Euro-communism seems to be related to the fact that the so called Communist world, following a period of warring after Stalin's death, appears to have chosen expansionary isolation based on typically Russian traditions, in preference to bringing Eastern Europe into line with the West. Expansionary isolation could be defined as isolation from all elements of European civilization with the important exception of natural sciences and modern techniques of production – and expansion in all parts of the world not yet "corrupted" by European individualism first and foremost in the Third World. Of the two major Russian traditions – a European consciousness imbued with inferiority complexes and a sense of world-saving mission based on the purity and superiority of the Russian soul – the latter seems to have gained the upper hand. Why? The Russian Empire provides an unsuitable framework for the development of social autonomies – i.e., the distinguishing feature between Eastern Europe and Europe. The developments of social autonomies has led to the dissolution of the imperial structures everywhere in Europe. By contrast, the present day Russian Empire, i.e., the Soviet Union, by virtue of possessing all means of industrial civilization for subjugating and constantly monitoring society, is able to prevent the development of social autonomies. Brezhnev's seizing power represented a choice. This choice has determined the political situation in the world ever since. Europe found itself stuck between two superpowers. One of these, America, believes itself to belong to European tradition although it represents only European rationalism and pragmatism. However, Americans lack a crucial aspect of European tradition, the continuous revision of their values, the ability to go back to one's own roots. As a result of Americanization, Europe has lost its self-confidence, has been on the defensive and has lacked the courage to stress those aspects of its tradition that are absent from the American approach. This state of affairs has made Europe more vulnerable to the

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other superpower, so much so that any criticism of Europe is felt by Europeans to be a veiled manifestation of Russian attempts at world domination. Therefore Europe accepts the status quo unquestioningly. Out of the two alternatives, an almost uncritical acceptance of the American approach and the subjugation to the Russian Empire, the first has been meted out to Western Europe and the second is the fate of Central Europe. In this way Europe has discarded its Eastern areas to the no-longer-European Russian Empire, even if these areas are so unwilling to accept de-Europeanization that their very traditions have had to be uprooted in the process. The way western Europe related to the events of 1980/81 in Poland and has been relating to Kadar's Hungary confirms the accuracy of the arguments stated here. Western Europe's public opinion showed very little enthusiasm for KOR and Solidarity and was in fact greatly relieved when martial law was introduced, as Western Europe believes that its own freedom is contingent on the continued subjugation of Central Eastern Europe. Hungary helps to appease any bad conscience as at present it is undeniably more "European" in many respects than it was between the two world wars. It follows from here that the Central Eastern European nations can only blame themselves if they are unable to work out some sort of European way of life for themselves in the framework of present political allegiances. Why did the Poles not observe the limits of their possibilities within the status quo? Why did the Europeans traits of the Czechs not bring about a compromise with the regime like the Hungarians did?

These questions have to be raised by us Central Eastern Europeans because if we are not prepared to give up our European identity then we have to work for it within the limits of the present political situation. There is a bonus to be found here. At present, a non-conformist Eastern European approach seems to be able to offer more to the European identity than does the Western European approach. The difference lies in the possibility not only of a pragmatic and purpose-oriented culture founded on individual freedom but also this culture's capacity for renewal. This pragmatic culture now appears to be the only thing left of Europeanism whilst the renewal is something which Western Europe seems to be giving up in order to preserve individual freedom. The reason why Eastern Europe has broader possibilities in preserving the chances of rejuvenation is that it stands to lose less.

Western Europe ought to pay more attention to Eastern Europe, it ought to notice that the recurring struggles allegedly to attack the status quo are not in reality directed against the current political situation. Their purpose is to attain Europeanism and they only get to the point of attacking the status quo if this seems to be the only remaining possibility for preserving European values. This was equally true for the Czechs in 1968 and the Poles in the 1980's.

The Czechs not only did not intend to alter the prevailing system of alliances in Europe but also, until August 1968, they regarded Russia as a natural ally.

Even if the Polish situation is different – Katyni, 1944, etc. further damaging none too amicable Polish-Russian relations – the idea of national independence was not a decisive factor in the Solidarity movement. Moreover, until the very last moment, they did not even wish to replace Communist power with a pluralistic political democracy. So the Polish movement limited itself voluntarily.

The only exception to this is the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Here the struggle for national independence was undeniably a major factor. In fact it was the Russian intervention in Hungary in 1956 which revealed that Western politics not only accepts the post-1945 situation, but also carefully safeguards it.

So what is at stake is not the abolition of the status quo. If it were possible to remain European within the Russian sphere of interest, the nations of Central Europe would simply acquiesce in their situation. Unfortunately, this seems to be impossible for all (except for the Finns, but for altogether different reasons). It often seems that

what the Russians want more than anything else is the prevention of all attempts at a European type of autonomy. Moscow tolerates Romania's extravagant foreign policy because all manifestations of Europeanism are systematically quashed there.

Having accepted the status quo – though not without reservations – more attention ought to be paid to Hungary on the one hand and to the still remaining possibilities of Europeanism on the other.

Most attempts at understanding "existing socialism" have a common weakness. They employ what could be called a structuralist method of analysis i.e., they investigate the institutional frameworks for all kinds of social reproduction (eg. the political structure, the formal mechanisms to regulate the economy and culture etc.). Where these descriptions fail is in the investigation of the differences between these countries – differences that follow from their different historical past and that are reflected in people's behaviour, i.e. in their relationship with the structure. This behaviour – with the underlying conditioning – has virtually no chance of modifying the formal structures as these are the very structures that the Soviet Union or the ruling elite of a particular country identifies as socialism, so these are the structures they will be least willing to allow to be altered. Thus the structural approach cannot explain the differences between individual socialist countries.

One has to employ some sort of a historical method to understand the societies – and the differences between the societies – of Eastern and Central Europe. There are crucial differences of human behaviour between Central Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe proper. Owing to these differences, the basically identical political structures forced onto these countries function in different ways. In my opinion, structure and society are more or less in harmony in Eastern Europe proper. Up to the present day there have not been any important independent movements in the deep strata of Eastern European societies within the institutional framework of the state. In Central Eastern Europe however the totalitarian state continuously has to resort to raping society in order to ensure that the whole mechanism resembles the Eastern European model, at least on the surface.

So in Central Eastern Europe the state of totalitarian intentions and the civil society that has been erased in most ways but still survives in people's instinctive forms of behaviour, are constantly at war with one another. This conflict can lead to basic problems in the functioning of the whole entity as in Poland, or the political elite can be strong and determined enough to suppress all dissent as in Czechoslovakia, or the state may want to escape major problems in the functioning of the whole system. Therefore it may gradually eliminate the appearance of its totalitarian demands while allotting some space for independent social movements but never eliminating the formal structures of an Eastern European type totalitarian state-society as in Hungary and Yugoslavia. In my opinion the last appears to be a dynamic option, in that it constitutes an attempt at solving the conflict of state and society in a way which is in many respects in harmony with the traditions of the Central Eastern European region. In this region societies are more or less independent of the political power, i.e. they are no longer state societies, but they have occasionally (and unsuccessfully) attempted to make the state responsible to themselves, while preferring to leave politics in the hands of the elite.

On the map of Europe, going from West to East one can discern two historical boundaries. One of these is the Eastern border of the former Carolingian Empire and the other one, East of it, separates Roman and Orthodox Christianity. The area West of the Westernmost one of these two lines – Western Europe proper – has, since the Middle Ages, been characterized by a gradual separation of state and society, and a

simultaneous gradual dissolution of village communities and the formation of new city communities within which the behaviour of the individual was regulated less and less by tradition. The individual became part of manifold and complex social structures and demanded more and more say in social issues concerning himself. The result of the process is the freedom of the individual and society, limited only by the freedom of the other members of the same society and a central power, the modern state not controlled by any single social group and fully responsible to society.

In Eastern Europe there have been no signs of such a development. The deep strata of society contained immobile traditional communities, organized from above by a central power which was unchecked by anyone. None of the social groups had any autonomy. The state and the church constituted an organic unity. The main reason for this social rigidity was probably the constant danger of invasion from the east – a danger that could only be thwarted by a strong centralized power. Therefore the societies of this region did not even attempt to achieve autonomy.

However, the societies of Central Eastern Europe did manage to win some limited autonomies. Therefore they never became state-societies of the Russian type and they were never able to delegate political power either. The West European type of bourgeois individualism existed here without the democratic conscience of the citizen.

Another specifically Central Eastern European factor to hinder the process of democratization was the problem of national identity. In Western Europe historical development became irreversible at the stage when national identity hardly existed. By contrast, by the time conditions were right for modern states based on social autonomies to develop in Central Eastern Europe, the communities of the region had developed national identity. This identity prevented them from making any compromises with the centralized power-wielding bodies whose members normally spoke a foreign language. Similarly, the people who constituted the majority within a state and habitually provided the ruling elite would not even consider negotiating with the peasant masses especially since they spoke a different language. Thus the cause of the community, i.e. the nation, and the cause of freedom, i.e. social autonomies, came into conflict with one another in most cases. (The Hungarian political theoretician Istvan Bibó [1911-1979], believed this to be a central issue.) The peace treaties that concluded the First World War only exacerbated the situation. Two important – we might even say fatal – consequences of this situation are that the nations of Central Eastern Europe identify with their states to an irrational degree ("My country, right or wrong"), and the nations of the region are indifferent to one another's fight for independence.

This sketchy historical survey only served as a foundation to my theory which argues that in Eastern Europe proper social relations and political structure are more or less in harmony whereas in Central Eastern Europe state and society are in a fundamental conflict, until either the totalitarian state succeeds in eliminating all traditions of struggle for individual and social autonomies or until as a result of social pressure the political structure changes from a totalitarian dictatorship into at least a paternalistic state in line with the traditions of the region (if not into a democratic state). Is the latter possible?

On the evidence of comparative and historical analysis the European is the only civilization that continuously struggles to transcend itself. Its purpose is not survival but the realization of ideals. Another typically European feature is the transitory character of traditions. The more European a society the easier it is for its traditions to dissolve or change. Therefore traditions in Western Europe are more dynamic than they are in Central Eastern Europe and are least dynamic in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe – and, first of all, Russia – still remains part of Europe as the

attempt at self transcendence is present there to some extent. Its permanent sense of being threatened from without throughout its history resulted inevitably in the concept of a strong centralized Russian Empire. The Tsarist Russian empire was by the end of the First World War unable to fulfil this ideal. The strong new power structure that replaced the Tsar recognised that in order to be accepted and legitimized it had to fulfil this ideal. For this purpose, it adapted the scientific spirit and the modern production techniques of the West. But if Russia had wanted to follow the European road it would have had to give up the concept of a powerful Russian empire and accept that even in terms of its own ideals it looked pretty retrograde and underdeveloped. No power-wielding elite is prepared to go down this road voluntarily, especially as it is hard to imagine how Russian society could function without a strong totalitarian central power base, given the fact that its community structure has been annihilated from above, and at the same time, the evolution of new communities in place of the traditional ones has been effectively precluded. Therefore the possibility of social self-regulation is completely absent. Russia still remains a European society in one important respect, in that its most profound objective – to increase the power of the state – is not dictated by any rational external force but by the demand to transcend itself. But in order to continue to be true to the ideal, the ruling elite has to strive to annihilate most European values, notably, the central value – ideal of Western Europe, namely social and individual autonomies.

In Central Eastern Europe the Russian model is impossible to achieve. However, some types of social autonomies and a paternalistic state – by contrast with a totalitarian one – is only interested in keeping general political decisions in the hands of a particular privileged group but is not interested in repressing autonomies that have nothing to do with power privileges. However, if a society that already possesses certain autonomies is for some reason driven to accept the strong central power exercised by a privileged group then this state may turn out to be strong enough to prevent any further development of the autonomous forces.

Central Eastern Europeans are fundamentally Europeans not only in that they have their own ideas of reality, but even their value-system is very close to that of Western Europe. They are unwilling to tolerate for long any political system which aims to destroy their autonomy completely. In times of revolt and rebellion abstract categories such as national independence, democracy, constitutionalism, social justice, etc. acquire real meaning. But in terms of everyday life these concepts operate in a much simpler, much more practical and earthy fashion, in the simple wish: let me be, leave me alone, don't tell me what to do, or when and how to do it.

In 1956, 1968, and 1980/81 it was, of course, national societies or nations as a whole that rose against a political order of a totalitarian character. But these societies in revolt did not really exist as genuine societies. Central Eastern European societies are "nationalized" or étatisées societies: they lack any system of relationships free of state (i.e. Party) interference or control. With the exception of the Catholic Church in Poland, there is not a single social institution in any of these countries of "existing socialism" which does not comply with the demands of the totalitarian state, which does not accept "the leading role of the Communist Party". And yet it was society which rebelled, because civil society is inherent in the individuals' surviving expectation of autonomy. This expectation is not political in most cases. People do not consider themselves qualified to judge, say, the Iraqi-Iranian conflict. But they will, eventually, put their foot down if there is long-term, direct interference in their personal lives. And this is inevitable in a totalitarian system. Systems which prevent the development of the mediating mechanisms which would tend towards some kind of dynamic balance on the one hand, while on the other hand, not exercising authori-

tative and absolute control in every aspect of society, head towards catastrophe. Total repression in every sphere of natural movement in society requires total dictatorship. But such total dictatorship can work "well" only if the members of a subjugated society are completely lacking in expectation of real autonomy. Central Eastern European societies do not lack such expectations. Therefore societies of the region rebel against totalitarian systems continually and these rebellions periodically erupt into real uprisings. And in the course of this process they organize themselves into genuine, living societies.

The three great revolts have been crushed. The Russians cannot see why their totalitarianism – so effective at home – should not work in Central Eastern Europe. But the communist elites in Central Eastern Europe must think differently if they want to stay in power. They must acknowledge the differences between their societies and the Russian, Albanian, and Rumanian ones. They have a choice: either they destroy even the vestiges of their own distinctive tradition, or they change the power structure from a communist-totalitarian to a communist-paternalistic one.

In Poland the ruling elite could never bring itself to opt for either way: Czechoslovakia chose the eradication of its tradition. A third attempt at a solution is that of Hungary. To interpret "Kádárism" as basically the same as other Central Eastern European systems, only more skilfully handled, would be a mistake. The "Hungarian experiment" as it is sometimes referred to, is, however unlike scientific experiments: the changes we have witnessed had not been carefully laid out in advance. What we have here is simply a situation in which the Hungarian ruling elite has learned something from the 1956 revolution – the first uprising of elemental forces against Communist totalitarianism. They have learned to watch out for at least some of society's expectations and to concede some ground – as long as these do not threaten their power directly. Moreover, the ruling elite has been trying to channel these expectations to ensure that they do not, indeed, threaten them in the end.

Today, Western European public opinion, along with Hungarian and Eastern European consciousness, tend to forget the terror and bloodshed with which Hungary's present rulers suppressed the 1956 revolution. Thousands were executed, tens of thousands imprisoned, hundreds of thousands oppressed. A few years later, a radical change ensued: the rulers extended a hand to the nation that had risen in revolt. The nation accepted it and was ready to cooperate. Thus, we had the first precondition of radical reforms: an exhausted society, and minimal concession from the rulers. At the time of Khrushchev's fall, eight years after the revolution, the nation rallied as one behind the very leader who had crushed it, in defence of what was later termed "Socialism with a human face". Thus, gradually the second precondition of radical reforms evolved: the ruling elite had acquired self-confidence.

And hence the idea of reforms could emerge. The substance of these reforms has been to allow considerably more leeway for social autonomies without calling into question the power of the Communist élite. We are talking of reforms which do not lead to any kind of genuine democratic awareness, but which simply bolster the "selfish bourgeois" strivings of the individual. It has to be borne in mind that what is invariably discussed is nothing more than economic reform. It is becoming apparent that if the economy is to work efficiently, some new form of ownership has to evolve: the executive power of the state on the one hand, and those exercising rights of ownership on the other, must be separated.

It is seldom mentioned that the implementation of economic reforms may take socio-political forms, or that the negative social consequences of radical economic reforms will almost certainly have to be eliminated by radical socio-political reforms. When such ideas are mentioned, however seldom, they are disapproved of by the authorities.

The unfolding of forms of economic autonomy, nevertheless, does lead to some changes in the outlook of the individual. These consist mainly in vague expectations of a widening of the sphere of personal autonomy. These inspirations are not directed specifically against the regime. People simply try to make their lives more comfortable and independent. Those who are in a position to enjoy the advantages offered by these reforms have the impression that they are freer. This, in turn, increases the self-confidence of the authorities. They begin to wonder whether it is really always necessary to use force.

This primarily economic development undoubtedly has its disadvantages: the most serious one being the lack of a communal sense of social responsibility – in other words the atomisation of society. It is equally unquestionable, however, that in the past twenty years the individual's autonomy has increased significantly in Hungary and this is true to some extent of culture as well, though one cannot speak here of true autonomy.

The "Hungarian question" is therefore this: Is it possible to make further advances – from the starting point of increased personal autonomy – towards developing a relatively autonomous society, with an autonomous economy, genuine trade unions, autonomous culture and an independent judicial system which, together, would eventually lead to the development of social responsibility – or will Hungary sink into a social and inevitably economic crisis similar to Poland? The outcome of the latter development, aggravated by lack of communal social responsibility, would be unforeseeable. There is, of course, another possibility, namely that the present situation would prove to be a lasting one.

The first alternative would, in many respects, be in harmony with the traditions of the region. Given the status quo, it might offer the maximum possibilities of safe-guarding the European heritage. This would mean that the political rulers' right to rule would not be called into question and in exchange for this, society would be allowed a great deal of independence and self-determination in non-political matters. This alternative would by no means contradict Hungarian traditions: Hungary has, after all, never enjoyed political democracy of the Western type, except for very brief periods. The question, however, is this: will the Communist elite in Hungary be able to fulfil the role of the former ruling classes? In this they are at a serious disadvantage: they are not backed by a thousand year-old tradition and it is far from obvious, no matter how hard they try to prove it, that they represent the best interests of the nation.

There remains, then, the alternative of the status quo. It is far from certain that – for the time being naturally only in Hungary – this will not be sufficient.