The New Europeans: Beyond the Balance of Power

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Europe enters the 1990s reunited, no longer as Western and Eastern Europe. This historic transformation of the Continent has thrown into doubt all the assumptions and verities accumulated over the preceding forty years. The contours of the new Europe will be molded by new generations of Europeans; born after the end of that great caesura, World War II, they are already a majority of the population and will provide the leaders who will refashion the Continent in the 1990s.

This essay will outline the worldview of these new Europeans and the kind of Europe they would like to build. While they will have to react to many factors beyond their control, a sense of what they would like to create will be an important, perhaps decisive, factor in the development of a new Europe.

Their work will be more landscaping than architecture. Unlike Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, and others of the generation that rebuilt postwar Europe, the Europeans of the 1990s are not faced with the task of total reconstruction. They will build on the solid foundations laid in 1945 in Western Europe as they reconstruct the Continent. While they confront an Eastern Europe devastated by two generations of communism, they can approach their mission from a restored Western Europe that is increasingly self-confident and assertive.

Now that the economic and political framework of the new Europe seems clear, the focus here will be on the broad security structure that the new Europeans are likely to prefer. Eastern Europe wishes to adopt what has been developed in Western Europe: the European Community (EC), parliamentary multiparty democracy, and a social-market economy. The security framework, though not so clear, will be crucial in providing the stability and confidence needed for the political and economic structures to prosper.

Defense against What?

Since the end of World War II, Europe has suffered from the common fear that the Soviet Union would use its military preponderance on the Continent to im-
pose its will on its neighbors in Europe. The nations of the eastern part of Europe have directly experienced the consequences of Soviet military power. With the exception of Yugoslavia and Albania, they have had a Stalinist system imposed on them by the Soviet Union. These countries were never allies, only satellites.

The result of this domination has been a strong revulsion by the people of Eastern Europe to the presence of Soviet military forces and of Soviet-style regimes in their countries, tempered by an appreciation for Mikhail S. Gorbachev and his policies toward Eastern Europe. One of the first acts of the newly independent governments in Czechoslovakia and Hungary was a request that the Soviets leave as soon as possible. Poland is likely to follow suit once the border issue with Germany is settled. Germans in the former East Germany are likely to sense a Soviet threat more strongly than those in the West.

The emerging leaders in this part of Europe along with vast majorities of their publics are likely to be primarily concerned about the possibility of the reemergence of a Soviet threat to their independence. This fear, combined with a strong revulsion against communism and the old ruling Communist parties, will favor Christian Democratic, Conservative, Peasant, and Social Democratic parties. The leaders of these parties will do all they can to exit the Warsaw Pact gracefully or at least to pretend to belong and allow the Soviets to pretend to believe it.

With the unlamented demise of the Warsaw Pact, however, comes a series of potential national threats to security. The revival of ethnic rivalries in Bulgaria, Transylvania, and Yugoslavia as well as the dispute over the German-Polish border that flared in early 1990 may become important security concerns for many in these regions. These concerns are unlikely to turn into a new Sarejevo, however, because they are not linked to broader alliance rivalries. But they could threaten to transform parts of central and Balkan Europe into Beirut-like areas. Not much reliable survey data are available on the importance of ethnic nationalism to the people in these regions. Yet it seems likely that the postwar generations are less preoccupied with these traditional conflicts and are more concerned with rebuilding their own polities and economies within a new European framework.¹ This is especially true among the better educated people who are likely to lead in the next decades.

Because of Soviet hegemony, institutionalized by the Warsaw Pact, central Europeans of the postwar generations have not experienced nationalist conflict to the same extent as earlier generations. Many have developed a shared sense of a common destiny with their neighbors, as indicated by their discussions over the renewal of Mitteleuropa and by their common struggles against communism and the Soviet Union.

It is fair to conclude that the revolutions of 1989 were patriotic but not nationalist revolutions.² There has been a revival of nations and also of Europeanism. If central Europe and the Balkans fall into deep economic recessions, the nationalist temptation may grow—especially among desperate politicians. Yet, as a starting point, the political culture of the postwar generations offers hope that Europe will not repeat the mistakes of the first half of the century.

Evidence for this is already present in attitudes toward German unification.
With the exception of Poland, most publics in both central and Western Europe are overwhelmingly in favor of German unification and believe it will benefit rather than harm Europe. Again, the postwar generations are the most open to this development. With regard to Germany, they tend to look to the future rather than to the past: they think of Mercedes rather than the Wehrmacht, of the Federal Republic more than the Third Reich.

In Western Europe, views of the threat are changing. The fear of a Soviet military threat receded over the two decades leading up to 1989. The concern over the Soviet Union as a political or revolutionary threat, a concern that was central to European leaders in the first decade of the cold war, also disappeared as the USSR became an ideological antimodel even for the left in the 1970s. What remained was a residual concern that unbalanced Soviet military power could be used for political intimidation.

These trends were most intense among the postwar generations. Having come of age during the era of détente followed by the decline and collapse of communism, Western Europeans under the age of forty have little sense of a real Soviet threat. Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev—the leader with whom this new generation associates the USSR—remains the most popular world leader, not only for this group but for most Europeans. Even in relatively hard-line France, the number of those believing that the Soviet Union respects the independence of the Eastern European countries has increased from 7 percent in 1982 to 40 percent in 1989.4

In contrast, the new Europeans have viewed America as less of a protector than a threat or at best as part of the landscape. Part of this generation was socialized in the 1960s and formed their views of America during the Vietnam War. Another group, which came of age in the 1980s, has been simultaneously repelled by the militarism of the Reagan administration and attracted by the continuing dynamism of the American economy and of its popular culture.

These new generations, no longer concerned about an invasion from the East, now fear a nuclear war precipitated by both superpowers. The debate over the Euromissiles in the 1980s was seen by many—especially in the university-educated group—as being dangerously irrelevant, fostering an arms race and raising the prospect of conflict while ignoring more pressing issues, such as environmental threats and the problems of economic underdevelopment.

With the moderation of American policies during the last years of the Reagan administration and the early Bush administration, European confidence in American leadership has been largely restored. Yet as the perceived need for the American security umbrella has declined, so has the willingness to follow the American lead.

The fear of the Soviet threat or of a superpower war in Europe has been replaced by concerns over environmental problems, the North-South relationship, and the growing prospect of instability in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The new Europeans in the West now worry about the implications of the implosion of the Soviet Union rather than its expansion. They are concerned about the dangers of economic collapse on the eastern side of the Continent and about the problems that immigration and demands for economic assistance could create for them.
The new generation of leaders coming to power in the West view Germany with more optimism than do those who lived through World War II. Like their counterparts in Eastern Europe, they have not experienced Germany as an invader or occupier but as a country of good democrats and good Europeans. They seem less worried that the new Germany will pose a security threat to them or anyone else in Europe. While a good deal of concern can be found among the current generation of leaders about possible instability resulting from German unification and the upheavals in the East, few postwar Europeans seem to share these concerns.

In short, the 1990s are likely to produce leaders in the West who will be relatively sanguine about their security and devalue the utility of military force in Europe. These leaders are likely to see threats as nonmilitary in nature and requiring nonmilitary solutions. The leaders of the new democracies in the East will be more pessimistic about the Soviet Union but will be preoccupied with the problems of building democracies and market economies and therefore unlikely to have so much influence on the broader shape of European security policy as those in the West.

With the Soviets out of central Europe militarily and overwhelmed by their internal problems for some time, Europeans, like Americans, wish to maximize their peace dividend and to turn to the great challenge of building a European architecture as well as dealing with their own domestic problems. If ethnic violence breaks out in central Europe or the Balkans, they will try to mediate the disputes but are unlikely to organize any military response.

How these new leaders confront threats to European interests outside Europe will be a key test for the future of their security policies. Europe will continue to remain far more dependent than the United States on the developing world for its raw materials. In addition, the proliferation of chemical and nuclear threats from non-European countries could pose a serious problem for Europe in the 1990s. The decline of dependence on the United States for military protection may produce a European assertiveness in defending interests in the Middle East and other vital areas. The Europeans may repeat their actions in the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War and begin to deploy their forces outside the context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and separate from American control, possibly offering key Arab and other states an alternative to the American protectorate.

To this point, European leaders and publics alike have preferred to deal with regional problems through diplomatic and economic instruments of policy. With the exceptions of France in Africa and Britain in the Falkland Islands, Europe has relied on the United States military, while often criticizing it. This could begin to change with a more assertive Europe. European publics have been less critical of European military actions outside Europe than they have of American operations. Terrorism, both international and domestic, is more than an abstract threat in Western Europe, and public concerns combined with a growing gap with the United States over the Middle East may make counterterrorism an important European security matter. This could continue to foster a Euro-American divergence.
In Search of a New Collective Security

European leaders in the 1990s will respond to an environment with a residual Soviet threat and a more palpable nationalist one. They will also have to be more responsive to instability and military contingencies in the developing world, especially in the Middle East. Their former ally, the United States, will be less essential for security and possibly a greater adversary in economic conflict.

Faced with this new context, Europeans have a number of security options: they can continue to rely on NATO, though in a restructured form; they can push forward with a European defense community separate from the United States; or they can move toward a pan-European security arrangement. At the beginning of 1990, NATO remained the popular choice for most Europeans. Support for membership in NATO was higher in most European countries in the 1980s than at any other time in the postwar period. A survey conducted by the Gallup organization in October 1989 found that majorities in all NATO countries except Denmark, Spain, and Portugal still believed that NATO should be maintained; only in Spain was there a plurality agreeing that it was not necessary. It seems that acceptance of NATO is not directly related to the Soviet threat, for while the perception of that threat has fallen steadily, support for NATO has not. To the younger generations, the alliance—like the European Economic Community (EEC)—has always been part of the European landscape. It has become associated with the stability of the postwar period and remains a valuable insurance policy to many, yet one on which the premiums may now be substantially lowered.

To many, NATO also has an important dimension for Europe (as it has for Spain) or may be seen as useful to small states (as it is to the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) or as an instrument of conflict management (as it is in Greece and Turkey). Most important, NATO remains identified with the American connection to European security, a connection that still seems to be prudent.

With the end of the Eastern bloc, NATO will be pressured either to diminish its military role or eventually to allow itself to be replaced by a more European organization. This pressure will be due to a combination of interacting factors, including the lowered sense of threat from the East, a growing Europeanism that is likely to include defense, and a reduced desire on the part of the United States to play the military role it has in Europe since 1945. European defense is therefore likely to be Europeanized by the end of the century.

There will be a debate within Europe in the 1990s over the institutional form of collective security and the role of deterrence within it. The nuclear powers, Britain and France, will retain and expand their nuclear forces. The publics in those countries have continued to support their national deterrents, although they have increasing doubts about the desirability of American nuclear weapons in their countries. The new leaders of Britain and France are also likely to wish to maintain these forces because they convey a special power status that nonnuclear states lack, because nuclear deterrence is still viewed as more effective than conventional deterrence, because nuclear weapons are cheaper than conventional forces (a consideration of growing importance in a decade of peace dividends), and be-
cause the American presence in Europe looks more questionable than at any other
time in the postwar period. They may also be more concerned about the dangers of
chemical and nuclear proliferation to smaller and less stable states and will see their deterrents as insurance policies against blackmail from these new nuclear and chemical powers.

The key debate will be within nonnuclear Europe, and Germany is especially
crucial. The German public remains divided on the need for nuclear deterrence, but antinuclear sentiments, which grew in the 1980s, will continue to strengthen as the Soviet Union withdraws from the eastern portion of the Continent. The partisan dissensus on nuclear questions remains deep, and the pronuclear Christian Democrats are increasingly on the defensive on this issue.

While pressure to eliminate all short-range nuclear forces in Germany will un-
doubtedly succeed, a residual longer-range nuclear deterrent could be politically sustainable. Germany will not have the independent deterrent option because of both external and internal resistance. The German military and the Christian Democrats are likely to continue to believe in the necessity of nuclear deterrence and to remain hostile to an exclusive reliance on conventional deterrence. The highest-ranking Bundeswehr officer, Admiral Dieter Wellershoff, said in April 1988 that “the history of war is . . . the history of the failure of purely conventional deterrence.” This sentiment continues to be repeated by key civilian and military officials in the Ministry of Defense.

The Social Democrats have moved away from the concept of deterrence, how-
ever, and have embraced the notion of common security: confidence-building measures, arms control, and détente rather than the threat of force. To the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the new collective security structure of Eu-
rope should be a strengthened, institutionalized Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). An SPD government would remove all nuclear weapons from German soil and would foster pan-European cooperation in lieu of deterrence. The SPD has talked about a European Security Agency that would comprise both Eastern and Western Europe and make NATO — and, to a great ex-
tent, a European defense community — anachronistic in the new Europe.

If this view prevails, the ability of Europe to develop an effective deterrence arrangement would be dealt a fatal blow. Yet this is unlikely, because an SPD government would be subject to pressures from its European partners to remain within a multilateral military framework and because many Social Democrats would be concerned that an alliance-free Germany might tempt the right to push for an independent nuclear force. Thus some link either to a Europeanized NATO or to a more purely European defense force will be seen as necessary.

Central Europeans will continue to be more concerned about their security than Western Europeans. Soviet forces will remain only a matter of hours away from
their borders, and the consequences of instability bred by nationalist conflicts are more direct, even existential. As the Warsaw Pact is seen as an instrument of sup-
pression rather than of protection, Soviet attempts to revive it as a political alli-
ance have no real prospect of success. Only Poland has a strong enough fear of a united Germany to sustain any sort of security relationship with the Soviet Union.
What are the alternatives? Central Europeans can hope to enmesh themselves in a larger pan-European system, push for NATO membership, or pursue bilateral treaties with their neighbors or powerful outside states. The NATO option, raised by the former Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn and others, is not a serious one and is intended more for election campaigns than for statecraft. The most popular alternative among the new leaders of this region seems to be the CSCE combined with membership in the EEC and the eventual development of the European Community (EC) into a political and defense community. The classic strategy of these states in the interwar period was to attempt to create a web of international guarantees for their sovereignty backed up with a series of insurance treaties with Britain and France. The unhappy lesson of that experience as well as that of World War I is that purely national solutions do not work and the balance of power is unreliable. Thus it makes sense for Czechoslovakian President Václav Havel and others to search for larger European frameworks.

The best that these small and vulnerable states can hope for is a tacit security umbrella guaranteed by Western Europe and gradually extended through membership in the EC. Already the security status of central Europe has been transformed in the eyes of most Western Europeans. Because the Eastern bloc no longer exists, these states are no longer considered a Soviet sphere of influence by Europeans and thus no tacit right of intervention is acceptable. A Soviet military action would not be viewed as a repeat of the invasion of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968 but would be closer to 1939 in the view of many Europeans. Such a move would be very dangerous and would be more likely to escalate to a pan-European conflict than any crisis since the end of World War II. At the same time, European leaders and publics are sensitive to any provocations or direct challenges to what are considered legitimate Soviet security concerns. Thus, barring a complete implosion of the USSR, the extension of formal military alliances to former Warsaw Pact members is not a serious policy option for at least the next decade. Even if a united Germany becomes a member of NATO, it will not allow NATO forces to be introduced in the former territory of East Germany.

The future security architecture of Europe will consist of a variety of levels. At the pan-European level, an institutionalized CSCE is likely to develop and to receive broad elite and public support. Below that level will be the gradual expansion of the EEC. It is likely to become a monetary and political union as well as develop a defense identity while gradually extending to central Europe associate-member status. As these polities and economies recover, they will eventually integrate within the EEC and gain the security benefits of a European umbrella. Finally, NATO will probably continue to provide the interim framework necessary for the reassurance needed as the Continent Europeanizes its own defense.

Should Europeanization fail because of a resurgence of nationalism in central Europe, especially in Germany, then a security network based on a series of bilateral treaties—i.e., a return to a balance-of-power system—is probable. This system would differ from the interwar system in that it would rely on nuclear deterrence but might also proliferate nuclear weapons in Germany, Poland, and other countries.
Conclusion

European history has returned to the Europeans once again. The era in which the superpowers controlled Europe's destiny is coming to an end. During an interregnum of about half a century, Europe under American protection was able to lay the foundations of a new postnational order through two key institutions, the European Community and NATO. Those once under Soviet domination are faced with the task of repairing the damage done and reintegrating into a common European home. As the forced harmony of Soviet control leaves with Soviet troops, will Europe once again miss opportunities as it did after World War I? Will it return to that time or go even further back, to the prenational heritage of Medieval Europe and of the Holy Roman Empire—to a Europe in which regions mattered more than nations?

The generation of leaders who will guide Europe in the 1990s will have to answer this question. They seem poised to create a Europe beyond the nation-state. Postwar Germans in particular seem to have little inclination to take an independent national route. They are more hesitant than other Germans about unification because they do not want to reawaken nationalism. Their values and attitudes give them a postnational identity that is likely to prefer policies of European integration over a separate German path. Their counterparts throughout Europe share this set of predispositions. The prospects, then, for a Europe quite different from that of pre-1945 seem good. This working model of the EC—combined with forty years of experience in a multinational security organization that has been more than a traditional alliance—means that supranationalism is not utopian.

The question of security may prove to be the most difficult one for this generation, which devalues the political utility of military force and tends to assume that stability in Europe is a given. Its sanguine view of the Soviet Union could be shaken by a more threatening regime in the future. Its distance from the United States, at least in security policy, is liable to undermine transatlantic cooperation in the future. The integration of central Europe may revive a sense that a security problem remains.

Yet if the trends toward the democratization of the Soviet Union continue, the new generation of European leaders in the 1990s has the historic opportunity to create a revived, prosperous, and democratic Europe whose postnational security system could serve as a model for other regions.

Notes


in FBIS, *Western Europe: Daily Report*, 22 Dec. 1989, 38; and "Political, German Reunification Views Polled," 2. These surveys, conducted in January 1990, found general approval for German unification in all of Europe except in Poland and the Soviet Union.


5. A survey of West German opinion taken in February 1990 found that people believed the most important tasks for their government to be environmental protection (mentioned by 60%), combating unemployment (52%), housing construction (44%), unification (23%), and — least important — military security (3%). "Einheit? Ja, aber Bitte billing!," *Die Zeit* (North American ed.), 16 Mar. 1990, 3.


