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PART ONE

Anatomy of a Diverse Region

1

Introduction: Defining Central and Eastern Europe

JUDY BATT

What is the justification for treating all together in one book the politics of the Central and Eastern European states? A region, as Kundera (1984) has put it, that is a 'condensed version of Europe in all its cultural variety', made up according to one rule: the greatest variety within the smallest space'? This amorphous region spans states as diverse as tiny Slovenia in the far south-west, a cohesive nation of just under two million, with a standard of living approaching that of the West European average, and a lifestyle that has much in common with its Alpine neighbours Austria and Italy; and, in the east, vast Ukraine sprawling across the steppes, with a population of 50 million, a state that, having emerged almost by accident in 1991 upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, has been struggling ever since with uncertainty as to its national identity and place in the world, profound economic decline and mass improvement, and poor government by a corrupt oligarchy of former communist apparatchiks.

The peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, their languages, religions and cultures, are extremely diverse (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2). Linguistic proximity, for example, among the largest, Slavonic language group, is cross-cut by the religious divide between the mainly Roman Catholic Poles, Czechs and Slovaks (the latter two also including Protestant minorities) and the Orthodox Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians (the latter also including a significant minority of 'Greek' Catholics, combining Orthodox rites with recognition of the Pope in Rome as spiritual leader). Speakers of Serbo-Croat, long recognized as a single language within the South

TABLE 1.1 *Major languages spoken in Central and Eastern Europe*

Indo-European group	*Non-Indo-European groups*
Slavonic	*Uralic*
West: Polish, Czech, Slovak	Finnic: Estonian
East: Russian, Ukrainian, Rusyn, Byelorussian	Ugric: Hungarian
South: Serbo-Croat, Slovene, Bulgarian, Macedonian	*Altaic* Turkish Gagauz
Germanic	
German, Yiddish	
Baltic	
Latvian, Lithuanian	
Italic (Latin-based)	
Romanian (including Moldovan)	
Albanian	

Slavonic sub-group, comprise three separate and now tragically antagonistic nations – Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks – primarily identified by their respective Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim traditions. Romanians, who speak a Latin-based language, are by religion mainly Orthodox, with a sizeable Greek-Catholic minority; while Hungarians, whose language falls outside the Indo-European group, share with their Central European neighbours the western Catholic and protestant religious traditions.

Irrepressible Diversity

In fact, *diversity* is the hallmark of Central and Eastern Europe, within countries as much as between them, and this has often been a source of political tension. Although the region's history has also been marked by long periods of peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence, the prevailing Western perception is one of chronic fragmentation and conflict between states and peoples. When we come to look for a common identity, as the historian Timothy Garton Ash has written,

> we shall at once be lost in a forest of historical complexity – an endlessly intriguing forest to be sure, a territory where peoples, cultures, languages are fantastically intertwined, where every

TABLE 1.2 *Religious traditions in Central and Eastern Europe*

MAINLY ROMAN CATHOLIC:
Poles
Lithuanians
Slovenes
German ‘Schwabs’ in Hungary, Romania and former Yugoslavia
Croats
MAJORITY CATHOLIC WITH SIGNIFICANT PROTESTANT MINORITY:
Czechs
Slovaks
Hungarians
MAINLY PROTESTANT:
Latvians
Estonians
German ‘Saxons’ in Romania (Transylvania)
MAJORITY ORTHODOX WITH SIGNIFICANT UNIATE (GREEK-CATHOLIC) MINORITY:
Ukrainians
Rusyns
Romanians
JEWS:
mainly urban dwellers throughout Central and Eastern Europe; much reduced by assimilation in the nineteenth century and the Holocaust in World War II.

MAINLY ORTHODOX:
Russians
Bulgarians
Serbs
Montenegrins
Macedonians
Moldovans
Gagauzi
MUSLIMS:
Bosnian Muslims
Turkish minorities
Sandzhak Muslims in Serbia
MAINLY MUSLIM WITH CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX MINORITIES:
Albanians
NB:
The Roma throughout Central and Eastern Europe tend to adopt the major religion of the locality in which they live; but many recently have joined various Christian sects and the Seventh Day Adventists.

> place has several names and men change their citizenship as often as their shoes, an enchanted wood full of wizards and witches, but one which bears over its entrance the words: ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter here, of ever again seeing the wood for the trees.’ (Garton Ash, 1989, p. 197)

A first stop in the search for commonalities would be the fact that all the states covered in this book experienced several decades of communist rule until the dramatic changes of 1989–91, since when they have all set about the ‘transition to democracy’. The communist system was a unique form of dictatorship that was characterized not only by the monopoly of political power in the hands of a single party, but also by far-reaching expropriation of private property and the direct subordination of the economy and society to political control. Communist ideology was universalist, in the sense that it predicted a common destiny for all mankind, a utopia of equality and justice transcending class and national divisions. The communist politico-economic system, pioneered by the Soviet Union, was justified as a universally valid 'model' that all peoples would follow on the path to this utopia. Communism was thus an experiment in enforcing conformity to this model upon the highly diverse region of Central and Eastern Europe. When it failed, all these countries faced broadly similar challenges in unscrambling its legacies and building anew: establishing new multi-party systems; holding competitive elections for the first time in decades; transforming parliaments from puppet theatres in which the communists pulled all the strings into working arenas for debate and legislation; dismantling the pervasive networks of the political police; as well as re-privatizing their economies and establishing functioning market economies virtually from scratch.

However, when we dig deeper into the communist past, we discover that communism took on markedly different forms across the states of Central and Eastern Europe. As one historian put it, 'the entire history of Eastern Europe from 1945 to 1989 … can be considered one spasmodic imposition of Stalinism followed by forty years of adjusting, accommodating, opposing, reinterpreting, and rejecting' (Stokes, 1997, p. 184). This started with Yugoslavia's breakaway in 1948 from the 'bloc' of countries under the control of the Soviet Union. The Yugoslav communists soon realized that in order to stabilize and consolidate their control without external help from the Soviet Union, they needed to develop their own 'road to socialism', more in conformity with their own conditions. They bolstered their independence by attacking the centralist form of communism imposed throughout the Soviet bloc as a 'bureaucratic deformation', and in its place they proposed a decentralized model of 'self-management'. The Yugoslav economic system was transformed into what became known as 'market socialism'. Central planning was abolished, enterprises were no longer controlled by the state but by their own employees, and market forces were allowed considerable latitude. The political system was federalized, and the six national republics and two autonomous provinces came to enjoy a large measure of political and economic autonomy. For many years the Yugoslav economy appeared to flourish, bolstered by growing ties with the West (including financial support), and by remittances sent home by large numbers of Yugoslavs allowed to work abroad in Western Europe.

Diversification also began among the countries remaining within the Soviet bloc after the death in 1953 of Joseph Stalin, who had brought communism to the region at the end of World War II. Revolts and attempted revolutions in East Berlin in 1953, Hungary and Poland in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980–81 demonstrated the fragility of the centralized Soviet model, its lack of genuine roots in the societies and cultures of the region, and its inability to provide the promised superior economy and standard of living to that provided by Western capitalism. Although these revolts were all put down by force, and Soviet-style ‘normalization’ quickly reimposed, it was clear that some leeway had to be granted to the different countries to respond more flexibly to national conditions. In the cases of Poland and Hungary, local communist leaders experimented with economic reforms, some aspects of which (particularly in Poland and Hungary) were similar to the Yugoslav experiment. The aim was to make the economy more flexible and dynamic, and so to buy popularity for the communist system, without weakening the communist party’s monopoly of power. Nevertheless, reforms did lead to a significantly less oppressive political atmosphere in these countries than, for example, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) and Czechoslovakia (after 1968). The latter two regimes stuck to a rigid form of barely modified Stalinist centralism, as did Romania. But, in contrast to the GDR and Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union’s staunchest allies, Romania under Ceausescu pursued an independent foreign policy, cultivating ties with the Soviet Union’s chief ‘enemies’, China, Israel and the West. This did not mean political relaxation at home: in fact the Ceausescu regime was the most repressive of all, culminating in a personalized dictatorship that recalled inter-war fascist glorification of the Leader, drawing heavily on Romanian nationalist symbols to appeal to the masses, backed up by all-pervading secret police intimidation. However, by the end of the communist period, all of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe faced profound economic crisis. So when in 1989 the then Soviet leader Gorbachev took the momentous decision to withdraw from Central and Eastern Europe, these communist regimes collapsed in rapid succession. This culminated in the Soviet Union in 1991 when the Baltic Republics, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics broke away to form new independent states.

Although all states faced challenges of postcommunist political and economic transformation, each did so in its own specific way. Precisely what had to be unscrambled when communism collapsed, and what material and human resources were available on which to build, varied widely. Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia were all saddled with crippling debts and high inflation resulting from their failed reform experiments; but at least their elites contained political pragmatists and technocrats having some understanding of the market economy, and their peoples had had a chance over the previous decades to engage in small-scale private entrepreneurship. Travel to the West, or at least access to information about it, was quite widespread. Yugoslavia, however, squandered these initial advantages when its crisis-ridden federation broke down into more than a decade of inter-ethnic war. One of the Yugoslav republics, Slovenia, did manage to escape unscathed, and having established its independence, now stands alongside Hungary and Poland in the group of states that have forged ahead in political and economic transformation and are approaching accession to the European Union. Romania, by contrast, has lagged behind, its economic transformation burdened by the impoverishment inherited from Ceausescu's misrule, the ambiguities of its postcommunist elite about change, and the political weaknesses and inexperience of alternative non-communist elites.

The GDR disappeared altogether after unification with the Federal Republic in 1991, which ensured its radical economic and political transformation by a unique process of absorption into another state (and also its exclusion from this volume). Czechoslovakia too disappeared by 1993, fractured into two independent states as a result of long-submerged national differences between Czechs and Slovaks that resurfaced after 1989. Nearly seventy years of common statehood and forty years of communist centralism have not prevented the two new Czech and Slovak states from taking on quite different profiles. The same is even more obvious in the cases of former Soviet republics: the Baltic republics' experience of independent statehood in the inter-war period – albeit brief – seems to have given them a head-start over Ukraine, which has been teetering on the brink of an economic and political abyss for most of the period since independence.

Thus the diversity that was already becoming apparent in the communist period has further deepened since the end of communism, hence the question with which we started remains to be answered. What justifies treating together these highly disparate states? If we take a longer historical view, we can identify some broad, recurrent themes that have shaped – and continue to shape – the political development of the region and its interactions with the wider Europe.

The 'Lands in Between': A Geopolitical Predicament

Central and Eastern Europe often seems easier to define by what it is not, than by what it is. It is an area without clear geographical borders that stretches from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Adriatic in the south, and south-eastward to the Black Sea. In the north, it comprises part of the Great European Plain that extends to the west across northern Germany and the Low Countries and to the east deep into Russia. In the centre is the upland plateau of the Czech lands and the Danubian Basin spreading out between the Alps and the Carpathian mountains. Further south still is the mountainous, often remote and inaccessible region of the Balkans, and to the south-east the land stretches away into the steppes of Ukraine. These are sometimes called the 'Lands in Between', a broad frontier zone between Russia and Germany, Europe and Asia, East and West.

This indeterminate location has had a fundamental impact on the shaping of political identities throughout the region. The lack of natural borders exposed the region to successive waves of migration over the centuries, while inaccessibility and economic marginalization helped preserve distinctive local cultures, languages and dialects – hence the region's ethnic diversity. An enormous variety of peoples came to settle here, not for the most part (until the twentieth century) in consolidated and clearly defined territories, but intermingled in a complex ethnic patchwork. As a result of its geopolitical exposure, the region has been chronically vulnerable to invasion by larger and stronger powers to the west, east and south. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, when in Western Europe the foundations of modern nation-states were being laid, Central and Eastern Europe fell under the control of large multi-national empires. The Balkans and most of Hungary were conquered by the Ottoman Empire, and were thus isolated from the West in a formative period when the cultural influences of the Renaissance and Reformation took hold. The Ottomans were finally driven out of Hungary by the early eighteenth century by the forces of the Habsburg Empire, after which Hungary fell under the rule of Vienna. Meanwhile, the Russian Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries expanded its might southwards to the Black Sea and, in the north-west, captured the southern shore of the Baltic from the Swedes. In the late eighteenth century, Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Habsburg Austria.

The establishment of the various empires promoted (or forced) further migrations of the peoples of the region as some groups fled before one imperial army to seek protection under another, others moved in to fill their place, and new ruling groups were brought from far-away imperial capitals to run the local administration. Along with ethnic diversity and intermingling, imperial rule promoted and entrenched complex patterns of ethnic stratification. Typically, the landowning nobility was of a different language and/or religion from the peasants who worked their estates, and different again from the administrative elites, commercial and professional classes in the towns. Thus, for example, in Hungary, Magyar nobles lorded it over Slovak or Romanian peasants; in Austrian Galicia, Polish nobles did the same over Ukrainians and Rusyns; in the Baltic, it was Germans and Swedes who dominated the Estonian and Latvian masses. Servicing the bureaucratic and military needs of empire brought fresh influxes of German-speakers to the eastern towns of the Habsburg Empire, to join long-settled communities of German craftsmen. Russians came to govern the cities of Ukraine, Moldavia and the part of Poland that had fallen under Russian control at the end of the eighteenth century. Greeks came from Constantinople in order to take on that role on behalf of the Ottomans in much of the Balkans. Throughout the region, Jews constituted a significant proportion of the urban population occupied in trade and commerce, petty crafts and the professions. Ethnic stratification was exploited by imperial rule, which favoured some ethnic groups over others, such as the Germans in imperial Russia's Baltic provinces, or Slavic converts to Islam in parts of the Balkans under Ottoman control. Challenges to the central imperial authorities were thus fended off by a strategy of 'divide and rule' whose consequences are still being felt in inter-ethnic relations in the region today.

The lack of defensible territorial borders had led, by the late eighteenth century, to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe being swallowed up between rival multinational empires that, in the course of the nineteenth century, began to look increasingly ramshackle. Autocratic rule and socio-economic stagnation blocked the development of dynamic modern civil societies. The intermingling of peoples did not lead to a 'multicultural' paradise or the emergence of an integrated, coherent 'body politic' capable of calling the state to account. The very absence of clear territorial bases for the exercise of political power led rather to the accentuation of language and religion as key markers of social group formation.

'Catching Up' with Europe: The Problem of Statehood

In the course of the nineteenth century, the challenge of cultural, political and economic modernization posed by the example of more developed and dynamic nation-states in Western Europe began to make itself felt among the peoples of the dynastic empires of Central and Eastern Europe. Defeat in war made the rulers of the region aware that the economic backwardness of their empires was a major source of military weakness. In the late nineteenth century, state-promoted industrialization drives were launched, but proceeded only unevenly, in fits and starts. 'Take-off' into sustained growth was held back by rigidly conservative political and social institutions, chief among which was the preservation of a feudal-type agricultural system in which peasants remained tied to the land as serfs. Despite, or rather, because of this social and economic backwardness, the ideas of individual liberty, social emancipation and national self-determination proclaimed by the French Revolution held enormous appeal for educated elites throughout the region, who came to see 'catching up' with the mainstream of Western Europe as the key goal for their societies. The ideal of the 'nation-state', a political order in which the state was held to be accountable to the 'people', furnished would-be reformers with the intellectual ammunition with which to attack autocracy, feudal privilege, ossified conservative traditions and social injustice in the name of the European liberal ideals of individual freedom, equal rights, the rule of law, and constitutional government.

But problems arose with the redefinition of the state as representative of the 'nation'. In the French context, the 'nation' had been conceived as the whole 'people' inhabiting the existing state's well-established historical territory, a free association of individual citizens with equal rights. Transformation of the Central and East European empires along the same lines was blocked not only by the entrenched resistance of the old regimes but also by lack of consensus on who precisely constituted 'the people' to whom the state was to be made accountable. By the early nineteenth century, under the influence of German Romanticism and especially of Johann von Herder (a native of the Baltic province of East Prussia), the idea of the 'nation' in the Central and East European context began to depart from the state-centred French concept, which defined 'citizens' in terms of residence on the state's territory, and moved towards a definition which drew political borders along cultural and linguistic lines. Thus the demand for 'national self-determination' was raised on behalf of ethnic communities, and implied the creation of new states for the respective ethnic communities on whatever territory they claimed as their homeland. Effectively this meant that the multinational Central and East European empires could only be transformed into 'nation-states' by redrawing territorial borders and breaking them up. But further, because most of the empires' constituent territories contained more than one ethnic nation, and because of the extensive intermingling of peoples that had in the meanwhile taken place, competing claims were laid by the various ethnic nations to the various parts of the imperial territories.

The collapse of the Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg empires, culminating at the end of World War I, left the victorious Western powers with the task of implementing the principle of 'national self-determination' as promised by the American President Woodrow Wilson (see Macmillan, 2001). The way seemed open for the peoples of the region finally to acquire their own sovereign nation-states and so to reach political modernity on the pattern already laid down by their neighbours in the West. The disintegration of the Russian Empire into the chaos of revolution in 1917 and civil war in the following years allowed the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians to break free and form their own states. The simultaneous demise of the Habsburg Empire and the defeat of Germany paved the way for a united independent Poland to reappear on the map of Europe. The Czechs and Slovaks formed a new common state of Czechoslovakia, while the South Slavs of Austria–Hungary united with Serbia in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia. Romania, which like Serbia had wrested independence from Ottoman control in the late nineteenth century, acquired from Hungary to its west and

Russia to its east extensive new territories where Romanians formed local majorities. Other nations were less successful, notably the Ukrainians, who remained divided between the Soviet Union in the east and Poland in the west; and the Hungarians, who gained independence from Austria only to lose two-thirds of their historic territory to Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The new nation-states of Central and Eastern Europe faced enormous internal and external challenges in the inter-war period. The heritage of history and the endemic problem of geopolitical vulnerability did not melt away overnight. First of all, the new states did not, for the most part, inherit ready-made administrations and integrated political communities of citizens. These had to be built almost from scratch on the territories inherited from various former rulers. So, for example, the Polish leader Pilsudski faced a huge task in 1918:

> Pilsudski had to weld together different economies, different laws and different bureaucracies. He had to rationalise nine separate legal systems. He had to reduce five currencies to one, and he did not even have the means to print banknotes. Railways were a nightmare, with 66 different kinds of rails, 165 types of locomotives and a patchwork of signalling systems. (Macmillan, 2001, p. 220)

Most important of all, most states were not ‘nation-states’ in the sense in which their new rulers had expected – states of and for a single, united ‘nation’ in ethnic terms, but contained sizeable minorities, more or less aggrieved at the changes in borders that had taken place over their heads. Thus Poland, reborn in its pre-partition borders, contained large minorities of Ukrainians and other east Slavic, Orthodox peoples who identified more closely with kinsfolk over the border in the Soviet Union than with their Polish fellow-citizens; Germans, who found it hard to accept their diminished status in a state dominated by Poles whom they tended to disdain; and Jews, who were regarded as alien by their devoutly Catholic Polish neighbours. Both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia posed unresolved questions of whether the aim was to construct a unified nation-state resting on a single composite political identity, or whether in fact they were multinational states that should give institutional recognition to their constituent national groups. The dismantling of historic Hungarian territory to the benefit of neighbouring Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia transferred large minorities of Hungarians to rule by the peoples whom they had previously dominated, and who regarded them as 'foreigners' rather than fellow-citizens. Moreover, many individuals were of two (or more) minds as to their ethnic identity and how it related to the new political order, as the inter-war writer Odon von Horvath explained:

> If you ask me what is my native country, I answer: I was born in Fiume, I grew up in Belgrade, Budapest, Pressburg, Vienna and Munich, and I have a Hungarian passport: but I have no fatherland. I am a very typical mix of old Austria-Hungary: at once Magyar, Croatian, German and Czech; my country is Hungary, my mother tongue is German. (Quoted in Rupnik, 1990, p. 250)

The strategy adopted by state-builders across Central and Eastern Europe was to impose from above a centralized state apparatus in order to enforce maximum uniformity within tightly controlled borders. This accorded with their perception of the French republican model, and fitted well with their objectives of securing the sovereignty and hegemony of the majority nation in whose name the state had been founded. But it was to prove a recipe for internal instability and external conflict. Firstly, nationalistic policies of building up state strength by economic protectionism exacerbated the economic difficulties caused by the fragmentation of previously relatively open, large markets of the imperial territories, and made the whole region peculiarly vulnerable to the economic crisis of the late 1920s and 1930s. This was combined with the explosive fact that most states were multinational. On one side stood the 'nationalizing' elites, bent on entrenching the hegemony of the majority by means of centralized political and administrative structures, ostensibly in the name of modernization, efficiency and civic equality. On another side stood the national minorities, for whom this represented just another form of bureaucratic pressure for assimilation and subjection to the untrammelled 'tyranny of the majority'. Often too there was a third side, a neighbouring state aggrieved by the outcome of the post-World War I peace treaties, which took upon itself the role of 'protector' of minorities abroad where these were ethnic kinsfolk, and aimed at eventual revision of the new borders (see Brubaker, 1996).

Bearing the Brunt of European Power Politics

All of these tensions were exacerbated by the external threats posed in the inter-war period by the resurgence of Germany in the west and Soviet Russia in the east. By the early 1930s, these rival powers were set upon expansion into the Central and East European territories they had ‘lost’ at the end of the World War I, and promoted their aims in the name of the radically opposed and profoundly illiberal ideologies of fascism and communism. Most of the new states in Central and Eastern Europe, by contrast, were small in size, economically weak, and deficient in military organization and capacities. Moreover, mutual mistrust among them obstructed any move toward common defence against the looming threats. The peace settlement had failed to provide an overarching security framework and structures to promote regional cooperation, without which ‘national self-determination’ was to be precarious and short-lived. This point was not lost on more perceptive individuals in the region, such as the Hungarian Oszkar Jaszi, who early recognized the unsustainability of the situation:

> The only possible cure for Europe’s ills is a democratic confederation of democratic peoples, the extirpation of rigid and selfish national sovereignty, peaceful and rational cooperation between all countries for the good of all. The fundamentals of this system are to be found in two basic institutions: one, free trade between all parties to the confederation; the other, a system of honest national and cultural autonomy for all national minorities living within the boundaries of the confederation. Under such conditions political frontiers would slowly become mere demarcations of administrative divisions. (Jaszi, 1923, pp. 280–1)

Voices such as Jaszi’s were not heeded at the time. Instead, Central and East Europe fell prey to a new round of imperial conquest, more brutal and oppressive than anything experienced before. After 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union redrew the map of Europe by carving up the lands in between them. Poland once again disappeared, partitioned between the rival powers. Poles became forced labourers for the Nazi war machine, their military elite massacred by the Soviet army advancing from the east, and their country reduced to the site of the major death camps into which Jews from the whole of Europe were herded and exterminated. The Baltic republics were invaded first by Germany then forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. Divisions among the Central and East Europeans themselves were ruthlessly exploited: Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were dismembered, and Nazi-backed puppet states were formed in breakaway Slovakia and Croatia. Axis ally Italy seized the Dalmatian coast and ran an enlarged Albania, while Hungary seized the opportunity to regain lost lands in southern Slovakia, north-western Romania and northern Serbia. As Great Power rivalry was being fought out over their heads, bitter ethnic wars meanwhile broke out on the ground between Poles and Ukrainians, Hungarians and Romanians, Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims; and Jews and gypsies suffered at the hands not only of the Nazi invaders but also of their own neighbours.

The peace that eventually came to the region at the end of World War II was bought at an exceptionally heavy price with the advance westward of the Soviet Army, by now in alliance with the Western powers. 'Liberation' from Nazi control by Soviet forces was rapidly followed by the installation of temporary governments stacked with local communist recruits and fellow-travellers. For the Western allies, preoccupied with the final defeat of Germany and Japan, keeping Stalin on side in the last months of the war was the priority. By the time they turned their attention to the situation in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the war, the Western allies' national capacities and their will to intervene to avert the consolidating Soviet grip over the region were exhausted. The main result of belated efforts on the part of the new US administration under Truman to 'roll back' communism in Europe was to prompt Stalin to seal off the Central and East European states that his troops had occupied behind an 'Iron Curtain'. Thereafter, all remaining non-communist parties and politicians were ousted from government, and the local communist parties were tightly bound into a communist international system that enforced uniformity and subordination to the dictates of Moscow.

The states of Central and Eastern Europe thereafter found themselves set on a new course of 'socialist construction' following the Soviet model. This was a project of 'catching up' with the West, but one explicitly designed in opposition to the capitalist path relaunched in Western Europe with US support in the 'Marshall Plan'. The continent was divided into two opposing blocs, and Central and Eastern Europe became once again the front line of East–West superpower rivalry. Although the project of 'catching up and overtaking' the West presented by communist rule held some attractions for the peoples of the region insofar as it promised rapid social and economic modernization, communist rule was regarded as politically alien, a new form of imperialism that suppressed their political freedom, their religions, and above all their national identity. For centuries, it had been Western Europe, not Russia, that they had regarded as the model to emulate and the centre of their cultural gravitational field. Although communist ideology was certainly a Western import into Russia, when it was forcibly imposed from the east onto Central and Eastern Europe, it was experienced as a form of 'Asiatic despotism' with which only a narrow minority could ever identify. The subsequent failure of communist regimes to deliver the promised economic and social progress only exposed the acute fragility of these regimes in the region, which explains why they all collapsed so quickly in 1989–91.

The 'Return to Europe'

The slogan that best encapsulated popular understanding of the meaning of the revolutions of 1989–91 in Central and Eastern Europe was the 'return to Europe'. Of course geographically they had never moved, but meanwhile Western Europe had surged ahead. Postwar recovery was followed by decades of economic growth and radical technological innovation; unprecedentedly prosperous societies enjoyed the additional security of extensive state welfare provision; and the problem of German power seemed to have been resolved by binding its larger western part, the Federal Republic, into political and economic integration within the European Community (later European Union) and military integration in NATO. Buoyed up by self-confidence and not a little complacency, the western side of the Iron Curtain had come to regard itself as 'Europe'. In 1989, it awoke to find long-forgotten neighbours clamouring to join in. For what the Central and East Europeans recognized in the 'Europe' represented by the EU and NATO was precisely that 'democratic confederation of democratic peoples' that Jaszi, among others, had envisioned: an overarching framework for the weak, small and divided peoples of the region to overcome their geopolitical predicament and achieve the security and prosperity without which the long-cherished goal of 'national self-determination' would remain unfulfilled. 'Returning to Europe' held the promise of replicating a tried-and-tested formula that would allow them finally to ‘catch up’ with the West.

Western observers have often remarked on the apparent contradiction in the revolutions of 1989, which simultaneously expressed aspirations to recover national independence and to join in West European processes of deepening political, economic and military integration that unquestionably affect key aspects of the traditional sovereignty of nation-states. The end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe saw an upsurge of nationalist rhetoric, leading not only to a revival of the sort of tensions between ethno-national majorities and minorities that had fatefully afflicted the stability of the region in the inter-war period, but also to the break-up of the three major multinational communist states – the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – to form a whole set of new nation-states. The temptation is to regard this as a symptom of some endemic, recurrent Central and East Europe disease that sets this part of the continent apart from the Western ‘mainstream’. This in turn raises questions about whether history has so shaped this region as to preclude its ever being fully integrated into the mainstream of modern Europe. Enlargement of the EU and NATO, from the Western perspective, could thus seem a profoundly risky undertaking. It threatened to overwhelm these elaborately constructed and highly valued European institutions with an influx of states whose fragile new political and administrative structures seemed unready to play by the established Western ‘rules of the game’, whose ruined economies would be heavily dependent on Western support for decades to come, and who seemed more likely to consume than to contribute to common security.

For Central and East Europeans, the contradiction between ‘national self-determination’ and joining the EU and NATO is much less obvious, for reasons that this chapter has sought to make clear. The notion of ‘returning to Europe’ usefully captures an essential fact of life in this region: the inseparability of the internal and external dimensions of politics. Establishing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, overcoming inter-ethnic tensions, nationalistic rivalries and mistrust, and creating flourishing and competitive economies all largely depend on a stable external environment, free of the threat of imperialist domination, in which borders can be freely crossed by people, products and capital. The EU, for all its shortcomings, has proved a markedly successful model in the West, where similar challenges were faced at the end of

World War II. The process of integration into pan-European structures can now provide practical support and incentives for Central and East Europeans to stay the course of difficult, painful reforms and get through the wrenching social upheavals they may bring. Reciprocally, political stabilization and economic revival in Central and Eastern Europe offers Western Europe its best guarantee of security in a new era: 'Fortress Europe' ceased to be an option once the Iron Curtain came down and the balance-of-terror system of the Cold War collapsed. Security must be now rebuilt on the bases of intense cooperation with neighbours, and of explicit recognition that the benefits will be mutual and self-reinforcing. Arguments such as these in favour of EU and NATO enlargement eventually won out over Western scepticism. In 1993, the EU explicitly recognized enlargement into Central and Eastern Europe as a goal, and accession negotiations with ten states of the region have been under way since 1998. The first new members expect to be admitted in May 2004. NATO took the decision to expand in 1996. Three new members (Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic) were admitted in 1999, and several more were invited to join in late 2002.

The process of EU and NATO enlargement, however, raises new questions for the definition of our region insofar as it is taking place in stages: not all the states of Central and Eastern Europe will join at the same time, if at all. This is particularly relevant as far as EU membership is concerned, because of the complex conditions and far-reaching implications of membership. In the early 1990s, the EU concluded 'Europe Agreements' (which carried, after 1993, the commitment to eventual membership) with ten states: the three Baltic Republics, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria. It started accession negotiations with Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia in 1998, and with the other five, deemed to be less far advanced in economic and/or political reform, two years later. Some of the latter group have caught up with the 'front runners' and will join in 2004, but Bulgaria and Romania will not. Meanwhile, countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania have been offered 'Stabilisation and Association Agreements' that, while acknowledging eventual membership as a goal, assume that this will only be achievable in the long term. So far, only Croatia and Macedonia have concluded such Agreements. On the other hand, Ukraine, which has expressed interest in eventual EU membership, and Moldova, which remains ambivalent, are not yet recognized as potential EU members at all. What is emerging are important subdivisions within the region, with the term 'Central Europe' now being commonly used in official circles to encompass the candidate states with 'Europe Agreements', the 'Stability and Association' states being grouped together as 'the western Balkans' or 'eastern Adriatic', leaving Ukraine and Moldova as 'Eastern Europe' alongside Russia, Belarus and other states that are part of the Commonwealth of Independent States that was set up in 1991 to manage the dismantling of the former Soviet Union.

These distinctions have important consequences, because the new borders they set up between 'ins', 'pre-ins' and 'outs' cut across a region that is only just emerging from the damaging divisions imposed by communist rule to rediscover shared history and to identify strongly with the idea of a united Europe. The point was dramatically demonstrated in 1999, when, three weeks after taking in the new CEE members, NATO launched its bombardment of Serbia. For the Czechs, with strong historic sympathies for their fellow Slavs the Serbs, and for Hungary, with some 400,000 ethnic kin living over their southern border in Serbia, this proved an unexpected wrench of their loyalties. More generally, exclusion from enlargement has a demoralizing psychological impact. Because EU membership in particular has become equated with 'being European', and because, in Central and Eastern Europe, being 'European' has come to mean much the same as being 'civilized' and 'modern', exclusion from EU enlargement can be a national humiliation that may encourage a resentful backlash. Differentiation can also revive tensions and rivalries between states. For example, Romania has sometimes expressed the fear that if Hungary joins the EU before itself, Hungary might exploit its position on the 'inside' to secure concessions from Romania as regards treatment of the still large and somewhat restive Hungarian minority there, an old fear of Hungarian intervention kept alive by memories of the inter-war period. Another point is that those states that join the EU first will benefit from full access to the single market and to substantial transfers from the EU's structural funds, far exceeding what is delivered in the various EU assistance programmes for non-members. This could further accelerate the divergence in economic performance between states of the region.

Moreover, EU widening is taking place at the same time as accelerated deepening of integration in key fields. One result is that while nation-state borders are becoming less significant between member-states, the EU's external border is becoming ever more salient as a line demarcating the unified economic, monetary and trading space within from those on the outside. The EU border is also coming to perform external security and policing functions formerly in the hands of member-states, which the new EU entrants will be expected to take on once they become the outer limits of the EU's 'Area of Freedom, Security and Justice'. The EU now has a common visa regime, and is moving towards common policies on immigration and asylum. These have divisive implications for the Central and East European region. For example, once Poland and Hungary join, they will require visitors from Ukraine or Yugoslavia to obtain visas, which at present they do not need. It is hard to see how cultural and economic interchange between these states will not be severely affected as a result. Thus 'Europeanization' of the region, insofar as it takes place in stages, seems likely to become as much a factor for further diversification within the region as for its unification. In future editions of this book, therefore, it may make less sense than it does today to treat the countries of Central and Eastern Europe together.

In the chapters that follow we pursue the themes of divergence and convergence between the states of Central and Eastern Europe, and between them and Western Europe, through a set of country studies and comparative thematic chapters. Variations in national patterns of democratization are explained by reference to the histories of individual countries, to the specific legacies of communist rule, and to the external influences exerted by the West through the processes of EU and NATO enlargement. Even those furthest advanced in their 'return to Europe', such as the Central European states of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, continue to face the challenge of underpinning their democratic institutions with popular confidence, efficient administrative practices and habitual respect for the rule of law. At the same time, even those fragile states in war-torn former Yugoslavia have made some progress in recent years towards national reconciliation and reconstruction. Western engagement, especially on the part of the EU, is now recognized as essential, yet here there is also room for concern. West European public opinion seems to have lost its enthusiasm for extending the benefits of integration too far to the east and south-east, instead focusing on concerns about illegal migration and the penetration of international organized crime into their societies. Western democracies themselves are undergoing challenges as political disaffection, social fragmentation and exposure to global economic pressures bring increased uncertainty. The ‘Europe’ to which the Central and East Europeans aspire to ‘return’ is itself in a state of flux, and this no doubt helps to explain why Western political leaders have not yet shown the courage and far-sightedness necessary for cooperation in concerted and sustained programmes of support for the postcommunist region. Yet support of this kind is in the interests of all Europeans as they confront the inescapable task of building a common future.

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