

# Pariahs and Favorites in East Central Europe

by Ewa M. Thompson

*"How horrible, fantastic, incredible, it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing."*

—Neville Chamberlain



Persons with roots in Central and Eastern Europe know that to speak with minimal competence about that part of the world requires making a distinction between East Central Europe (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Slovakia), the Balkans (the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, partly Greece), and the post-Soviet states of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. East Central Europe is as different from the Balkans as Canada is from Argentina.

Since the times of Neville Chamberlain, not much has changed in Western consciousness regarding this region. It still consists of faraway lands of which we know nothing. Or rather, Americans know enough to blame them (as well as the Balkans) for triggering two world wars and generally making trouble for the Western world. Hence the undercurrent of sympathy toward the Russian czars and commissars whose mission has been to constrain these unruly folks between the Oder and the Dnieper rivers.

The professed ignorance about East Central Europe, which Chamberlain's statement exemplifies, is a bit duplicitous. Even such American pooh-bahs as Helmut Sonnenfeldt, who

once advocated merging East Central Europe with Russia, have known that before the 1945 Yalta agreements, Russians had never dominated all of today's Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, or Hungary. Civilizationally, the great divide between Poland and Russia has not been breached, as Samuel P. Huntington reminds us in his essay "The Clash of Civilizations?" (*Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993). Yet the Sonnenfeldt "doctrine," conceived when the Soviet Union was a superpower, advocated disregarding that divide and urged the West to give up on 90 million people east of the Elbe River—a classic case of what James Burnham once called "the contraction of the West."

Western European powers have had a hand in undermining East Central European states and replacing them with multinational empires, while at the same time guarding and nurturing their own territorial, cultural, and linguistic identities. Then the triumphant nationalists of Western Europe and the United States accused East Central Europe of nationalism. The causes and consequences of the slicing of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into three parts in 1795 are to this day glaringly omitted from the textbooks of Western European history, as if that event did not presage a new dynamic among European states by bringing Russia into the equation and extending her borders dangerously westward. Edmund Burke

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Ewa M. Thompson is a professor of Slavic Studies at Rice University.

and Lord Dahlberg-Acton wrote cogently about the ganging-up on the Commonwealth in 1772, 1793, and 1795, but their comments were disregarded. The Congress of Vienna, lauded by Western historians as a fountainhead of peace in Europe, confirmed the partition of the largest state in East Central Europe and divided it among various empires with scant regard to religion, language, and cultural tradition. The 1815 Vienna accord was a time bomb which erupted in 1830 in Poland, in 1848 in several European countries, and then again in 1914. If the Russian Empire was a prison of nations, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was surely a cacophony of nations clamoring for self-definition, which a territorial empire could ill afford—while Prussia, that “bastard state” of Europe, straddled German and Polish lands.

Russian apologists in American academia, and lassitude of mind toward matters which are not actively promoted by any interest group, have eliminated from English usage the words “Ruthenia” and “Ruthenian,” signifying the territories and nations between Poland and Russia. Lithuanians, a brave and stubborn people, snatched Ruthenia from the Mongol empire in the 14th century. In 1386, a dynastic union joined Poland and Lithuania, giving Poland the fatal opportunity to play imperialist—which she did until 1795, when she herself fell to the imperialism of her neighbors, and with her Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine.

In conditions of widespread literacy, which invariably fosters ethnic identity, and with democratic political philosophies popularized in print, nationalism was bound to flourish on the European continent. In countries united by language and history, nationalism manifested itself in closing the ranks and self-glorification (“God is an Englishman”), while in multinational and multicultural countries it was bound to be disruptive. Quite simply, the perception was that certain ethnic groups lorded it over others, and that this was contrary to democratic principles. The partitioning of Central and Eastern Europe by empires, at a time when national identities had already congealed, was bound to prevent the creation of linguistically and culturally homogeneous societies, and it damaged the relations between the “occupied” nations. Even now, the small and mid-sized nations of Central and Eastern Europe are strangers to one another. A certain amount of mute contempt, which defeated nations often harbor toward one another, enters the equation. France, England, and Germany have profited from the exaggerated and sympathetic attention that the countries of the Balkans and of East Central Europe should have bestowed on one another.

Some long-standing animosities were exploited by the respective empires. The Polish-Ukrainian conflict, which goes back to the times when Poles ruled Ukraine, was used by Austrians who conspired to pit Ukrainian peasants against Polish landlords in 19th-century Galicia. In Ukraine, many years of anti-Ukrainian Soviet propaganda created a backlash of admiration for Ukrainian nationalists such as Stefan Bandera, whose soldiers murdered Jews and Poles. Lithuanians dislike the Poles for the Polonization of Lithuania that occurred when both countries were tied by the dynastic union; this was used by the Russians when they occupied Lithuania. On November 6, 1994, a Lithuanian bridge was blown up, and a hitherto unknown Polish National Liberation Movement claimed responsibility. Zbigniew Semenowicz, a Polish minority representative in the Lithuanian Seimas (Parliament), said that he had never heard of such a group, and that if it existed, it must

have been created by the Russian secret police. The Lithuanians concurred. Such incidents (called *provokatsiya* in Russian) have stoked many an ethnic fire, to the Russians’ benefit.

The West views these nations as upstarts because they enjoyed no political independence in the 19th century. But in their own eyes, they remained countries under *foreign occupation*. They did not experience that leisurely development of national ideologies so characteristic of Western countries and so invisible to Western eyes. While the energies of East Central European nations were sapped by the fight for independence, the energies of the West found an outlet in the creation of wealth. What lies in the national interest is often misunderstood in East Central Europe, let alone in the Balkans and the post-Soviet states. The countries of the region did not develop patterns of political behavior that are effective and intelligible to others. The issue of public relations and of the national image is poorly understood. To Western eyes, these countries remain largely unintelligible in the puzzling reversals of their reforms, the awkwardness of their diplomats, the surprising results of their elections, and the apathy of their voters after so much sacrifice to secure the right to vote.

**As long as Poland remains Poland, i.e., as long as its people refuse to reduce Christianity to the realm of private hobbies, they will be treated as untouchables by America’s power class. Poles lack that qualifying grace of distancing themselves from old-time religion, which Czech intellectuals such as Thomas Masaryk or Edward Benes represented.**

The 1938 Munich agreement is symbolic in many ways of Western attitudes toward East Central Europe. The United States and Western Europe realize that the results of abandoning East Central Europe to its own fate will not instantly affect them. The dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and even war on the Polish front in 1939 gave the French and British additional months of relative peace and prosperity. Only in hindsight did Munich turn out to be a mistake. So the temptation to do nothing is great. In October 1991, a Heritage Foundation study by William D. Eggers recommended that the United States withhold funding for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) until the European Community agrees to reduce trade barriers to Eastern Europe. Nothing of the sort has been done, and one-way

Western tariffs continue to cripple East Central European economies. Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski keep reminding us that, at present, NATO protects those European borders which need no protection rather than those which need protection. But an effort of will to incorporate East Central Europe into NATO has not been made.

Largely without being noticed, the American intellectual establishment has set up its own rules of political correctness in regard to the countries of this region. The best treatment is reserved for the Czechs, the worst, for the Poles. Consider the anonymous papers published by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (an American government agency), assessing democratic liberties in postcommunist Europe. "Human Rights and Democratization in the Czech Republic" (September 1994) repeatedly emphasizes that in various East European countries, as well as in the United States, serious crimes against human rights have been committed, and the Czech Republic occasionally falls in the same category: "Although the basic idea of expelling ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary had been blessed by the United States . . . the methods used for the expulsions were, in many instances, neither 'orderly' nor 'humane,' as ultimately called for by Czechoslovak and international authorities. . . . Although the expulsion of ethnic Germans appears to have been even more brutal and more lethal in regions east of the Czech lands, the issue of the expulsion of Sudeten Germans appears to have become a question of far greater political significance in the Czech Republic than in post-communist Poland or Russia." "Each country and every nation," the report continues, "has inglorious pages in its history and the United States is no exception; Americans continue to struggle with a legacy of slavery, brutal treatment of native Americans, and even the wrongful confinement of American citizens because of their race during World War II." The author states that the Czechs have not had an impeccable record in regard to the Gypsies, but also implies that mistreatment of Gypsies is equally severe in Poland and Hungary: "According to a 1991 opinion poll conducted in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, 85 percent of the Czechoslovak respondents said they would not like to have Roma [Gypsies] as neighbors." Figures for Poland or Hungary are not provided. There are laudatory passages about the founding of the Czechoslovak state and the Czech record in general: "the Czech Republic has received admiration for its overall record on human rights and political stability."

No such tiptoeing can be found in "Human Rights and Democratization in Poland" (January 1994). Here, the author tends to highlight individual incidents, implying that they illustrate the rule: "For example, in 1991 there were violent attacks on members of the Roma community in the village of Mlava. In spite of the brutal nature of the assaults, the attacks resulted in only light sentences, giving rise to concerns that the government is insufficiently sensitive to the threat of ethnic, religious and linguistic intolerance." Note the imputed lack of a separation of powers. Nothing is said about the reemergence of the Polish state in 1918, about the Polish-Soviet war of 1920-21, which culminated in the battle of the Vistula and stopped the Soviet advance into then left-leaning Germany—not a word.

But there is much annoyance at the attempt by Poles to stop abortion on demand: "Contrary to public sentiment, some legislators in the previous parliament, posing as the self-appointed

guardians of Catholicism, engaged in heavy-handed tactics to push through a provision requiring religious education in schools, a media law that demands respect for the 'Christian system of values,' and an abortion ban that provides criminal penalties for both doctors and patients." This last bit of information is mendacious. The Polish antiabortion law of 1993 specifies that only individuals performing, not undergoing, abortions may be punished. When I wrote about these matters to Senator Dennis deConcini, he wrote back admitting the misstatement of fact but without apologies and vigorously defending the brochure.

Why do the rules of political correctness continue to damn Poland with faint praise? The Czechs are astute and tough-minded people, but they are neither better nor worse than others in East Central Europe. Charter 77 enlisted about 1,300 people, but Poland's Solidarity had 10 million members, and it was the only nonviolent mass movement ever to present a united front to communism. The Solidarity labor movement played a role comparable in importance to Ronald Reagan's Pershings in Germany, Mikhail Gorbachev's reformism, and Pope John Paul II's moral support. So why is Poland a pariah among the politically correct?

Part of the answer is precisely because Poland did play a key role in the abolition of communism. Too many American academics were sorry to see communism go, having built their careers on explaining how it functions and having articulated a model of the world into which communism nicely fitted. Another piece of the puzzle is the deep-seated prejudice of the American elites *against* Catholicism, the confession to which 98 percent of Poles profess allegiance, according to a September 1994 poll. Anti-Catholicism is still the anti-Semitism of American intellectuals. As long as Poland remains Poland, i.e., as long as its people refuse to reduce Christianity to the realm of private hobbies, they will be treated as untouchables by America's power class. Poles lack that qualifying grace of distancing themselves from old-time religion, which Czech intellectuals such as Thomas Masaryk or Edward Benes represented. The prewar Czechoslovak government was profoundly anti-Catholic, drawing its strength from a largely secularized and anticlerical Bohemia (in contrast to the strongly Catholic Moravia, the other part of the Czech Republic). Ever since the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, when the Protestant Czech patriots lost to the hated Catholic Austrian Habsburgs, who absorbed Czech lands into their empire, the tenor of political discourse in Czechia has been more than a little anti-Catholic.

Vigorous attempts have been made to remake Poland into a country where the "intelligentsia," or college-educated section of the population, share an attitude of bemused superiority in regard to all that Polish Catholicism represents. Adam Michnik's *Gazeta Wyborcza* is the Polish equivalent of the *New York Times*. Allegations continue to fly in Poland that the cooperative firm Agora, which publishes *Gazeta*, appropriated the lion's share of the funds American taxpayers sent to Poland to support Solidarity's publications. But those who accused *Gazeta* of misappropriations have failed to produce any evidence of wrongdoing. *Gazeta* has captured a large share of the newspaper market, and together with *Polityka* (edited by "reformist" communists), it exercises an influence on the Polish reading classes. Polish conservative publications are underfunded, and their runs are small. Significantly, the only philosophically conservative publication of any size is the

trade union weekly *Tygodnik Solidarnosc*.

The armchair warriors who talked about the return to Poland of Lviv (the capital of western Ukraine) and Vilnius (the capital of Lithuania) are history. But the dream of a Polish role in re-Christianizing Belarus, Ukraine, and perhaps Russia is strong, as witnessed by the throngs of Polish priests and nuns who volunteer to go east as missionaries, risking life and limb. While some chauvinistic Ukrainians are forming paramilitary units and demanding a piece of southeast Poland, their role in Ukrainian politics seems confined to the lunatic fringe. The Czechs are less than friendly toward Hungarians and Germans, with whom they have had historical disputes. The Poles are suspicious of Germans and Ukrainians, not to mention Russians. Belarus is barely holding to its name, and English usage is unhelpful, for it has not yet decided how to call the nationals of that country: Belarusses or Belarussians?

These problems do not pose a clear and present danger to East Central European stability and peace. None of the East Central European countries is about to slide into violence because of infighting, minority oppression, and the like. The peaceful division of Slovakia and Czechia (despite continuing bickering over property and the citizenship of 100,000 Gypsies) exemplifies the relations between nations in this area of Europe. Hungary's bitterness concerning the substantial Hungarian minorities in Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia will not translate into armed intervention.

The main danger is the revival of Russian imperialist ambitions. The blindness of the West in that regard, the frequency with which American scholars and journalists express their fear that a "fascist" trend may take over in "Eastern Europe," are really marks of their sympathy for Russia, of a longing that some day post-Soviet Russia will reassert its will over half of European civilization, altering the fundamentals of that civilization. The left's fierce reaction to articles such as Huntington's, as well as vociferous opposition from erstwhile "Soviet experts" in academia to NATO membership for Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, are of similar provenance. This longing and opposition stem from the *Suicide of the West* basis of liberalism so eloquently argued by the late James Burnham.

The continuing preferential treatment of Russia by Western elites is by far the most destabilizing factor in this region. Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary vis-à-vis Russia are like free-standing bottles of liquor facing an alcoholic. Instead of removing the Russian temptation to expand by eliminating the power vacuum in East Central Europe, Western leaders contribute to the growth of Russia's revanchism by signaling their indecisiveness to the Russian Foreign Office. While the IMF-imposed budgets of East Central European countries keep national deficits around three to four percent of the GDP (the Czech Republic has none), the same IMF allows Russia a deficit that is twice that (8.3 percent in the first six months of 1994 and, according to the "fantasy budget" approved by the Duma on January 25, "only" 7.7 percent in 1995). Western lenders turn a blind eye to the fact that Russian deficits finance the military and not the citizenry.

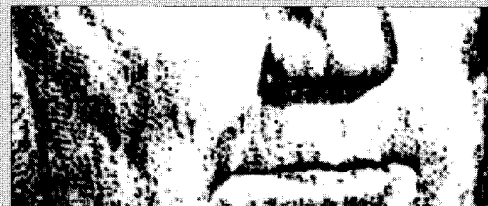
After the 1993 coup, when Yeltsin apparently struck a deal with the army, Russian foreign policy changed dramatically. It became aggressive and assertive. The West has made a weak response to the reawakening of Russia's territorial greed. Yet it is virtually certain that if Russia yields to the temptation of stepping into the East Central European power vacuum, be-

fore these countries are absorbed by NATO, she will *eo ipso* sign a death warrant for her own chances of democracy and peaceful development.

During the Cold War, Western leaders welcomed any state they could into NATO. Greece, Turkey, and Norway all served the common purpose of enlarging the realm of Western security. Turkey bordered directly on the Soviet Union, and Norway continues to border on the Russian Federation. Yet the Soviets (who were stronger and more dangerous than the Russians are now) did not say much when these countries joined NATO. But today, the West genuflects before Russia's demand that the realm of Western security be strengthened no further, certainly not by admitting the countries of East Central Europe into NATO.

If an armed conflict develops in this region in the 1990's or early 21st century, it will be caused, abetted, and directed by Russians. It will be similar to those conflicts that Russia has so skillfully stirred up along its southern border (the Chechen saga is a recent example). All other East Central European wars are virtually certain to be fought in letters to the editor and speeches in parliament. The nations of the region are now busy nursing their bruised national identities. Their overwhelmingly nonradical political parties try to return to normalcy, for they never lost sight of their vision of normalcy. That is what they want—to be "ordinary" European countries, just like Holland or France, surrounded by other European countries, bickering in their parliaments over problems of economy and culture. During the foreseeable future, relations between these nations will remain correct if not cordial—unless they once again fall to intrigue and violence from the East.

## LIBERAL ARTS



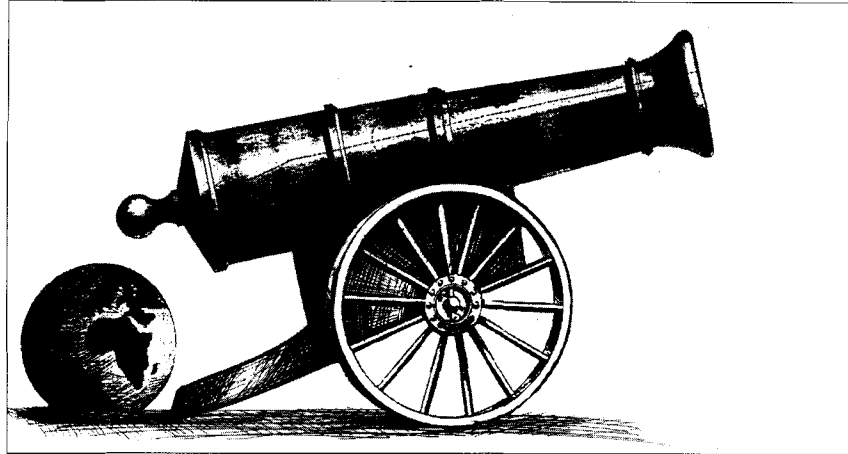
### COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS?

"We should really appreciate the Louis Farrakhans and Khalid Muhammads while we've got them. While these guys talk a lot, they don't actually do anything. The new crop of leaders are going to be a lot more dangerous and radical, and the next phase will probably be led by charismatic individuals, maybe even teenagers, who urge that instead of killing each other, they should go out in gangs and kill a whole lotta white people."

—Derrick Bell, a black New York University law professor, as quoted in the Chicago Tribune.

# Uncle Sam and the Third Balkan War

by Dhimitrios Gheorghiou



Whenever you hear the New World Order crowd whining about the obligation of the “international community” to come to the rescue of a “multiethnic democracy” threatened by “nationalism,” get ready for Uncle Sam to be dragged off on a fool’s errand. This term, “multiethnic democracy,” the prime exemplar of which is supposedly the United States, is state-of-the-art New World Order lingo for the new type of state designed to supplant the old nation-state, which is based on retrograde “nationalism.” “Nationalism” is pejorative, referring to the aspiration, heretofore considered natural and honorable, of any people to live in its own homeland, contingent upon that people’s ability and willingness to fight for it and sustain it. In their untiring vigilance against any holdouts, current or potential, against the homogenized, deracinated world government in the making, all lovers of progress oppose ethnically-based nationalism at home and abroad. Exhibit A of this phenomenon is the hatred of the Bad Old South Africa, particularly Afrikaner nationalism, and the wild enthusiasm for the Good New South Africa, an aspiring “multiethnic democracy” labeled a “rainbow nation” by French President François Mitterrand. The new African National Congress-dominated regime, with the rest of the world’s approval, is determined to stamp out any remnant of autonomy for the Afrikaners and Zulus, the genuine nations in South Africa with the strongest sense of identity and cohesion. Incidentally, that stamping out may yet involve slapping blue helmets on the United States Army’s 82nd Airborne.

The endangered “multiethnic democracy” of the moment is, of course, Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to proponents of intervention in the Balkans, Bosnia was once a dreamland where Catholic Croat, Orthodox Serb, Muslim, and Jew lived in peace and harmony, frequently intermarried (a big selling point), and respected and tolerated each other until, inexplicably, the Serbs, incited by the Hitler-of-the-Month, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, suffered an atavistic fit of nationalism. The only decent response, in the New World Order, is to stage a Studs Turkelesque “Good War” to restore Bosnia to its pristine state.

In pursuit of this goal, the entire *apparat* of the West has cranked into action. Atrocity stories, war crimes, even *geno-*

*cide*. Grim footage of—yes!—*death camps*, in the heart of Europe, back after 50 years! Mortar bombs raining down upon civilians in bread lines and marketplaces (never mind who the real perpetrators were, or why Muslim cameras just happened to be ready at the scene). The shelling of hospitals (omitting little details like guns mounted on hospital roofs). Evil Serb snipers shooting Muslim children in a bus (the fact that the murdered children were actually Orthodox Christians—i.e., Serbs—somehow getting lost in the shuffle). Elie Wiesel wailing on opening day at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Zubin Mehta leading the Sarajevo Symphony Orchestra in a performance of Mozart’s *Requiem* in the shelled-out ruins of the National Library, broadcast to 26 countries worldwide. Peter Jennings in an hour-long nationally televised pout. Patricia Ireland and the National Organization for Women demonstrating against the elusive “rape hotels.”

Somehow, though, America “just didn’t get it.” Despite a sustained, three-year propaganda symphony not equaled since the Spanish Civil War in its comprehensiveness, striking imagery, and nearly undetectable smothering of dissent—plus assurances of no American ground troops, just surgical air strikes, which do not count as real war—Americans, in a shocking manifestation of niggardliness and blighted global consciousness, remain unwilling to send their sons (and daughters) into this particular abattoir. Maybe they felt gypped by the outcome of the crusade against the previous Hitler-of-the-Month, Saddam Hussein. Or maybe, in his own spasm of tribalism *à la Serbe*, Joe Sixpack done figured out that the United States military, if it survives feminization and sodomization by our Philanderer-in-Chief, would have its hands full taking care of our borders (assuming they are ever set to that task) without trotting them off as janissaries to save every “multiethnic democracy” that hoists a flag at the United Nations. Or maybe, despite a Made in America historical memory normally good for about two weeks of the latest O.J. Simpson developments, our typical fellow citizen has evolved an inarticulate but usually accurate political sense that tells him when he is being force-fed an uncommonly ripe batch of swill by the reigning pseudoaristocracy, representing both entrenched parties (from Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich to Joe Lieberman and Joe Biden), the news media (the networks,

Dhimitrios Gheorghiou writes from Washington, D.C.