

THE
GROOVES
OF
CHANGE



EASTERN EUROPE
AT THE TURN
OF THE
MILLENNIUM

J . F . B R O W N

The
Grooves
of
Change

The Grooves of Change

Eastern
Europe
at the Turn
of the
Millennium

J. F. Brown

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

DURHAM AND LONDON

2001

©2001 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Typeset in Minion by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

appear on the last printed page of this book.

Portions of chapter 4 previously appeared in articles in *Transitions*
and in *Building Democracy* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharp, for the

Open Media Research Institute, Prague, 1996).

Reproduced by permission of the editor,

Transitions.

For Arthur, Roley, and Louis,
unlikely musketeers

Let the great world spin for ever
down the ringing grooves of change
—Alfred, Lord Tennyson,
“Locksley Hall”

Contents

	List of Maps	xi
	Preface	xiii
1	Coming into Being	1
2	Communist Rule: La Longue Durée	28
3	Economics 1945–2000: Behemoth	60
4	Democracy: Stumbling Forward	73
5	Country Profiles: Facing the Future	107
6	The First Yugoslav War: Serbs, Bosnians, Croats	144
7	Kosovo: The Clash of Two Nationalisms	162
8	Key Minorities and Key Questions	200
9	Looking Outward and Inward	215
10	The Last Word: Urgency	241
	Notes	245
	Index	265

List of Maps

1	Eastern Europe in 1914	4
2	Eastern Europe in 1925	22
3	Postwar Population Movements (boundaries in 1947)	31
4	Eastern Europe in 1949	47
5	Eastern Europe in 1995	83

Preface

IN 1994 DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS published *Hopes and Shadows: Eastern Europe After Communism*. It followed two books by me that Duke Press also had published: *Eastern Europe and Communist Rule* (1988) and *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (1991). This book is both similar to and different from those other three. It confines itself to the seven former communist countries of Eastern Europe—Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (both once Czechoslovakia), Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the successor states of Yugoslavia—but it also looks at these countries in the perspective of the twentieth century and at their prospects for the new century.

I retain the term “Eastern Europe,” not only out of habit or because of its sequential convenience in following the titles of my other books for Duke. (Back in 1966, my very first book was called *The New Eastern Europe*.) Instead, I do so because the term still has its uses. It provides a suitable framework in which to discuss the abiding features of the region’s modern history: its basic continuity; the prominence of ethnic and national factors; the region’s dependence on great powers or combinations of powers outside it; the north-south divide between East Central and South Eastern Europe; its overall political and economic deprivation; the intense variety within it that has defied definition and generalization. Besides, many of the problems that these countries face are similar, the attempts to deal with them are comparable, their successes and failures are relevant and illustrative. I am aware, of course, of the argument that the term “Eastern Europe” should have died in 1989 with the cold war, that a one-time convenience had become an offensive inaccuracy. In keeping with this argument, I accept that “Eastern Europe” is on its way to becoming a solecism or fading into

oblivion. But there is still some way to go. Take one simple fact: leaving aside the Yugoslav catastrophe, what divides East Central Europe (“Central Europe”) from South Eastern Europe is still in some key respects of much less significance than what divides it from virtually the whole of Western Europe. As the one gap widens and the other narrows, then the term “Eastern Europe” will indeed become as untenable as it is now unfashionable. In the meantime, though, it survives—eroding but not erroneous.

In this regard, I am myself trapped in an inconsistency. I believe Russia is part of Europe and that it must be brought patiently into the European fold. Obviously, therefore, it is part of Eastern Europe. But I do not cover it in this book. (A review in 1995 took me to task for not doing so in *Hopes and Shadows*.) There are four reasons for my not doing so: (1) it would require more space than this volume avails; (2) precedent, since my earlier books have covered only the seven countries specified; (3) proportion, since Russia would crowd out Eastern Europe, diminishing if not demeaning it, making it “Zwischen-Europa,” a totally unacceptable term; (4) ignorance, since my knowledge of Russia is “fringe”; ignorance, of course, is an impediment that seldom deters, but Russia, of all places, is not for fools rushing in.

This book is painted with a broad brush, and it is judgmental. I make no apology for either. It is, if you like, more the distillation than the extent of what I know. I hope only that too many generalizations have not become oversimplifications. I have assumed some knowledge on the part of the reader, or at least a willingness to quarry below the surface. I also have tried not to suffocate the book with a surfeit of footnotes. As to judgments, I cannot avoid them in a book like this one. I hope that they are strong enough without being too opinionated. In parts, I can be charged with repetitiveness, especially when dealing with ethnic and minority issues. Why not one chapter covering them for the whole of the twentieth century and beyond? Perhaps. But I was anxious to show how these issues have overshadowed, even bedeviled, every period that the book covers. Hence, the cumbersome chronological approach. I also sometimes quote longer or shorter passages from my earlier books. This is done neither because I think these books are the best, nor because they are the only ones that I have read. Instead, I have done so because the passages quoted fit in with the continuity of my thinking over a number of years, or they illustrate the corrections or modifications necessary to it.

Many people have helped me with this book. I am grateful to them. I name them in no sort of order, except the first: Margaret, my wife, to whom I am

most grateful of all. The rest are Vlad Sobell, Vladimir Kusin, Barbara Kliszewski, Tom Szayna, Steve Larrabee, Vera Tolz, Jan de Weydenthal, Jiri Pehe, Viktor Meier, Michael Shafir, Dan Ionescu, Evelina Kelbecheva, Aglica Markova, Louis Zanga, Franz-Lothar Altmann, Anneli Ute Gabanyi, Pat Moore, “Dimi” Panitz, Mark Thompson, Stefan Troebst, and Evie Sterner. Not all of them would agree with everything I say; precious few, probably. But I owe all of them a debt.

This book had a difficult birth. It needed a good midwife. It got one in Valerie Millholland, editor and friend at Duke University Press. Yet again, my gratitude. It got a good editor, too, in Bob Mirandon, who has edited my last three books for Duke Press. Many thanks also go to Pam Morrison at the press. I couldn’t have been luckier, and couldn’t be more grateful.

Lynne Fletcher typed the manuscript with skill, patience, and humor. What more could a pen pusher want?

Dr. F. Stephen (Steve) Larrabee read the manuscript thoroughly and made many advantageous recommendations—in fact, saving me from minor disasters in several places. My thanks to a friend of thirty years.

Looking back beyond this book to the time when I began working on Eastern Europe, I think especially of four men: Charles Andras, a colleague, counselor, and friend; Pierre Hassner, who matches wisdom with fun and humanity; the late General C. Rodney Smith, who was an example and an inspiration; and the late Gordon Sterner, a much remembered friend.

I spent several months in 1995–96 working for the Aspen-Carnegie International Commission on the Balkans, based in Berlin, always a capital city. David Anderson was one of the commissioners. He died in 1997. He was a good, able man, much loved by those who worked for him. For me it was a privilege knowing him.

I spent the spring semester of 2000 teaching at the American University in Bulgaria. It is located in Blagoevgrad, a vibrant little town, geographically and historically just about as Balkan as you can get. My students were of a high order and from more than a few of them I learned more about Balkan experiences and attitudes than I could have from countless textbooks and endless miles of travel. I thank them, salute them, and wish them well.

The Oxford Public Library and the Maison Française in Oxford were very helpful. But the two institutions to which I have always been most indebted are the Radio Free Europe Research Department and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. I joined the one in 1957 and have been reading the other

since 1959. To say I am grateful gives absolutely no idea of how lost I would have been without them.

This is the last book I shall write about Eastern Europe. But the interest remains. So do the concern and the affection.

Jim Brown
October 2000

Coming into Being

THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE East European nations stemmed not so much from their own exertions, however considerable, as from the exhaustion and collapse of the empires that ruled them. The maintenance of that independence has depended mainly on the will of others. Its permanence, therefore, could never be taken for granted. That is the basic and continuing lesson of modern East European history.

But we must immediately enter a caveat. When we refer to the independence of *nations* we mean the independence of those East European nations that became nations-of-state, “majoritarian nations.” Thus, we encounter another determining factor in modern East European history: its glut of nations and the relations between them.

In a book published in 1988 I wrote:

Eastern Europe has never been rich in natural resources, but it has always been rich in nations. It covers an area about two-thirds the size of Western Europe. But, whereas Western Europe is more or less exclusively covered by five large nations—the Germanic, French, Hispanic, Anglo-Celtic, and Italian—Eastern Europe has more than fifteen nations jostling within its boundaries. Nor are many of these nations compact units: many have sizable minorities of other nations in their own midst and members of their own nation enveloped by others. The patchwork quilt has been produced by historical events that still embitter the atmosphere in many parts of the region today, often evoking nationalism in its more virulent forms.¹

What has characterized the relations of these nations is not unity or cooperation, but the struggle for mastery and survival. Some nations would

have preferred being left alone in their former subjection; their older masters were better than the new. The superior status of some was reduced to inferiority overnight. Many states found that their unity under oppression melted away when the oppression was over. The end of the great imperialisms begat little imperialisms. And these little imperialisms often were more virulent than the old.

Another major theme of this book is the distinctiveness between the two parts of Eastern Europe: East Central Europe and South Eastern Europe (the “Balkans”). The two areas, many would argue, are more than distinct: they are so different as to be incomparable—even incompatible. Perhaps. But throughout their history the independent states in both these parts of Eastern Europe have shared similar experiences in state-building and in political and economic development. They have also operated in the same international setting; parts of both regions have been ravaged by the two world wars. All of them for nearly a half-century were pressed into the communist mold. These experiences are still fresh and relevant enough to warrant an overall, if discriminating, perspective. It was the twentieth century that pulled them together. Early in the twenty-first century, the ties that once bound them will drop away.

Finally, a fourth major theme is continuity. The successive phases of modern East European history—imperial subjection, precarious independence, Soviet communist domination, and now renewed independence—would seem to be so different from one another as to preclude any suggestion of continuity. But, though it is too much to see history as essential continuity regardless of change, it remains true that all change, including revolution, has elements of continuity. In Poland, until recently, citizens’ habits, attitudes, even personalities, differed according to whether their forebears had lived in Russian, Austrian, or Prussian Poland during the partitions. Other East European nations show marks of their imperial histories more obviously than the Poles do. Historical and national peculiarities helped to break up the flat standardization of communism. Now, after 1989, communism itself has left some indelible footprints.

Freedom Through Diplomacy

In the Balkans the course of independence lasted a whole century, starting with Serbia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, ending with the independence of Albania in 1912 and finally the creation of Yugoslavia after

World War I. In between, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria became independent.² The will to national independence was there, and so were the heroism, the effort, the sacrifice. But it was the decline of the Ottoman empire, beginning in the seventeenth century, that decisively eased the process of independence. And what finally secured it was the diplomatic interplay of the great European powers, the workings of the “balance of power.”

Many attempts have been made to define the balance of power, some downright incomprehensible. Bismarck’s remains the crispest definition, as befits its most skillful practitioner: “Always try to be one of three in a world of five great powers.”³ The balance of power was a fluid concept, shifting and changing according to circumstance. But it governed international relations for much of modern history, and it was the midwife of Balkan independence.

The Congress of Berlin in June–July 1878 saw the balance of power at its zenith. In March 1877, Russia had brought into being through the Treaty of San Stefano imposed on Turkey not just an independent Bulgaria but a “Greater Bulgaria.” It was good for the Bulgarians, obviously, but it also was good for the Russians, greatly enhancing their power in the Balkans. Hence, it upset the balance of power and alarmed Britain, Austria-Hungary, and Germany. Those countries faced down Russia, and the Treaty of San Stefano was revoked; the new Bulgaria was drastically reduced and a certain normalcy was restored. But, as often happened in the workings of the balance of power, where one problem was solved, another emerged. The “Macedonian Question” has now straddled three centuries. It began in earnest toward the end of the nineteenth century, continued throughout the twentieth, and is still unresolved at the beginning of the twenty-first (see chapter 7).

Freedom Through Ideology

World War I marked the end of the nineteenth century and the classic concept of the balance of power. The war itself was the sign and the measure of the demise of the balance of power, which did not immediately die. The mind-set that it had shaped lingered on irrelevantly for many years. After 1945, too, a new East-West balance of power emerged in Europe, but this was a rigid security balance, not a flexible diplomatic one. As the *governing* principle for international relations in Europe, the balance of power was dead. It had been an effective principle for most of the nineteenth century because it suited the powers that conducted it. It collapsed mainly because it



1. Eastern Europe in 1914. © Bartholomew Ltd 2000. Reproduced by permission of HarperCollins Ltd, Bishopbriggs, Scotland.

did not suit the ambitions of the newly reunited Germany. Bismarck would have gone on playing the game, but Kaiser Wilhelm II had neither the will nor the wit to.

At the Paris peace treaty meetings in 1919 and 1920, ideology touched down on the European scene in the person of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and the doctrine of national self-determination. Wilson's insistence on this principle led to a drastic redrawing of the map of Eastern Europe, which called for the re-creation of Poland, the creation of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the survival of Albania, and the drastic diminution of Hungary. "Eastern Europe," as it generally was to be known through the rest of the twentieth century, came into being.

The new Wilsonian ideology, however, came and went. Wilson's policy was repudiated by the U.S. Congress, and the United States returned to isolationism, refusing to guard and smooth the wheels it had set in motion. In the meantime, two new ideologies, lethal threats to Wilsonianism and to democracy, had appeared on the European scene: communism and fascism. Soviet communism primarily threatened Russia's internal order. But, behind it, Russian imperialism threatened the new Eastern Europe. Italian fascism was imperialist-inspired, while German fascism was racist, imperialist, revanchist, and vengeful. Eastern Europe was also threatened by the machinations of two of its own states: Hungary and Bulgaria, "losers" at the Paris peace settlements and lackeys first of Italy, then of Germany. These ambitions, combinations, and machinations led to the destruction of inter-war Eastern Europe and to World War II.

Still, for nearly twenty years, this new Eastern Europe survived. Geographically, Poland was its largest state. The Polish state had been destroyed in the second half of the eighteenth century, partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. But the Polish nation, though losing its freedom, never lost its will or its coherence. World War I gave it the opportunity to again move toward freedom, and the Treaty of Versailles brought the Polish state back to life.

The most spectacular, but eventually unsuccessful, state creations after World War I were Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, both daringly multinational. They were not the direct creations of the Paris treaties; they were inspired and conceived locally. But it was Wilsonianism that secured them. The original inspiration for them came from the nineteenth-century Romantic notion that ethnic and linguistic similarities could override cultural and historical differences and secure multinational states. This turned out

to be a destructive myth. Wilsonianism was also to founder on the complexities of European history and on the depths of ethnic prejudice. A prolonged period of peace might have secured the success of the new East European order. But a prolonged period of peace could have been ensured only by what the United States in 1920 was not ready to give: a strong presence in, and commitment to, Europe. Britain and France could not secure the new principles that the United States had pressed in the peace settlements. They were too weak; and they were less than enthusiastic about these principles, anyway. Indirectly, they even encouraged the forces that destroyed them.

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were cases of self-determination vulgarized and gone wrong. In 1921, more than 5 million Czechs lived in Czechoslovakia along with slightly less than 3 million Slovaks. More than 3 million Germans (slightly outnumbering the Slovaks), more than 700,000 Hungarians, and nearly 500,000 Ruthenians (Ukrainians) made up the rest of the population.⁴ These figures reflected a dangerous lack of ethnic balance, even when only measured in raw numbers. Officially, Czechs and Slovaks were lumped together as “Czechoslovaks,” a presumptuous Czech insistence that symbolized their scant regard for Slovak sensitivities. (Westerners routinely referred to “Czechoslovaks” as “Czechs.”) Thus, 9 million “Czechoslovaks” resided in a country of slightly more than 13.5 million—hardly a commanding majority for an alleged majoritarian nation, especially when most Slovaks saw themselves as anything but majoritarian. In multinational states, however, numbers were by no means everything. History and attitudes counted for more. The Germans in Czechoslovakia had been the master nation in Bohemia and Moravia under the Habsburgs, and, almost without exception, they bristled rebelliously over the postwar dispensation. The Hungarians, too, had been masters, the historic “owners,” of Slovakia, and they were just as adamant in their rejection of the new order. Wide discrepancies also existed in the civilizational level between the nations in the new Czechoslovakia. Germans, generally, were at the highest level, and many Czechs were up to the German level; certainly, Czechs were higher than most Hungarians. Slovaks were the next lowest in order, and Ruthenians pooled at the bottom. Interspersed among these nations were more than 300,000 Jews. In the Czech provinces, Jews certainly stood at the highest civilizational level; farther to the east, however, they often were just as poor as their fellow citizens, although usually better educated and more “savvy.”

Yugoslavia was to be an even more damaging case of multinational failure. At first, the Yugoslav concept was not welcomed by the Serbs, who subsequently accepted it as the best option available. The Serbs' basic aim was to have "all Serbs under one roof," a twentieth-century update of Ilya Garašanin's *načertanije* idea.⁵ They were now determined to twist the Yugoslav idea in the interests of Serbia; Yugoslavia would become, in fact, an extension of Serbia. But, even without the Serb Herrenvolk complex, this hastily cobbled Yugoslavia would have been difficult to contain. Slovenia and Croatia both insisted on being considered "Central European." Then came the Yugoslav "others": the Macedonians, most of whom had little national consciousness and found themselves in "South Serbia"; the Albanians, shut out of the new Albanian state and becoming ever more numerous in both Serb Kosovo and Serb Macedonia; and then the Turks, Vlachs, Gypsies, and many others. The Bosnian Muslims turned out to be the most crucial of all these others. After being slighted, or even discounted, for most of the twentieth century, they seared into the European conscience at the end of it.

The Ethnic Dimension

For every problem solved by the World War I settlements in Eastern Europe, another was made; for every injustice removed, a new injustice was created. This ominous confusion came about because of the ubiquity and intractability of the "ethnic dimension." (See chapters 6 and 7.) The coerciveness of former empires had served as a bridle on ethnic tensions, but once Austria-Hungary, Germany, the Ottoman empire, and tsarist Russia collapsed, the bridle was gone. Similarly, after 1989, when the Soviet empire and the communist system collapsed, the bridle that had been reset after 1945 was removed again, and historic tensions revived. The ethnic dimension had never really disappeared, but now it was back with no restraints.

Ethnic problems were by no means confined to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Romania, the big winner of the Paris peace treaties, had acquired Transylvania, which had a large and proud Hungarian community, and South Dobrudja, with a large Bulgarian populace. Bulgaria still had a very large Turkish community despite the Turkish exodus after virtual independence in 1878. The new Poland had more than 5 million Ukrainians, about 3 million Jews, and at least 2 million Germans. Even Hungary still had a relatively large minority of Slovaks, many of them in various stages of Magyarization.

Different types of national minorities also abounded.⁶ Among the most significant and most problematical were the contiguous minorities, those living adjacent to the frontiers of a state ruled by members of their own nation. Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, Ruthenia, Yugoslavia, and Romania fell into this category, although in Transylvania, just to complicate matters, a large swath of Romanians, the new majoritarian nation, lived still closer to the new frontier with Hungary. In Bulgaria, more than half the Turkish minority lived adjacent to Turkey in the southeastern part of the country. The Kosovo Albanians (Kosovars) and most of the Macedonian Albanians lived next to Albania, where a large Greek minority lived adjacent to the border with Greece. Nor was the situation less acute in East Central Europe. Most of Poland's Ukrainian and Belorussian minorities lived next door to the Soviet Union, which had established "self-governing republics" in Ukraine and Belorussia. Large numbers of Lithuania's Polish minority fronted onto Poland.

Germans made up a huge minority in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, probably about 10 million in all. Many in Czechoslovakia and Poland lived adjacent to, or very near, Germany, but most resided in Yugoslavia, Romania, and Hungary as well as in the Soviet Union. By and large, the Germans were decent and constructive citizens until many of them succumbed to the temptations of Nazism after 1933.⁷

Other characteristics of minorities were just as meaningful as adjacency or nonadjacency. Two of them, closely linked, require a brief discussion.

REVERSAL OF STATUS

Some ethnic groupings had suddenly become minorities after generations, even centuries, of supremacy; often they once had dominated the very nations that now lorded it over them. These included Germans, Hungarians, Turks, Bosnians, and Albanian Muslims. Others had always been minorities—some tolerated, but most exploited, oppressed, and victimized. These included Jews, Vlachs, and Gypsies. In addition, some tiny minorities had no historical role except to be subjugated or ignored.

MINORITY ATTITUDES

No nation takes kindly to being knocked off its perch, but some were less philosophical about it than others. The Hungarians and the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia were such groups; so were the Hungarians in Transylvania. Whether they would have become more reconciled, or at least

resigned, had they not been stirred up from outside is open to debate. So can a converse question be debated: would the Balkan Turks, left high and dry by Ottoman disintegration, have been less resigned to their fate had they not thought that Kemal Atatürk's new Turkey had washed its hands of them.

Finally, a sobering reminder. Some of the worst treatment of minorities is by other minorities. Looked down on by the majority nation, every minority looks for other minorities that *it* can look down on. That has been the iron law of ethnic relations not only in Eastern Europe, but also in Western Europe and the United States, despite differing contexts.

MUSLIMS, JEWS, AND GYPSIES

These three large minorities deserve special attention. It is difficult to imagine three more different groups, yet a unique characteristic defined them: they had no homeland, or, more correctly, they were perceived, or perceived themselves, as having none. The Gypsies certainly did not. Neither did the Jews. (Zionism was barely afloat in 1918, and the ink scarcely dry on the Balfour Declaration.) With the Muslims, the situation was complex. They had lost the Ottoman setting, with which they had identified and in which they felt secure. Certainly, some Albanian Muslims now had a state, but few of them thought of it as a homeland.

In Bosnia the situation of the Muslims was poignant and precarious. Bosnia was indeed their home; ethnically and linguistically they were no different from the surrounding Serbs. But in the eyes of the Serbs they had committed the sin that made them unbridgeably different: apostasy. By embracing Islam and rejecting Orthodoxy, they had not only collaborated with the Ottomans (most Serbs had done the same); they had *identified* with them, converting to their religion, which meant that they had become part of them. And, as Muslims, they had been legally, socially, and economically superior to their Orthodox kinsmen. Now the boot was on the other foot, and the Serbs were in no mood for magnanimity. Ivo Andrić has a sensitive passage in *The Bridge over the Drina* about the Muslim plight. He describes Turkish power as having vanished “like an apparition.” The Bosnian Muslims “had lived to see that power, like some fantastic ocean tide, suddenly withdraw and pass away somewhere far out of sight, while they remained here deceived and menaced, like seaweed on dry land, left to their own devices and their own evil fate.”⁸ That was how they appeared early in the twentieth century. Later, the Bosnian Muslims were to gain the status of a Yugoslav “nation” under Tito, but after the breakup of Yugoslavia they

became another victim of twentieth-century genocide. So did the Kosovo Muslims, also pressed into the new Yugoslavia after World War I.

The Jews were to become victims of genocide on a scale unimaginable. In 1930, about 6 million Jews resided in Eastern Europe (excluding the Soviet Union), mainly concentrated in Poland and Romania. No sane person was prepared for the Holocaust, but dislike of the Jews was widespread and always liable to be whipped into active hatred. In the countryside, Jews were sometimes the stewards on the estates of absentee landlords. Many country innkeepers and moneylenders were Jews. Some of them did prey on ignorant and hopeless peasants, although prejudice, innate suspicions, and galloping rumor grossly exaggerated their misdeeds. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church not only countenanced, but often encouraged, anti-Semitism. The fact that hundreds of thousands of poor Jews resided in both town and country was often ignored.

In the cities and larger towns the “Jewish Question” was more complicated. Large numbers of Jews had lived in those places for generations, often in overcrowded ghettos. In some cities they numbered up to one-fourth, even one-third, of the population. In a few places they comprised more than a half the populace. A tiny fraction of them became multimillionaires in finance and industry. In Hungary especially, many Jews were thoroughly assimilated and ardently patriotic, as they were in Germany.⁹ But it was the small-business Jews and shopkeepers who endured the worst of urban anti-Semitism. This bigotry was often dubbed “economic anti-Semitism” and held to be somewhat more respectable than other varieties of prejudice. Jews also were conspicuous in culture, science, and the “free professions,” bunching there because access to some other careers was denied them. And while many Jews were successful capitalists, others became ardent communists. Hence, accusing fingers were pointed at them on two counts. With the economic depression, the rise of German Nazism, and the overall search for scapegoats, the Jews were the obvious target. What had once been a prejudice against them, or perhaps a fixation, was becoming an obsession as the restraints on public barbarism began to collapse. Anti-Semitism, in fact, was an integral part of East European culture. This bias did not preclude relations of respect between many Jews and Gentiles, and many Gentiles were truly horrified by the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews. But the general prejudice existed, and the efforts of many East Europeans to mitigate or explain away their anti-Semitism have always been unconvincing. In fact,

the vehemence with which some do it is often in itself a measure of the malady they seek to deny.

Finally, the Gypsies. When the Nazi pogroms were beginning, a German Jew is reported to have said that, while he knew many people disliked the Jews, he was mystified about the persecution of the Gypsies. What had they done? They had done nothing (except perhaps steal a bit—sometimes a lot—and behave “antisocially”). But they were different, very different, from the prescribed Aryan ideal. They were also free spirits, unaccountable. They had what is anathema to any totalitarian dictatorship: spontaneity. The Nazis killed about a half-million of them.

Gypsies not only are unaccountable, but they are uncountable, too. In Eastern Europe in the 1930s, Gypsies numbered probably about 1 million or even fewer. Many of them were engaged in jobs like tinkering, carpentry, basketry, horse breeding, or horse stealing. Most East Europeans regarded them as falling somewhere between a nuisance and a problem. But Gypsies formed only part of the background. East Europeans were not obsessed with them, as the Nazis became. As for the Gypsies themselves, absolutely no concept of Gypsy power, even Gypsy organization, existed among them. “Leave us alone” was their guiding slogan.¹⁰ That demand remained the same at the end of the century, but by that time their problems had re-emerged (see chapter 8).

Groups and Nations

Ethnic groups and nations, ethnicity and nationalism, all have been studied voluminously. But so far they have escaped convincing and comprehensive definitions. Perhaps wise approximation of all four subjects will have to do since the quest for exactness might confuse rather than illuminate.

In the East European context some ethnic groups existed until well into the twentieth century without having any national consciousness. This was true in Galicia, for example, in the Kresy in what became eastern Poland, and in Macedonia. They were “natives,” “people from here,” *tutejsi*. Almost exclusively, they were peasants whose sense of national identity was subsequently formed by a combination of urban intellectual propaganda, modern communications, education, Christian denominationalism, war, and oppression.

What, then, were nations? Joseph Stalin, an expert in defining them as

well as destroying them, saw the main components of nations in language, territory, similarity of economic system, and similarity of psychological setup or culture.¹¹ (Coming from Stalin, the third component was only to be expected; the fourth raised eyebrows.) One of the most satisfying definitions—practical, precise, and muscular—came from a group of Serbian rebels who went to see Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian leader, in April 1848. (Kossuth was rebelling against the Austrians and the Serbs were rebelling against the Hungarians in a multiple national struggle.) When Kossuth contemptuously asked the Serbs what they understood by “nation,” they replied: “a race which possesses its own language, customs, and culture, *and enough self-consciousness to preserve them.*”¹² These Serbs were not so much defining nationhood as showing that they were a living example of it.

What, then, was nationalism? Ernest Renan’s chestnut about a nation being a “group of people united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbors” not so much defines nationalism as describes it. Nationalism is nations being human, with all the negative consequences that follow.¹³ It became an amalgam of fulfillment, frustration, and aggression; it also added a real dimension to the tribal suspicions that already existed. The notion of “ancient hatreds” has become unfashionable recently because of its sloppy use by Western writers and politicians during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. It seemed to relieve the writers of deeper analysis and the politicians of deeper engagement. But tribal suspicions and resentments always existed, waiting to be tapped, channeled, and fanned into full-blown hatreds. Dark centuries were indeed sleeping.

The most satisfying summation I have seen of the emergence of nationalism from the concept of nation is that of R. J. W. Evans:

But what is a nation? We can identify two basic senses of the term, one older in origin, on the whole, and the other younger. On the one hand, a nation is a community bound together by residence in a given territory. On the other, it is a community bound together by ties of language, tradition, religion, or culture in general. The first kind of nation defines itself through citizenship, the second through ethnicity. In 1848, these two principles first confronted each other directly. Patriotism, allegiance to one’s country, found itself outflanked by nationalism, allegiance to one’s ethnic kin. From that time on, nationalism progressively became the dominant motive force, threatening the

breakup of existing states, forcing strategists of the prevailing political order to take on board its own weapons.¹⁴

In Eastern Europe the emergence of ethnic nationalism was eased by the sense of cultural superiority that some nations had always felt regarding others. As Eric Hobsbawm put it: "The true distinction (between ethnic groups) . . . demarcates felt superiority from imputed inferiority, as defined by those who see themselves as 'better,' that is to say usually belonging to a higher intellectual, cultural or even biological class than their neighbors."¹⁵

After the world war the peacemakers partly accepted the growing dominance of ethnic nationalism by breaking up Austria-Hungary; they then sought partly to reverse their action by establishing Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In the erstwhile Russian empire, the triumphant communists, despite their earlier promises, stamped out the many sprouting national movements and, despite the pretense of ethnic devolution, reimposed their own imperial control. After 1989, resurgent ethnic nationalism destroyed the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, and it seriously threatened Russia itself.

The International Setting

The international setting, which always has been decisive for the East European states, has changed remarkably in the twentieth century. In the few years after 1918, a power vacuum developed in Europe. Neither Britain nor France had the strength or the will to fill it. The United States helped win the war, and it then helped make the peace but then withdrew. Soon, however, Germany and Russia revived under aggressive totalitarianisms, and a series of momentous and bewildering changes buffeted Eastern Europe. In 1945, Germany lay shattered and divided. The East European states became satellites of the victorious Soviet Union. The United States, having returned victoriously to Europe, now stayed and became the West's leader in the cold war. The United States and Russia were now the two superpowers; Britain and France had lost world and Continental influence. From 1989 through 1992, the Soviet Union and the communist system collapsed. Germany now stood powerful and reunited. The United States was the sole superpower.

Although the United States had withdrawn from Europe after World War I, it continued to have a profound social, economic, cultural, and