Europe beyond partition and
unity: disintegration or
reconstitution?

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There is a race on in Europe today, writes Hassner, between integration in the West, disintegration in the East, and rapprochement between East and West. In this situation the key to the decline or revival of Europe as a whole is the strengthening and opening of Western Europe to Eastern Europe. The responsibility of the West in this regard and the shortness of time available cannot be overemphasized. Hassner traces three phases in European and Russian developments—from the ending of the Cold War to all-European collaboration and then, with disillusion, back to differentiation and new frustrations in East and West.

‘The moment when I speak has already escaped me’: No one can write about Europe today without acknowledging that this eternal truth, borrowed from a verse in a French poem, has never been more valid. Indeed, it is impossible today to speak of Europe in the present tense: the bipolar Europe, based on the division between two alliances, two economic organizations, two superpowers and two Germanies, is already past. Some of us thought we knew the Europe of tomorrow, symbolized by the magical figure of 1992. But to new uncertainties about the date of the 1992 horizon—as Ralf Dahrendorf has said, ‘1992 will surely come, but when?’—are now added new doubts about its direction, as peaceful integration and democratic prosperity become universally accepted goals in the East as well as in the West. Secondly, the goal of 1992 has been reaffirmed and reinforced by the Kohl–Mitterrand declaration of April 1990 aiming at the creation of a European political union, including common security institutions, by the same date. Thirdly, the road taken by the European Community looks more than ever like the only promising one for the whole continent. Yet the liberation of Eastern Europe, the uniting of Germany and the decolonization struggles of the Soviet Empire have raised in many minds the question whether, rather than towards 1992, we are not headed towards 1914; whether yesterday’s Europe will not be succeeded by the Europe of the day before yesterday rather than by that of tomorrow.

Of course, Balkanization and disintegration, civil war and revolution, may be confined to one part of the continent; and they can, at any rate, only last for
a time. The real question is less that of tomorrow than of the day after tomorrow. The times of troubles may lead, as they did in Western Europe, to a post-warlike, post-revolutionary and even post-nationalist condition, with the victory of liberalism and rationality. Or, on the contrary—unless the meeting of East and West fulfils the Hegelian dream of reconciling unity and virtue with modern freedom and peace—it may be Western Europe which will be ‘East Europeanized’, ‘Third Worldized’ or, simply, thrown back to its own heroic or barbaric past, complete with new religions and new wars, new prophets and new Caesars.

The reader may find these speculations idle and suspect that they represent an evasion of the necessary task of building a new European architecture; and he may not be entirely wrong. Yet they do serve to point out that in a Europe which is moving in so many directions, where so many ages of history and dimensions of politics are coexisting in so little space, the rules of the game for institution- and model-building have been fundamentally transformed. Political decisions and institutions are more necessary than ever, but the time-dimension has become both more decisive and less predictable. During the Cold War, processes were constrained, repressed or channelled by state and, above all, alliance structures; today, old and new structures are being driven, transformed or emptied by contradictory processes within, between and across societies.

In the abstract, it may be useful to distinguish three such processes: the interaction of strategies (both diplomatic and military), the interdependence of interests (particularly economic), and the interpenetration of societies (particularly affecting the movement of people, aspirations and ideas). The point is that all three of these processes work at different paces or on different time-scales. Yet they interfere with each other, and while each of them has its own logic and dynamic, it is the unpredictable result of their combination that political decisions (which are naturally biased towards immediate problems and deadlines) and institution-building (which inevitably works for the long run and is slowed down by the need for multilateral consensus) have to take into account—or, even worse, to anticipate.

An example is the process of German unification, which virtually everybody thought would take decades and could be ‘managed’ from above or from the outside. Yet the interpenetration of societies precipitated it in two successive ways. First, the twin impact of Western prosperity and of Soviet liberalization led to popular impatience, expressed by escalating emigration and dissent; and then the opening of the Austrian border last summer and then the Berlin Wall increased the interdependence between the two German economies and made the East German one quite unworkable. Chancellor Kohl acted decisively in using this situation to speed up unification, and Germany’s neighbours and allies, having unsuccessfully tried to slow down the tide, are running behind it, trying hastily to adapt old institutions or to build new ones in order to accommodate a united Germany in the middle of Europe.

1 For further discussion of these processes see Pierre Hassner, ‘Modelling while Rome burns?’, unpublished paper.
To put it another way: There is a race on today between the rapprochement between the two Germanies, the two Europes and the two superpowers; the integration of Western Europe; the disintegration of Eastern Europe; and the trend to the disengagement of the two superpowers. Of these, the only clear and irreversible trends, whose strength and speed have taken everybody by surprise, are the end of communist rule in Eastern Europe (and hence of the Warsaw Pact) and the unifying of Germany. The fate of the Soviet Union itself (both as a communist regime and as a multinational empire) and that of Western Europe (both regarding its ability to unite and thus constitute a valid counterweight to increasing German power and Soviet instability, and also regarding its links with the United States) now hang in the balance. It is these themes that will constitute the main concerns of the early 1990s, just as Eastern Europe and Germany have provided the headlines of the late 1980s.

Going from West to East, we can distinguish three possible dialectical sequences concerning the relation between Western and pan-European institutions, the evolution of Eastern Europe in its attempt to rejoin the European mainstream, and the evolution of the Soviet Union between imperial power and democratic reform. In each case, our conclusion will be that, while of course the future is unknown, whatever happens, Western Europe must both give much higher priority to its relation with the East and cling to its enterprise of building an autonomous centre of power within this continental framework.

1. The West: from Cold War victory to all-European cooperation and back to deterrence

The root of the problem lies in the double-faced result of the 1989 revolutions. On the one hand, the centre of gravity of the European continent has moved from East to West; or, put in a more brutal way, the West has won over the East. It is East Germany which has disintegrated rather than West Germany, Comecon rather than the European Community, the Warsaw Pact rather than NATO. On the other hand, the centre of gravity of the respective Western halves of these pairs has, by the same token, moved eastwards, or at least towards Central Europe, and in the process Germany, the Community and NATO are encountering severe problems in digesting their respective victories.

While in the long and even medium run it is likely that the absorption of the former GDR will increase Germany’s total economic power and political influence, and with them those of Europe as a whole, in the shorter run Germany is likely to be less stable inside, less active outside and less reliable or dedicated a partner for European integration—in spite of Chancellor Kohl’s determination—because of the difficult cultural, psychological, social and economic problems of integrating 17 million people whose spiritual and material experiences have been different for 45 years.

This same problem reverberates on the European Community as a whole, though perhaps in a more serious way. While for Germany this stage is likely
to last no more than a few years in its acute form, for the Community it may lead to basic structural changes. While the Monnet method of combining economic interdependence and common institutions to ensure peaceful political integration is a striking success story and indeed represents the only hopeful road for the less peaceful and prosperous parts of the continent, it is not likely that the institutions of the Community—and still less their future extension to political union and military security—can be successfully combined with indefinite enlargement, particularly to countries whose levels of development, economic traditions and international orientation are qualitatively different.

Deepening versus enlarging

Yet it is just as unlikely that the priority of ‘deepening’ over ‘enlargement’ strongly advocated by the French government, and to some extent by the Brussels Commission and by all those Europeanists who are primarily concerned with the functioning of the institutions and the creation of a West European federation, can be maintained for very long. If the former GDR is in, can Austria be refused access? If Austria is in, can Hungary be far behind? If Germany’s weight within the Community increases, does this not necessarily draw the latter more towards Central Europe? Can it then turn a deaf ear to the unanimous aspirations of Central European nations? Can it, for very long, be content with offering help from outside and well-meaning advice on forming a union of their own which would enter into some kind of association with the EC? If and when these nations progress towards democracy and a market economy, will they not be even more insistent than today upon being treated as fully fledged Europeans, and will they not have a point? Once the Cold War and the division of Germany are over, is there any good reason for restricting the Community to Western Europe, other than the pragmatic ones based on considerations of optimal size and on justifications of the ‘First come, first served’ variety?—Though these pragmatic considerations, while less and less psychologically and morally defensible, retain a certain technical validity.

Strengthening and opening

The only way out of this dilemma must be to combine broadening and deepening, to make the challenge of broadening into a reason for greater daring and energy in the direction of deepening—that is, of endowing Europe with common monetary, political and security structures. This is what the majority of the EC governments (not to mention the Commission, whose president, Jacques Delors, is the author of the so-called ‘Bruges formula’ according to which any progress in reunion with the East should lead to a speeding up of integration in the West)\(^9\) claim to be aiming for.

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Of course this is easier said than done, if only because the deepening and the enlarging cannot be done quite by the same partners or quite on the same timescale. Hence 'variable geometry', Europe 'à la carte' and 'multiple speeds', all those slogans which at one time or another have been applied to the process of European integration, are even more valid today, particularly when applied to the problem of dealing with Eastern Europe. But the direction must remain clear: that of an ultimate extension of the Community to the whole of the continent (with, I believe, the permanent or at least longer-term exception of the Soviet Union, which we shall discuss later), preceded and guided by a double process of a political strengthening of the Community and a reorientation of its activities towards the East. I would emphasize that the success or failure of this combination holds the key to the decline or revival both of the Community and of Europe as a whole.

After NATO

The problem is even more difficult, and the prognosis rather less sanguine, for the Atlantic alliance, or at least for NATO. While the Community can easily survive the demise of Comecon and even prosper from it, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the decline of the Soviet military threat, at least in its immediate and visible form, pose much more serious questions for the survival of NATO. After all, a military alliance, let alone a military organization, can hardly thrive without a potential adversary. This does not mean that the presence in Europe of American troops and nuclear weapons, which have constituted the cornerstone of NATO, has outlived its usefulness; and a voluntary alliance of free nations with origins fundamentally different from those of the Warsaw Pact is under no logical compulsion to follow the fate of the instrument of the Brezhnev Doctrine and Soviet domination. But, valid as they are, these arguments are not necessarily convincing for the general public. Secondly, arguments for transforming NATO into a political organization whose mission would be to negotiate arms control agreements are likely to be challenged by the objection that, with each country of the Warsaw Pact having a more independent policy, even on arms control, every day, it is hard to imagine future arms control being handled essentially at the alliance level, rather than political relations taking place primarily either at the bilateral or at the CSCE level. Finally, even if NATO and nuclear weapons do retain a role, and this role constitutes the hard core of Europe's military security, they can no longer provide the primary structuring framework of West-West and East-West relations. They will recede into the background and appear, at best, as necessary but discrete insurance policies. The limelight will belong to pan-European structures rather than to purely Western ones; to economics rather than to security; and above all, to bilateral relations or to universalistic organizations rather than to alliances.

Besides the crumbling of the Warsaw Pact and the decline of the Soviet military threat, the primary reason for this evolution is, of course, the uniting
of Germany. It is likely that, contrary to the stated Soviet preferences, Germany will not be neutralized. But the price for not having a neutral Germany between the two alliances may well be a neutral Europe, or the dissolution of the alliances themselves.

Let us assume that, contrary to their position at the time of writing, the Soviets accept that unified Germany should belong to NATO, with the former GDR remaining non-integrated, or demilitarized, or even hosting some Soviet troops. Let us further assume that Chancellor Kohl wins the December 1990 West German elections and that NATO’s presence in Germany remains substantial and operational (rather than essentially symbolic, as it would seem to be in the discussions of the SPD). How long is this solution, which may look satisfactory on paper, likely to last in reality unless the Soviet Union again appears as a credible military threat? German public opinion may be less united in its commitment to unification than is sometimes assumed; but it definitely is united in wanting to eliminate the limitations on Germany’s sovereignty that were linked with its defeat in the Second World War and with the Cold War. Faced with the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and with a Soviet Union which, whether through friendliness or absorption into its own internal strife, no longer appears as a threat, how long will the Germans tolerate the presence of foreign troops and nuclear weapons, particularly American ones, on their soil? And how long is American public opinion—equally confronted with the evolution in the East, but also with that of German attitudes and with its own budgetary constraints and priorities—going to keep its troops and nuclear weapons in Europe, let alone in a reluctant Germany?

A collective security system

To the feeble extent that any prediction is possible in today’s Europe, it should be relatively safe to predict that in a few years there will be no nuclear weapons and perhaps no foreign troops on German soil; and that those which may remain would justify their residual presence in terms of ‘reassurance’ rather than deterrence,\(^3\) of arms control rather than defence, of contribution to the collective security system advocated by such diverse voices as Mr Shevardnadze, Vaclav Havel and an increasing number of German voices coming from both government and opposition, rather than to an alliance committed to the defence of the West.

This development would in many ways be a welcome and salutary one. While the old problems of European security in terms of the East–West balance have not really disappeared, it is certain that the waning of the Cold War has opened up a whole series of new security problems. Without even mentioning yet the non-military dimensions of security—economic, social, ecological and

so on—it is clear that the dangers of violence in the new Europe come more from the rise of nationalism in the East, from the decay of multinational states like the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and from the minority and border problems of the Balkans. There is little that NATO (or, for that matter, the French or British national nuclear deterrents) can do about civil war in Yugoslavia, Soviet intervention in the Baltic states or conflict between Romania and Hungary. All these potential domestic or inter-state uses of force have more to do with the problems of prewar Europe or of today’s Third World than with the East–West confrontation of the last 45 years.

Hence in order to prevent, solve or, more realistically, to manage and limit these problems, the experience of the League of Nations or that of the United Nations is more relevant than that of NATO. For the first time in postwar Europe (with the exception of Cyprus), attempts at mediation, the sending of observers or international peace forces may be the order of the day.

The question then is whether to look in the direction of a revival of the UN and at an extension of its activities to Europe, or to look to the endowment of a regional organization like CSCE with a true security role. Given the identification of the Helsinki process both with human rights and with the overcoming of Cold War divisions in Europe, it is likely that an institutionalization of CSCE will be the road chosen to give ‘Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals’ or the ‘Common European Home’ its collective security system.

The trouble is that nobody really knows what such a system would consist of, and that the actual record of previous attempts at collective security is pretty depressing. While there are many reasons why today’s Europe, even without military alliances, should be less war-prone than the Middle East or yesterday’s Balkans, there is no reason to believe that any collective security organization would be more effective, particularly if it consists in mobilizing all the states of the international community to punish an aggressor, or in delegating the use of force to a standing common authority. In fact the lesson of the postwar years is that both the classical systems—a flexible multipolar balance of power and world peace through world law—are too unreliable, and that only permanent or preventive integration, or entanglement through physical presence, can bring a new quality of stability based on predictability.

Hence the dilemma: The overcoming of the East–West conflict and of the division of Europe makes the survival of NATO in anything like its present role unlikely; yet no substitute based on East–West cooperation and on the reunification of Europe is likely to provide the same degree of security and predictability.

Many current conceptual efforts are directed at solving or mitigating this dilemma by combining integration and physical presence with all-European structures. One proposal is common membership of Germany (and possibly other European states) in both alliances. Another, broached by the West German SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine in some campaign speeches although not part of his official platform, is a kind of multiple tous azimuts bilateral
integration, with a German–Polish brigade, for instance, being added to the existing Franco-German ones. Multiple reciprocal stationing of forces, national or multinational, by European states on each other’s territories in a ‘reassuring’ or preventive function is another version of the same idea.

A return to Western deterrence

None of these ideas should be rejected out of hand, as their hybrid or seemingly contradictory character does reflect the paradoxes of the emerging European situation. Yet none of them seems very practical, if what is needed goes beyond symbols. They do not escape the traditional weakness of collective security—that they are plausible only if they are not really needed, if European divisions and imbalances have already been overcome.

But suppose the Soviet Union is becoming again more militaristic and threatening. Or suppose that the Eastern part of the continent is in the throes of civil conflict and revolution, while the Western one continues its progress towards political and economic union. Or suppose the extremes of catastrophic decline in the East and of revolutionary unity in the West do not materialize, but the logic of national power reasserts itself in the long run and, as in the past, Germany and Russia (or a federation of Slavic republics or a largely preserved USSR) emerge as the two dominant states in Europe. In all these cases, it is likely that neither the CSCE nor any of the various schemes for reciprocal entanglement would prove very effective in restoring security and balance to the continent. It is, rather, likely that Western Europe, possibly including Germany, would try to reactivate or reconstitute, if not NATO, at least some Western structure or mechanism for military deterrence and political action.

It is in this third phase—after bipolarity and the Cold War, and after the euphoria and the disappointment of all-European cooperation—that the time for a reassertion of a West European defence identity (which is unlikely to constitute a priority for any country in the present atmosphere) may come. Put differently, after the thesis constituted by NATO and the antithesis of CSCE, some kind of European Defence Community may come to represent a synthesis. All the more so since this might be conceived as a West European pillar either of NATO or of CSCE, depending on America’s wish to maintain its presence in Europe and Germany’s wish to maintain special links in the West.

Whatever the precise priority between these two directions and whatever the precise institutional arrangements, the idea would be that the European Community should be structurally tied both to the United States and to Eastern Europe, but that—under whatever roof—it should maintain a distinct identity of its own. This would be desirable not only as a counterbalance against a potentially re-emerging Soviet superiority, not only as a framework for discouraging German temptations, but also in the perspective of the new security agenda. If Western Europe is to exert a mediating or stabilizing role in Eastern Europe, its freedom of diplomatic action will need to be protected against blackmail by its own counter-deterrence.
2. Eastern Europe: beyond liberation

It is all the more urgent for Western Europe to preserve this latter option because its relations with Eastern Europe may well become increasingly complex and unpredictable—the only certainty being the improbability both of complete separation through a new Iron Curtain or Berlin Wall and of harmonious integration free from inequalities and conflicts.

The rush to the West

For Eastern Europe, the Cold War represented both the imposition of alien regimes through Soviet occupation and a forced social, cultural and economic separation from the West. Liberation obviously leads the various East European countries to a rush towards the West—which implies simultaneously claiming their European identity (and hence the recognition of their full rights as Europeans and of the incomplete character of European integration as long as it is limited to the Western half of the continent), adopting democratic and parliamentarian institutions, private property and the market, and expecting their standard of living to rise, in turn, to Western standards.

It is clear that, however justified the immediate urge and the long-term direction may be, short- and middle-run expectations are bound to be disappointed, at least in part. This is due first of all to the objective difficulties of the transition, which will involve government by consent, then to the inner tensions between political and economic reforms, which will involve hardships and inequalities, and then to the lack of appropriate traditions and the long-lasting effects of the communist system. But it is due just as much to the likely West European reaction.

The North–South of East–West

For the reasons quoted above, the EC is reluctant to accept the immediate admission of all the newly democratic East European countries to membership. It is willing to help, but not on the scale the East Europeans expect. Moreover, to the extent that they realize that West European standards will be hard to attain, while conditions in their own countries are deteriorating even further individual East Europeans are tempted to try to find for themselves in the West the freedom and prosperity that elude them in their own countries. This—movement from East to West—was after all the main single factor behind German unification. But while the Federal Republic, legally and politically unable to stem the flood of Übersiedler (from East Germany) and Aussiedler (ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union), saw no other solution than a fuite en avant into unity, this perspective is not open to other East Europeans. On the contrary, while the East European countries are opening up their borders, the Western ones are tending to close theirs. Tens of millions of would-be immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union enter into competition with hundreds of millions from Africa and Latin
America for access to the prosperous and democratic West. To that extent (as with the problem of debt and investment, of trade and aid), East–West relations are losing their specific character and are appearing more and more as a special case of North–South ones, or of relations between the rich centre and the poor peripheries. Hence the danger that the Wall and the Iron Curtain set up by the East for political reasons could be replaced by new barriers set up by the West for economic and demographic ones. But of course the self-isolation that evaded totalitarian states is not a viable option for democratic societies. They have to live with this uncomfortable problem; and their own interest dictates active cooperation in improving conditions in the home countries.

Even between East and West Germans, tensions seem to be increasing out of mutual resentment about the amount of help from the West and of disruption or competition from the East. In turn, both parts of Germany are united in irritation against Poles or other immigrants or temporary workers (particularly from the Third World), who are accused of unfair competition through black market or cheap labour.

**East–East tensions**

And this only illustrates the second type of tensions and inequalities arising in Europe: those between the East Europeans themselves. Clearly the results of the encounter with Western Europe will combine with permanent or resurgent national characteristics to promote an increasing differentiation, as compared to the forced homogeneity of the communist past and to the sentimental but partly superficial unity of European reconciliation.

As in the Third World, but in a much more compressed space, several categories are likely to emerge: some countries playing the role of the region’s ‘little dragons’, and some being in danger of becoming Europe’s Africa.

More than ever, the East Germans will be a class in themselves, as no other country is likely to find a level of salaries, investment or access even remotely comparable to that provided by unity with the FRG and the enthusiasm of West German business. Hungary and Czechoslovakia, for different reasons, may well succeed in their return to Mitteleuropa. The case of Poland hangs very much in the balance. It enjoys, with Solidarity, a unique basis of political and moral legitimacy thanks to which its population has accepted sacrifices which would be unthinkable among its neighbours; but its economic structures and traditions and its diplomatic style (as evidenced by the nervousness and rigidity of its diplomatic actions over German unity and border and minority issues) are very serious handicaps. Romania and Bulgaria encounter no less serious difficulties. Those of multinational countries like Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union are, of course, the most serious of all.

For the North–South divide runs not only across the European continent and within its Eastern part, but within some of its countries themselves. Slovenia

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and Croatia, the Baltic states and Georgia are much more ready to be co-opted into the efficient and prosperous centre than their poorer, more numerous and militarily more powerful orthodox counterparts like Serbia and Russia, not to mention the more backward Muslim republics.

Economic rivalries and jealousies, then, are added to traditional national antagonisms and minority problems. Here the relation with the West, and particularly with Western Europe, can play an important role in steering in the right or the wrong direction. Useful attempts at regrouping along regional lines are being undertaken, sometimes with Western participation, like the November 1989 Budapest meeting of the Southern Four (Hungary, Yugoslavia, Italy and Austria) organized by Italian Foreign Minister de Micheli, or the Bratislava Central European conference called in April 1990 by Vaclav Havel (with the participation of Hungary and Poland and observer status for Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia), or Poland's contacts with the Nordic countries. Yet differences in situation, in political approach (nothing is more striking than the differences in diplomatic conceptions and style between Poland and Czechoslovakia) and to some extent in interests (while President Havel is the most active proponent of Central European confederal structures, his compatriots balk at the idea of free entry for Poles into Czechoslovakia) as well as traditional rivalries make it more likely that, basically, each East European country will undertake its hard and long journey to the West alone—unless the Community itself undertakes to encourage their unity by channelling its help, as the United States did with the Marshall Plan, through common institutions.

Disillusion

This would be all the more desirable as relations with the West are likely to become a major, perhaps the major political stake in the domestic life of former communist countries. Particularly in the cases where attempts at promoting democracy and market economy and, more generally, at ‘rejoining Europe’ will be perceived as failures, these failures will tend to be blamed on an ungrateful and selfish West. The question then is likely to be what kind of regime will intervene in this third, post-disillusionment phase. Will it be an attempt at some kind of social democratic compromise, or a return to a national populism of the left—or, more plausibly, of the right?

After all, this would only repeat traditional patterns. Contrary to common Western beliefs, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are not devoid of democratic traditions. But their prewar history is made up of alternations between formally democratic regimes that were patterned on the French or British model but weak and corrupt, and dictatorships that reacted to the failure of the former in the name of moral regeneration, efficiency and national identity.

Already now, the still prevalent opposition between communists and non-communists is being supplemented or replaced by an articulation along lines of

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Pierre Hassner

economic interests (hence the rise of peasant parties); but still more along traditional lines between 'slavophiles' and 'Westernizers' (as in tsarist Russia), between urbanists and populists (as in Hungary), or between the 'blacks' (i.e. the Church) and secular movements like the intellectual founders of Solidarity in Poland. In other words, the articulation emerging in Central and Eastern Europe is one between national or religious neo-traditionalist populism, and pro-Western democratic or rationalist liberalism.

The pessimistic tone of these remarks, reinforced by the current rise in national clashes in most of these countries, should not be interpreted as predicting the victory of xenophobic or anti-democratic forces. After all, in the interwar period three models competed for the soul of these peoples: the Western democratic one, which looked tired and declining; the fascist one, which looked energetic and on the rise; and the communist one, which appeared as a dangerous threat to most and as an inspiring hope to some. Today the fascist and communist models are dead or discredited, and the liberal capitalist world looks to be not only the only model available but also highly successful economically and politically. This is why it is so vitally important that it should not appear indifferent or—worse—closed to the aspirations of its newly won disciples in the East.

The responsibility of the West in this regard, and the shortness of the time available, cannot be overemphasized. Unlike the past, when the Soviet bloc was inaccessible to Western direct influence; unlike the future, when the Community and Western-style democracy may lose their triumphant glow and the crisis in the East may lead to uncontrollable crises and resentments—now is the time when political help to pro-Western forces, economic and cultural help to their countries and, above all, a coordinated policy of gradual admission of the whole region to West European markets and institutions can make a decisive difference.

Even at the diplomatic and security level, Western Europe may be highly useful—through mediation, warning or surveillance—in defusing national conflicts, provided it has another message beyond 'Leave it to Moscow', as seemed to be the case during the Romanian revolution in December 1989 and the Lithuanian crisis in April/May 1990.

3. The Soviet Union: beyond perestroika

Of course, Moscow is at least as much the problem as it is the solution. Most projections of the European future, particularly in Germany, seem to proceed either from a complacent view according to which the Soviet Union will follow the path of its former satellites towards democracy and the market and become a stable and cooperative partner in a common European order, or from the worry that these positive developments depend on the person of Mikhail Gorbachev, whose power is under threat, so that Western policy should essentially consist in helping him out.

Both perceptions may well correspond to a period which, as Michel Tatu
among others has pointed out, may already be past. Of the various possible 
Soviet futures for the coming years, the two most positive are not the most 
likely. In particular, extrapolating the last three years does not seem very 
plausible, as difficulties and resistances against the policy of retreat are mounting 
as one approaches the hard core of Soviet power. A revolutionary breakthrough 
in the direction of a Soviet Commonwealth based on independent republics, 
genuine multi-party democracy and Polish-style economic reform is the best 
hope on paper, but the chance may already have been lost, and Gorbachev’s 
current hesitations may well be founded on a correct awareness of the limits of 
his power over Soviet society in spite of his constant gains in intra-elite 
struggles.8

Repression and retrenchment

Some of the Western observers who refuse the optimistic scenarios often 
denounce the whole Gorbachev enterprise as a plan designed to capture 
Western good will and technology, only to resume the attack (in the form of 
a Third World War, as Zinoviev asserts, or, less extravagantly, in the form of 
a Brezhnev-like policy of military expansion and pressure) once Moscow has 
overcome its technological lag and lulled the West into dismantling its defences. 
This interpretation has the advantage of serving to justify the survival of 
NATO and the attempts at European defence. But it is highly unlikely that 
even the most hostile and militaristic Soviet leadership could either restore the 
Brezhnev Doctrine or reconquer Eastern Europe or start a bid for global and 
strategic primacy again. Perhaps it could become less forthcoming on a German 
settlement and insist on maintaining its troops in the former GDR indefinitely, 
although it is hard to imagine how it could undo German unification. Certainly 
it would try to keep the inner empire, including the Baltic republics, and it 
would have its hands full with trying to repress the various nationalist and social 
movements and to stop the Soviet Union’s slide into anarchy.

Such a situation—one of a Soviet Union that was nasty, brutish and weak, neither 
the West’s friendly and cooperative neighbour in a ‘Common European Home’, nor a threatening empire occupying half of Europe and bidding for 
continental or global dominance, but a hostile yet inner-directed power—
would raise many unanswered questions about the status of Eastern Europe, of 
NATO and American troops and of East–West relations in general. It would 
be rather reminiscent of the interwar period, minus the international communist 
movement and the threat from Germany.

8 On the other hand, the fact that the Russian Republic, under Boris Yeltsin’s new leadership, seems to be taking the lead in the movement for independence and reform, and to be engaging in direct 
negotiations with other republics, would seem to indicate that the revolutionary decolonization 
Gorbachev has so far refused may occur in spite of him, from below. If Russian nationalism evolves in 
this direction rather than in the imperial one, a new balance may then be found without the agonies 
of repression or civil war. The question remains, though, whether a political game based on 
compromise would not be overtaken by the mounting economic and social tensions and the bloody 
ethnic clashes at the periphery. 18 June 1990.
Collapse

One wonders, however, if it could last very long, and whether it would not precipitate the threat of imperial and social collapse into the anarchy and civil war which it was meant to prevent. Of course, the way in which national and social confrontations leading to revolution or secession would combine is impossible to predict, and so, even more than for the ‘repression plus retrenchment’ hypothesis, are the consequences for Eastern Europe and the West.

Clearly the latter would do its best to avoid repeating its half-hearted interventions of 1917 to 1920. The nuclear dimension would increase both the need for restraint and the need for communication; the problem of refugees and the dangers of territorial overflow would require delicate handling both at the diplomatic and at the humanitarian level. Peace-keeping forces in the short run, and perspectives of integration for whatever islands of peace may emerge, are not to be excluded. But the institutional inclusion of the Soviet Union or what would be left of it into an all-European security system or peaceful order such as Mitterrand’s ‘confederation’ would have, at best, to wait until one or several politically and economically manageable entities—perhaps Russia, perhaps an independent Ukraine, perhaps a Slavic federation—eventually emerged out of the turmoil.

A stable Russia

This last scenario would probably have a chance, then, only in a third phase, after the repression and the anarchy represented by the two preceding ones. There is no way of predicting if, when and how Russia would thus complete its democratization and its Europeanization. One can only assert that these processes are rather more likely after a ‘time of troubles’ than through gradual reform or radical revolution in the present phase, although a voluntary fragmentation through ‘implosion rather than explosion’, to use Enders Wimbush’s phrase, is no longer to be excluded.

Even democratized and ‘cut down to size’ through the loss of its inner empire following the external one, Russia is likely to be different in size and population, in armaments and in domestic institutions from the rest of Europe. Former German Chancellor Kiesinger’s formula about Germany—that it has always been either too weak or too strong for the peace of Europe—may be even more applicable to Russia. Unless it is in the throes of anarchy and civil war, it may be too strong to be included in an institutional structure from which the United States would be absent, as would seem to be the case in de Gaulle’s notion of ‘Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals’ or in some versions of Mitterrand’s ambiguous proposal for a confederation. Who would want such an unpredictable partner, unless this confederation was only another name for CSCE?
The reason I have given such stress to the unpredictabilities of Soviet evolution is that it seems to me that this, along with European political union, holds the key to the evolution of the continent. We are back, then, to where we started. The reason for my scepticism about all-European architecture is that we have entered a period which is closer to 1918 than to 1947. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union was a separate world, isolated in its barbaric rigidity and in its domination over Eastern Europe, while Western Europe, including Germany, could be decisively influenced, if not shaped by the institutional and economic hand of a powerful and eager United States. After the First World War, by contrast, the real question was not that of the precise institutional formula for the League of Nations, but that of American presence or withdrawal, and above all that of the domestic evolution and the ultimate fate of Germany and the Soviet Union.

The difference today is that the first problem—Germany—is happily solved for the time being. Nuclear weapons, economic interdependence, democratic education and, last but not least, European integration would seem to make a resurgence of German totalitarianism and military expansionism almost unthinkable.

The evolution of Eastern Europe is rather more unpredictable, but the range of variations and their impact on the rest of the continent are still limited by size, economic and socio-cultural dependence, and military weakness.

The real question-mark hangs over the vast stretches of an empire which is terminally ill while still a nuclear superpower.

These degrees of unpredictability should also determine degrees of intimacy and of institutionalization. It would be foolish to believe that Europe should cut itself off from the two superpowers. Yet it is clear that its first priorities are the economic and political union of Western Europe and the establishment of structural ties with Eastern Europe leading to its eventual integration. Meanwhile, institutional links with the United States should be maintained and entertained; and the prospect of similar ties with the Soviet Union should be kept open for the day when Europe and the whole civilized world can celebrate ‘the end of Soviet exceptionalism’.

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