

# EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

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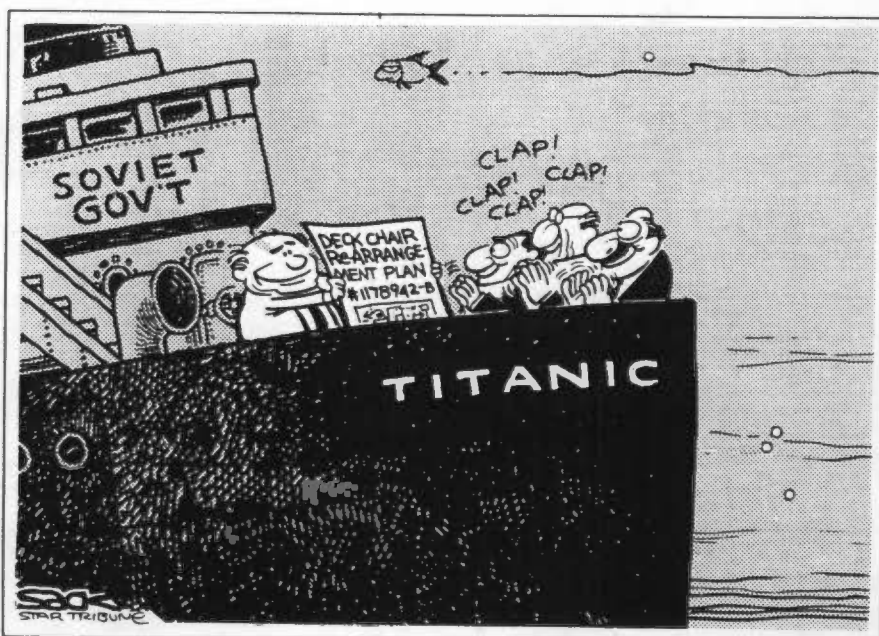


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ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

# To Strasbourg or Sarajevo?

The fall of the state and the rise of the individual in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union demand an intense, prolonged financial and intellectual effort from the Western democracies.

**W**hen historians begin to chronicle the end of the 1980s, they will be tempted to conclude that those years marked the final battle in the great contest of ideas that, beginning with the French Revolution, raged for 200 years over the nature of the individual's relationship to society and society's relationship to the state. The fall of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe permits us to weigh the future of East-West relations from a new perspective, an emerging philosophical consensus grounded in the supremacy of the individual. The rights of the individual

are on the rise, asserting their authority over the state. But, like most battles, this one is complicated and confused, and its outcome is far from certain. But that should not prevent the West from getting involved. The question is, how?

The French Revolution's faith in rationality, its extraordinary optimistic utopianism, gave birth to a widely held conviction that the world was entering a new era in which deliberate social engineering based on utopian aspirations and political decisions implemented from the top down, would foster a just society. These ideas found expression not only in democratic idealism, especially socialist utopianism, but also in totalitarian ideologies - Hitlerism and Marxism-Leninism. Both branches

of totalitarianism preached the possibility of a perfect society through subordination of the individual to society and the subordination of society to the state. World War II ended Hitlerism. Marxism-Leninism lasted until the 1980s, when it fell completely in Eastern Europe and began to crash - and continues to - in the Soviet Union.

The discredited faith in state domination is being replaced by a new, widely accepted political notion based on the supremacy of spontaneous human action. It holds that the inherent complexity of social change cannot be totally subordinated to social planning, that the conduct of human affairs requires pragmatism and experimentation, and that the guiding principle of social organiza-

■ ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI  
WAS US NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER TO  
PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER



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*'Freedom of  
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tion must be absolute freedom of choice to make political and social decisions.

In a speech to the United Nations, Mikhail Gorbachev has said, 'Freedom of choice is a universal principle which should allow no exceptions,' a quotation that captures the essence of the change sweeping international politics. It signals Western civilization's move toward a consensus regarding the individual's relationship to society, a common commitment to make the primacy of the individual the foundation of the citizen's relationship to society. Under the new consensus, politics is a mechanism that serves collective individual aspirations arising from guaranteed freedom of choice.

#### **WRENCHING CHANGES**

The consensus, in its particulars, may be ill-defined. While previously the Soviets automatically regarded the US as the essence of imperialism, today some idealize life in America and attempt to copy it. Soviet delegations often travel to the US in the sincere hope of absorbing the American model of social and political development and transplanting it unchanged to the Soviet Union. But the essence of freedom of choice, the supremacy of spontaneous human response, is that each society has to

devise solutions to the problems it confronts. Although it may rely on certain basic principles - e.g., freedom of choice and free-market mechanisms - their application does not yield models that can be easily transplanted. It would be tragic if the Kremlin merely replaced Marxism-Leninism with Friedmanism, if it simply switched 'isms' and overlooked that every successful society is a product of its own history and must adapt its cultural experience to certain shared frameworks.

Futile attempts at political transplants aside, no one can predict with certainty that the defeat of state supremacy will mean the victory of Western-style democratic pluralism and free-market economics. Communism has been dismantled in Eastern Europe and is clearly in its death throes in the USSR, but what will follow is unclear - evolution, reform, revolution, retrogression?

We must distinguish between two different stages of change in East Europe. One involves early attempts at democratic construction; the other is the dismantling of totalitarianism. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary are engaged in the former. If they succeed, they will serve as models for reform in the rest of Eastern Europe. But if they fail, it is very likely that prospects for constructive

change in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union will diminish. The remarkable changes in Eastern Europe have evoked much interest, enthusiasm and hope in the West. Yet it is increasingly apparent that the process of change has run into mounting difficulty.

Some of the reasons for the difficulty are rooted in the past, in the legacy of the old system. Others are newer:

- First, the prompt unification of Germany is absorbing German attention and money. And the integration of East Germany into the Federal Republic is disrupting economic relations between the former East Germany and Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.
- Second, the economic crisis in the Soviet Union affects the economic well-being of the countries attempting to reform, all of which have over the past several decades built up extensive trade with the USSR. Trading patterns are now under severe stress; the situation will worsen with the introduction of world prices, particularly for energy supplies. This will place serious strains on some of the economies of Eastern Europe.
- Third, the Gulf crisis and its accompanying effect on oil prices is





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putting growing pressures on the fragile economies of the region.

- And fourth, foreign debt – particularly in Poland and Hungary – complicates recovery and weakens already unstable domestic financial structures.

These pressures intensify social frustrations of the kind expressed so vividly in the Polish presidential elections. The surprising results of the first round of voting were an indication of widening social protest and dissatisfaction. Indeed, it is becoming a fact in Eastern Europe that liberation from 40 years of communism – a liberation fervently hoped for by the majority in every country – is producing dangerous levels of suffering, deprivation, frustration and even despair. This is not what the masses expected; this is not a fulfillment of their (sometimes naive) hopes.

The frustrations carry over to ethnic tensions, which are flourishing in the wake of relaxed political constraints. Social-economic tensions inflame relations between Hungary and Romania, the Slovaks and Czechs, and throughout all of Yugoslavia. These tensions, which seem to sharpen daily, call into question whether democratic construction over the next few years will succeed or be diverted in directions inimical

to the institutionalization of democracy.

#### THE USSR'S SYSTEMIC CRISIS

Problems farther east, in the USSR, are even more acute. The USSR is not engaged in democratic construction; it is still dismantling the system of the past. This process has generated a deep-rooted, three-part, systemic crisis – an economic crisis, a national crisis and a political crisis. Each aggravates the others and makes their resolution more difficult.

The depths of the Soviet economic crisis are well-known. It is simultaneously a microeconomic and a macroeconomic crisis. At the microeconomic level it is a crisis of individual suffering, of deprivation to which the average Soviet citizen is exposed. Its symptoms range from malnutrition to increasingly inadequate medical facilities and reduced life spans. The Soviet Union is one of the few countries in the world in which male life expectancy has actually decreased over the last several decades. The microeconomic crisis has bred a general sense of uneasiness about the future and inflicted suffering on hard-working people who are increasingly unable to understand the economic situation and uncertain about how to resolve it.

The macroeconomic problems are

no less severe. Simultaneously, the USSR is experiencing a drop in production, declining productivity, inflationary tendencies and, generally, economic gridlock. This is a system, used to commands, with commands that are no longer authoritative. However, it lacks the incentives and the organizational and entrepreneurial skills needed to make the transition to a market economy. The economic crisis has a spiral of its own that points increasingly in the direction not just of gridlock but of collapse. This is serious; the threat to the livelihood and well-being of 300 million people has worldwide ramifications.

Dealing with the economic crisis is complicated by the simultaneously burgeoning national crisis. Some proposed solutions to the economic crisis – e.g., decentralization – intensify national problems. The agitation among ethnic groups in the USSR caught the Soviet leaders somewhat by surprise. In his spontaneous remarks, which often reveal the nature of his thinking, President Gorbachev himself has said that until recently he had not considered the national issue a serious problem, that he thought it had been resolved by the Soviet experience and that he was taken aback by its intensity. Yet the national problem is a fundamental reality from which there is no escape.



The Soviet Union is a multinational empire composed of a variety of nations, of which the non-Russians together account for 50% of the Soviet population. Once aroused, nationalism is impossible to contain by force and even difficult to handle by compromise. It is an emotional condition that can be satisfied only by being fulfilled. One reason Western Europe is able to make progress toward transnational cooperation is that aspirations to nationalism there have largely been fulfilled and people are aware, through painful experience, that the extremes of nationalism are dangerous. In the Soviet Union, national aspirations have not been fulfilled but, rather, delayed and frustrated. This lends the aspirations a dynamism that is very difficult to contain by coercion or compromise.

Gorbachev's attempt to resolve ethnic tensions by compromise — by proposing a new union treaty — comes four years too late. National aspirations have far outpaced the willingness to compromise. But any attempt to impose a coercive resolution by maintaining central control will breed direct resistance and deepen the crisis. The inherent international

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*Gorbachev has had some real successes in politics*

problem is a long-term dilemma for which there is no immediate solution but which will continue to aggravate the economic crisis.

Compared with economics and the nationalities problem, Gorbachev has had some real successes in politics. He had admirably and courageously opened Soviet politics to permit genuine discussion. Perestroika is a mirage, but glasnost is a reality.

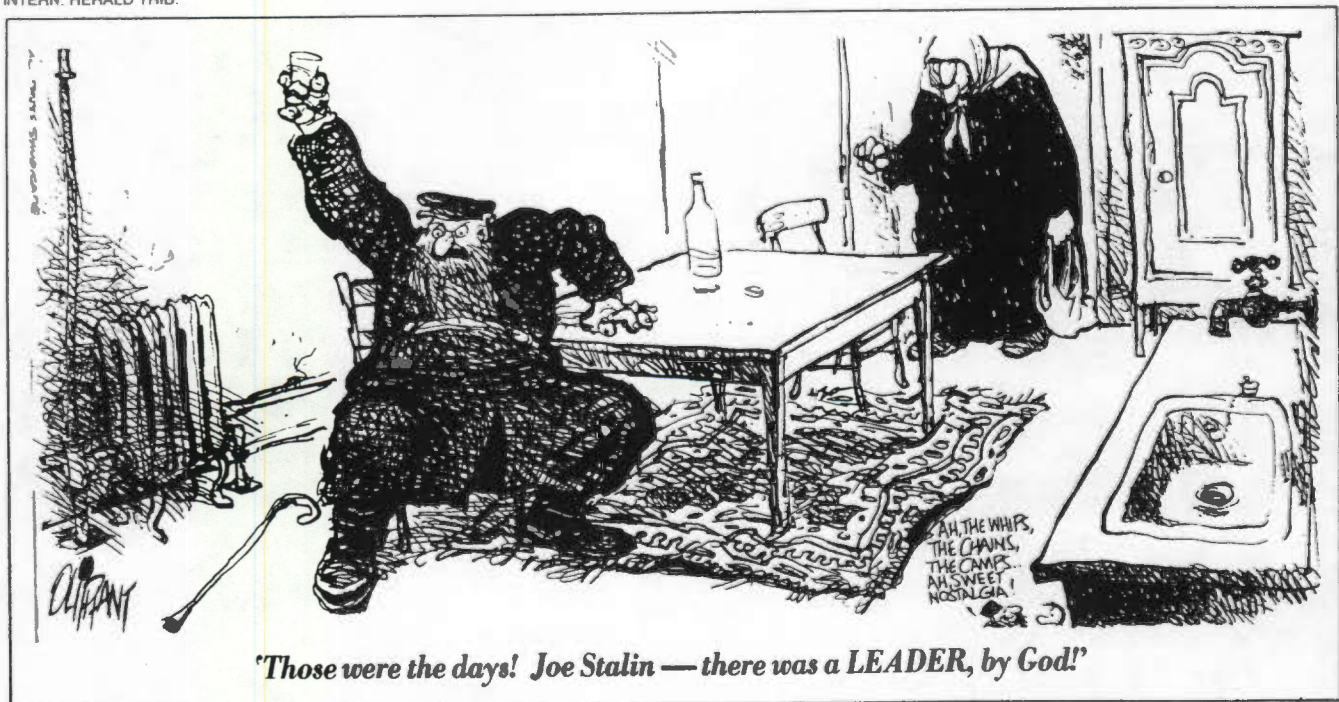
The success of glasnost, however,

in the context of economic failure and intensifying national conflicts unintentionally contributes to the scale of the crisis. A great deal of the political debate concerns conflict, dispersal of authority, delegitimization of power and the creation of an increasingly chaotic dynamism. The choices facing the Soviet Union are becoming polarized. Should the system return to a degree of central power? If yes, what should it be based on? Is there a principle that can justify central power? State nationalism? In the midst of reawakened nationalism, it would immediately provoke a clash between Great Russians and non-Russians. Order for the sake of order? It will be contested by those who view order as a form of coercion incompatible with democracy.

**CULTIVATING NEW POWERS**

All of the above suggests that we are facing a prolonged and uncertain process, despite the seeds of hope that the upheaval has planted. To structure a constructive relationship with the Soviet Union, the West must recognize that ongoing multi-level change in the USSR demands simultaneous multi-level responses. We are

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accustomed to dealing with the Soviet Union through the center, the Kremlin. We dealt with it when it was an enemy. Now we are tempted to deal with it the same way when it is no longer an adversary but a friendlier nation that needs our help.

We should certainly continue dealing with the Kremlin, and Gorbachev deserves our sympathy and admiration. But we must realize that the Soviet Union is no longer directed from the center – to deal effectively with the Soviet Union we have to work simultaneously at a variety of levels of political power.

We have to deal with a central government, but if we want to help – particularly if we wish to channel philanthropic aid – and provide economic assistance and political guidance, we must cultivate relationships with the new centers of power. These are the democratic governments in a variety of Soviet cities, including Moscow, Leningrad and others, and in the national republics, whose institutions are becoming important centers of authority. With help from the West, they can contribute to the pluralization of Soviet politics.

The fundamental reality today is that the democratic Soviet Union of the future cannot be the kind of centralized union that existed in the past. To become democratic, the Soviet Union has to be based on genuine self-determination. It thus has to become a confederation, or a league of states that permits secession. Such a league could perhaps eventually develop a shared market and even shared security arrangements. It will not be easy and it will certainly complicate East-West relations, but only by helping institutionalize the shift of power away from the Kremlin can the West further the transformation of the Soviet Union into a viable pluralistic society based on a free-market economy. Attempts to shift power back toward the center will be counterproductive and will ultimately result in failure.

#### **AIDING EAST EUROPE**

Concerning Eastern Europe, we must

### *The legacy of communism is a massive social, economic reality*

recognize, as with the Soviet Union, that security and stability will arise from peaceful social and political change. Thus, it is in our interest to help democratic construction in those parts of Eastern Europe where it is under way. To spur economic development, we have to take steps to relieve the debt burden some of these countries are carrying. This increasingly urgent issue will, I believe, be addressed by the industrialized nations this spring; the Club of Paris is beginning to reassess its position and investigate solutions to the debt crisis.

The West must also do more to promote regional cooperation in East Europe, fashioning economic assistance to help it flourish. The nationalist tensions born of the compartmentalization of Eastern Europe during the years of Stalinist domination are not in the interest of Europe. East Europeans must be urged to seek cooperative solutions to problems of the environment, transportation and economic development. European recovery after World War II was the result of deliberate efforts by Americans and Europeans to promote European cooperation. So it must be for East Europe's entry into the larger community of cooperative nations.

And finally, we must recognize that the problems we confront are

unprecedented, both conceptually and historically. The fact is, we have entered into the great unknown. We simply have no relevant experience to draw on in mapping the transition from communist systems to pluralistic democracies based on free markets. We have no lessons that apply. We have some general notions about ways to rebuild capitalist economies; we applied these to Europe and Japan. We also used them to help Spain and Portugal make the transition from fascism. But we have no historical lessons that are fully conceptually developed for dealing with a transition from communism to democracy.

This means there is a need for very serious conceptual as well as institutional efforts in the West and between East and West. Our approach to the problem so far has been haphazard. We have created some institutions to help, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Individual nations have mounted initiatives. But there is no collective program involving the US, West Europe, Japan and the countries of Eastern Europe to define the broad conceptual outlines of a common effort to ease the pains of transition.

The legacy of communism is a massive social, economic reality. It is a seamless web that, if it is to be torn away, requires an intense, prolonged intellectual and financial effort. We have failed to give it adequate attention. And I fear that our increasing preoccupation with such problems as the Persian Gulf crisis will divert our attention from the central historical drama of our time – whether we can together chart a path to a constructive future for the millions now engaged in an attempt to move beyond the tragic experience of the past decades and toward a better life. ■