

## **EASTERN, EAST-CENTRAL, OR CENTRAL EUROPE:**

### **WHERE IS IT AND WHAT IS IT?**

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Where is east-central Europe? This is a question that immediately provokes yet another: what is east-central Europe? Like the terms western Europe, southern Europe, or northern Europe, east-central Europe is a vague concept that defies any precise definition. It is, nonetheless, a term that is used in the media, in books, and verbal discourse.

#### **Territorial extent**

The concept of east-central Europe seems to have evolved from the even more general terms, central Europe and eastern Europe. Central Europe was the older of the two, and in the nineteenth century it had come to denote territory ruled by various German states as well as the Habsburg, or Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The term often implied that there existed a religious-cultural dichotomy and a desire to distinguish this part of the continent from the “less civilized” east and southeast. In other words, central Europe was understood to comprise the German states and the Germanic part of the Habsburg Empire that were linked to the Catholic (and in part Protestant) “West.” This was opposed to the unenlightened or heathen “other,” i.e., the Orthodox “East” embodied in the Russian Empire, and the Muslim and Orthodox “Balkans” under the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire.

As for the term eastern Europe, it began to gain currency in the wake of World War I, which saw the creation of small successor states sandwiched between Germany in the west and the Soviet Union

in the east. German literature sometimes referred to this area rather prosaically as *zwischen Europa*, the in-between-Europe. When, after World War II, the Soviet Union expanded its political influence farther to the west, the term eastern Europe came to designate the so-called satellite countries: East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, as well as Yugoslavia and Albania, which were also ruled by Communist regimes but which had at some point succeeded in leaving the Soviet bloc. This Cold War definition of eastern Europe remained in place until the collapse of Communist rule during the Revolutions of 1989.

It is during the post-Communist era that the terms east-central Europe and central Europe have gained increasing currency. These terms have appeared, in part, in response to the wishes of the inhabitants in the region itself, who often adamantly reject the adjective “eastern,” which they believe is applicable to Russia or the Soviet Union with whom they do not wish to be associated. Consequently, the formulation east-central Europe, or preferably just central Europe, are again – as in the nineteenth century – being used to underline the association of oneself and one’s country with the rest of Europe and at the same time to distinguish oneself from the “unenlightened” and economically underdeveloped “East.”

This still leaves the question as to what precisely is the territorial extent of east-central, or central Europe? Not surprisingly, there is no consensus. Some authors, both within and beyond the countries in question, consider east-central Europe to comprise only Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and perhaps Slovakia, that is, the proverbial “West.” Other writers extend the boundaries of east-central Europe to include the Balkan peninsula (in some cases Greece as well), while in the north the Baltic states and perhaps even Finland are added. For some, the former Soviet republics of Belarus and Ukraine should be added; for others those countries are relegated along with Russia to eastern Europe. Clearly, the concepts east-central Europe and central Europe vary according to the eye of the beholder.

Let us begin with physical geography. There is a general,

although not universal, consensus that the European continent stretches from the coasts of Ireland and Portugal in the west to the Ural mountains in the east. The longitudinal coordinates of that land mass are 10°W and 60°E. If divided into three equal parts, the center portion 10°E – 30°E, basically coincides with the east-west geographical middle, or central third, of the continent. Looked at from a north-south perspective, the territory referred to here as east-central Europe falls within 55°N and 40°N latitude. This is also roughly the middle, or central third of the continent as measured from the Arctic coastline of Norway in the north to the isle of Crete in the south.

In terms of present-day political divisions, east-central/central Europe as outlined above includes fifteen countries or parts of countries: Poland, western Belarus, western Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. The outside boundaries that encompass these countries should not, however, be considered absolute but rather as frayed edges. And beyond these edges are historical and contemporary states like Brandenburg-Prussia, Lithuania, Austria, Venetia, and Greece, which could at times be considered part of east-central/central Europe.

From the standpoint of language and national cultures, east-central/central Europe does respond to the proverbial description of a “land in between,” that is territory roughly bounded by the Germanic- and Italian-speaking west, the Russian-speaking east, the Baltic (Lithuanian)-speaking north, and the Greek- and Turkish-speaking south. Since, however, language and national cultures are not necessarily limited to a specific territory, one must also be mindful of centers of cultural creativity beyond the land mass described above. In that regard, St. Petersburg in Russia, Riga in Latvia, Trieste in Italy, Berlin, Paris, New York City, and Toronto are just some of the other paces that need to be factored into any serious cultural history of east-central/central Europe.

## Geographical zones

East-central/central Europe can be said to be divided into three geographical zones: (1) the northern zone; (2) the Alpine-Carpathian zone; and (3) the Balkan zone. The northern zone is bounded by the Baltic Sea in the north and the crests of the Ore, Sudeten, and Carpathian mountains in the south. This zone is characterized primarily by an unbroken plain that is part of the North European Lowlands, stretching in a west-east band across the entire European continent and including northern Germany, Poland, Belarus, and part of the western Ukraine. Along the southern portion of this zone located in east-central/central Europe are plateaus and foothills covering large parts of southeastern Poland, southwestern Ukraine, and northern Moldova. Because of its geographical features, the northern zone has traditionally allowed for easy access from all directions, except perhaps from the mountainous south. The lowland plain is drained by several river systems—the Elbe, Oder, Vistula, and Neman—all of which flow northward into the Baltic Sea or North Sea.

The second, or Alpine-Carpathian, zone is characterized by mountain ranges that surround lowland basins and plains. In terms of present-day countries, this zone includes the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Subcarpathian/Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, Hungary, western Romania (historic Transylvania), northern Yugoslavia (the Vojvodina), Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. This zone is bounded in the northwest by a triangle formed by the Sudeten Mountains, Ore Mountains, and Bohemian Forest, which surround the lowland Bohemia Basin and plateaus of Moravia. Immediately to the south are the Alps, which cover most of Austria and Slovenia. Farther east the zone is bounded by the wide sweeping arc of the Carpathian Mountains, which stretch from Slovakia eastward across Ukraine’s Transcarpathian region and southward into Romania, where the arc turns abruptly westward until it reaches the Danube River at the so-called Iron Gates. The Carpathian arc surrounds the Transylvanian Basin and large Hungarian plain that covers virtually all of Hungary and

stretches southward into Yugoslavia's Vojvodina and Croatia's Slavonia as far as the Sava River. Because the main geographic feature is the Danube River and its main tributaries (the Tisza, Drava, and Sava), the area is often referred to as the Danubian Basin. The mountain crests of the Alpine-Carpathian zone traditionally served as natural protective barriers that states hoped to secure and maintain as their political frontiers. Despite the existence of several passes, those crests also limited communication and trade with regions outside the zone.

The third, or Balkan zone, begins at the Sava River and includes the Walachian Plain below the arc of the Carpathians. This zone basically coincides with the Balkan peninsula, which is surrounded by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas to the west, the Aegean Sea to the south, and the Black Sea in the east. In terms of present-day states, the Balkan zone comprises western Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, most of Yugoslavia, southern Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, and Greece. Most of this zone is covered by mountains (one range in Bulgaria actually carries the name Balkan mountains), although there are extensive lowland plains in southern Romania (Walachia) and northern Bulgaria, which are together drained by the lower Danube, as well as the Rumelian Basin in southeastern Bulgaria, the Thracian plain in European Turkey, and the Vardar Basin in southcentral Macedonia and northern Greece.

Although geographically part of the Balkan zone, the coastal areas of Croatia (Dalmatia) and central Albania are quite distinct. This is because they have traditionally been linked to the Adriatic and Mediterranean maritime world and, until very recent times, were cut off by high mountains from the Balkan hinterland. With the exception of the coastal areas on all sides of the peninsula, communication within the Balkan zone has been hindered because of the extensive mountainous ranges. The result has been the existence of large tracts of sparsely settled and frequently isolated areas that are incapable of sustaining populations of any significance.

## Cultural spheres

The population throughout most of east-central Europe is characterized by great diversity in terms of religion, language, and nationality. By the nineteenth century, all of Europe's main religions were well represented in the region: Catholicism in both its Roman (Latin)- and Byzantine (Greek)-rite forms, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Protestantism. Numerically, the Catholic Church had until the twentieth century the largest number of adherents, with an estimated 56 million at the end of the nineteenth century and 83 million at the end of the twentieth century. The majority of Catholics were and still are of the Roman (Latin)-rite, with the Byzantine (Greek)-rite Catholics numbering respectively 5 million (ca. 1900) and 7.7 million (ca. 1995). Whereas both rites are within jurisdictions ultimately responsible to the Pope in Rome, the Greek Catholics (or Uniates as they are also known) use the Byzantine-rite and follow other practices similar to the Orthodox world to which they had belonged before accepting union with Rome.

The Orthodox represented the second and now largest group in east-central Europe, having increased from 44 million at the end of the nineteenth century to 87.5 million at the end of the twentieth century. In contrast to the more unified Catholic world, with its ecclesiastical center in Rome, the Orthodox are divided into several self-governing, or autocephalous, churches. These autocephalous churches are loosely linked together by what they call a "communion of faith," and most show respect to the "ecumenical patriarch" of the Church of Constantinople (resident in Istanbul), a hierarch who is considered the "first among equals." Despite frequent analogies, the ecumenical patriarch has never had the same jurisdictional authority within the Orthodox world as does the pope within the Catholic.

The size of the Jewish population may have been considerably smaller than either the Catholic or the Orthodox population; nevertheless, the 7.4 million Jews living in east-central Europe at the end of the nineteenth century represented 70 percent of the total

number of all Jews worldwide. The Jews of east-central Europe were basically divided into two distinct groups, the vast majority of whom were Ashkenazim, or Yiddish speakers. The other group, numbering only about 193,000, were the Sephardim or Ladino speakers. Also in contrast to the Catholics and Orthodox, the number of Jews has decreased dramatically in east-central Europe during the course of the twentieth century. This is largely the result of their physical extermination during the World War II Holocaust, so that there are only 594,000 left in east-central Europe (ca. 2000), and as many as three-quarters of them live in the region's former Soviet republics (western Belarus, western Ukraine, Moldova).

The Muslim population of the region has undergone even greater numerical fluctuation. At the outset of the twentieth century, there were an estimated 4.4 million Muslims living primarily in the Balkan zone in lands under Ottoman rule. As the Ottomans were progressively pushed out of the region, so too was the Muslim, mostly Turkish, population. Between 1912 and 1926 alone, nearly 2.9 million Muslims were either killed or were forced to emigrate to Turkey. Despite such demographic losses, a high birth rate (in particular among Muslim Albanians) has resulted in a total of nearly 8.2 million Muslims living in the Balkan zone of east-central Europe by the end of the twentieth century.

Protestants in the region made their appearance already at the time of the Reformation. Various Protestant sects gained a significant number of adherents in east-central Europe, most especially in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the eastern regions of the Hungarian Kingdom. Despite their relatively small size, Protestants had a significant impact on their surrounding environment as promoters of education and in the printing of books and pamphlets in vernacular languages. By the nineteenth century, the most important Protestant denominations in east-central Europe were the Evangelical (Lutherans) and Reformed (Calvinists).

Aside from these "mainline" religious orientations, east-central Europe also became home to several other smaller groups, many of

which by the end of the twentieth century have dwindled further in size or have virtually ceased to exist. Among these are the Armenian-rite Catholics, Orthodox Old Believers, Karaite Jews, and Anti-Trinitarian Protestants.

The spatial distribution of the major religions in east-central Europe is uneven. The Catholics are concentrated in the northern zone and in the Alpine-Danubian zone, that is in lands formerly belonging to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Austria-Hungary. The Orthodox are found in parts of all three zones, but most especially in the western regions of the former Russian Empire/Soviet Union and throughout the Balkan peninsula. By the end of the twentieth century, fully 97 percent of all Orthodox Christians lived in the following countries, listed in order of their size of adherents: Ukraine, Romania, Greece, Belarus, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Before its decimation during World War II, the Jewish population was concentrated in what was known as the Pale of Settlement, that is, lands acquired by the Russian Empire at the end of the eighteenth century from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (i.e., present-day central and eastern Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, central and western Ukraine) and the Ottoman Empire (Moldova and southeastern Ukraine). Whereas there were also Jewish concentrations in the Habsburg Empire (especially in the northeastern counties of the Hungarian Kingdom and in the urban conglomerations of Budapest and Vienna), there were very few Jews throughout the Balkan zone aside from some concentrations of Sephardim in small towns and cities, especially Salonika/Thessaloniki.

Certain religious groups were linked to the state, while others were associated closely with national movements among stateless peoples. This was particularly the case in the Orthodox world, where the self-governing, or autocephalous churches often came into being at the initiative of the state's secular authorities. In turn, the state would frequently use the church to promote its national and even socioeconomic policies. For instance, in late nineteenth-century

Macedonia, the Bulgarian, Serbian, and Greek Orthodox churches competed with each other in an attempt to convince the local population that it was either of Bulgarian, Serbian, or Greek nationality. Similarly, Islam served the interests of the Ottoman state throughout the Balkan zone, where it was not uncommon to find people who converted to Islam (Bosnian Muslims and Albanians among others) in order to become part of the ruling socioeconomic elite.

Whereas the Catholic world did not permit the establishment of “national” churches, Roman (Latin)-rite Catholicism in practice functioned as a state church in many countries, most especially in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This meant that for a long time the Catholic Church controlled the Habsburg educational system, and being Catholic certainly enhanced an individual’s socioeconomic mobility, especially in the military and civil service.

Some religions, on the other hand, were closely associated with stateless peoples and their efforts at attaining recognition as a distinct nationality. In this sense, Greek Catholicism came to be perceived as the “national” religion of the Ukrainians of Galicia, as did Roman Catholicism for the Poles, who before 1914 lived as a stateless people in the German, Austrian, and Russian empires. Some ideologists went so far as to argue that one could not be a Pole unless one were Roman Catholic, or that one could not be a Ukrainian from Galicia unless one were Greek Catholic. The simplistic association between religion and national identities at times produced anomalies. For instance, Slovaks were traditionally associated with being a Catholic people, yet the revered nineteenth-century national awakeners who promoted the idea of a Slovak literary language and identity distinct from Czech were all life-long Protestants and indeed ministers (L’udovít Štúr, Michal Hodža, Jozef Hurban).

The linguistic configuration in east-central Europe is even more complicated than the region’s religious structure. Taking into account the unresolved debate about whether a given form of speech should be classified as a language or as a dialect of another language, it is still possible to refer to as many as 32 languages in the region. These

languages represent all the major linguistic groups spoken on the European continent: Slavic, Germanic, Romance, Baltic, Turkic, and, in their own category, Romany, Albanian, Greek, and Armenian.

By far the largest number of speakers are within the Slavic group, which in turn is subdivided into East Slavic languages (Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Carpatho-Rusyn); West Slavic languages (Polish, Kashubian, Lusatian Sorbian, Czech, Slovak); and South Slavic languages (Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian). The Germanic group is represented by German-speakers not only within the boundaries of present-day Germany and Austria but in various areas throughout east-central Europe. Some of these areas were part of a continual German speech area stretching eastward into Pomerania, Poznan, Silesia, Bohemia, and Moravia. There were also Germans who lived in compact colonies, some of which began to be settled as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (the Saxons of Transylvania, the Zipser or Carpathian Germans in north-central Slovakia, the East Prussians), others which were first established in the fourteenth century (Galician Germans in southeastern Poland and western Ukraine, the Gottschee Germans in Slovenia) or in the eighteenth century (the Danube Swabians in southern Hungary, Slavonia, the Vojvodina, and the Banat, and the Volhynian, Bukovinian, Black Sea, and Bessarabian Germans in Ukraine). Many of these German colonies were decimated as a result of the events during and immediately following World War II; those that managed to survive after 1945 had significantly reduced numbers. Another Germanic language is Yiddish, which was spoken in Ashkenazim Jewish communities until their destruction during World War II.

The Romance languages are represented primarily by Romanian speakers in present-day Romania (historic Walachia, Moldavia, Transylvania) and Moldova, as well as by Vlachs, a semi-nomadic livestock-raising people based in the mountainous areas throughout much of the Balkan peninsula. Italian remained the dominant language for many coastal towns and cities along the Adriatic coast from Trieste to Dubrovnik, although by the second half of the

twentieth century only a few Italian speakers remained in Istria (Slovenia) and Dalmatia (Croatia).

The Finno-Ugric group is represented by Hungarian spoken by Magyars in present-day Hungary as well as in linguistically contiguous areas of all neighboring countries—Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Yugoslavia (the Vojvodina), and Austria. There is still a large community of Magyars farther east in Romania (in eastern Transylvania), some of whom designate themselves by the term Székely/Szeklers. The Baltic linguistic group is represented by the Lithuanians within the present-day country of the same name; the Turkic linguistic group by Turks (primarily in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Greece), by Tatars (in Romania's Dobruja region), and by Gagauz (in Moldova and adjacent southwestern Ukraine).

As for the distinct language groups, Greek is limited primarily to present-day Greece, although before World War I it was the language of the large Greek population in western Anatolia as well as of the traders and merchants living in numerous towns throughout the Balkans and as far north as Budapest. Albanian is spoken in a compact area covering present-day Albania as well as in neighboring Yugoslavia (Kosovo) and Greece (Çameria/northern Epirus). Like Greek, Armenian was the language of merchant colonists living in cities stretching from Istanbul to as far north as Poland, although most of that otherwise small group has become assimilated in the course of the twentieth century. By contrast, the number of Romany/Gypsy speakers has increased. Although not all Romany use or even know some form of their ancestral language, the number of Roma/Gypsies has increased dramatically, with conservative estimates being 820,000 at the end of the nineteenth century to over 2.1 million at the end of the twentieth. Traditionally an itinerant people, the Roma/Gypsies either voluntarily or through state intervention (especially during the Communist era after World War II) came to settle in permanent abodes. They live on the outskirts of villages, and in towns and cities throughout virtually all countries of east-central Europe, although the largest concentrations are found within the present-day borders of

Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Slovakia.

Such extensive linguistic diversity might suggest that the speakers of the nearly three dozen language groups were isolated among themselves because they could not understand neighbors with whom they often lived in the same state, province, city, or even town and village. Leaving aside the possibility of at least basic communication between speakers of related languages (in particular among the Slavic languages), it was not uncommon for communication to be carried out by a few *lingua francas*. Often *lingua francas* were the state languages, so that in the nineteenth century the Russian language served the role of an intermediary between Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Jews, while the Polish language served the same function between Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, and some Ukrainians and Belarusians. German was the most widespread *lingua franca* in the Habsburg Empire, making possible communication between Austro-Germans, Magyars, Jews, speakers of various Slavic languages, and Romanians. To a lesser degree Hungarian played the same role within the Hungarian Kingdom, allowing for communication between Magyars, Slovaks, Rusyns, Romanians, Croats, Danube Swabians, Jews, and Serbs.

For those who received a higher education, spoken *lingua francas* like German, Russian, or Hungarian could be used for more sophisticated spoken and written communication. Therefore, bilingualism – even multilingualism – became the norm for most educated east-central Europeans at least until the mid-twentieth century. After World War II, the status of Russian as a second language was enhanced by virtue of the fact that it was a mandatory subject in schools throughout most of the region as long as pro-Soviet Communist regimes were in power. Gradually, however, the former state languages – German, Hungarian, and eventually Russian – were no longer being learned, since each was associated with an “imperialist” and “occupying” power, whether the pre-World War I German and Austro-Hungarian empires, or the postwar Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The result is that a much smaller percentage of educated

people in east-central Europe know German or Hungarian at the end of the twentieth century than did their predecessors before and just after World War I; similarly, Russian is unknown to young people educated in the 1990s. Instead, since the Revolutions of 1989 it is English which is becoming the lingua franca that more and more links the linguistically diverse peoples of the region.

There is a crucial difference, however, between the old and new lingua francas. In the former multinational empires, it was quite common for educated individuals to have multiple identities, and the lingua franca, especially if it was simultaneously a state language, was an important badge associated with those identities. Hence, a native-born Yiddish speaker from Prague, aside from being a Jew, might in certain circumstances identify as a German or a Czech, because he or she had learned and used those languages. By contrast, English is a kind of “new Latin,” in that it is a neutral and purely functional instrument – and one, moreover, that does not add another “national” identity to its user in east-central/central Europe.

Language, of course, is not simply a functional instrument for communication; it also has great symbolic value in relation to national identity. As nationalist ideology increasingly established roots beginning in the early nineteenth century, intellectuals throughout east-central Europe were inspired by Herder’s theoretical question: “Has a people, in particular a culturally underdeveloped people, anything dearer than the language of its ancestors? Therein resides its whole intellectual wealth, tradition, history, religion and principle of life – its very heart and soul.” Some thinkers went even further and began to argue that a nationality could not even exist unless it had its own language.

To be sure, all peoples spoke languages, but not all peoples had a literary language. It was the struggle to create a literary language that led to great intellectual debates and often political conflict in east-central Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Questions such as, “Which dialect or dialects should form the basis of a literary language,” or, “Should not a sacred language like Church Slavonic or ancient Greek be adopted for modern usage?” are the kind

of issues that for decades were to preoccupy the attention of national awakeners. Nor did all national awakeners feel that their respective people needed its own distinct literary language. For instance, supporters of Pan-Slavism, who saw strength in unity, favored a limitation on the number of Slavic literary languages. The Slovak Ján Kollár suggested that number might be four (Russian, Polish, Czech, Illyrian/South Slavic); the Slovene Jernej Kopitar respected all the Slavic “dialects” but argued for the adoption of a single Slavic literary language; Slavophiles in Russia also called for one literary language, and that it should be Russian.

Since literary languages were almost always associated with the existence of a distinct nationality, and since the creation of a literary norm was to a degree an arbitrary intellectual construct, the decision as to where the boundary of one language ended and another began often led to conflict between neighbors. Is, for instance, Kashubian a dialect of Polish or a separate language? Analogously, what is the relationship between Ukrainian and Russian, Slovak and Czech, Rusyn and Ukrainian, Macedonian and Bulgarian, Moldovan and Romanian? If the first in each of these pairs became recognized as a distinct literary language, this would imply and perhaps confirm that there exist distinct Kashubian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Rusyn, Macedonian, and Moldovan nationalities. These are the kind of debates that for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries transformed the languages of east-central Europe into instruments of political, social, and cultural conflict.

As recently as the 1990s, one literary language has been deconstructed because of political reasons. With the creation of independent Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina alongside what remains of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), the former common linguistic medium called Serbo-Croatian (rendered in two alphabets, Roman and Cyrillic) has been replaced by two new separate “national” languages, Croatian and Serbian. There have even been attempts to create a third variant, Bosnian. The linguistic diversity of east-central Europe has, therefore, continued to evolve, since language remains both an instrument for verbal and written communication as well as a political

weapon and badge of national identity.

### **Socioeconomic setting**

At the outset of the nineteenth century, east-central/central Europe was overwhelmingly rural in character. This remained the situation as late as the 1870s, when the first European-wide census data became available. The data not only revealed that most east-central Europeans lived in the countryside, but that those rural areas were relatively sparsely populated. In comparison with western Europe (Germany, Italy, France, the Low Countries), where large blocks of territory had well over 100 persons per square kilometer, only a few areas in east-central Europe (northern Bohemia-Moravia and Upper Silesia) reached those densities. Most areas had between 20 and 100 persons per square mile, whereas the entire Balkan zone (south of the Sava-Danube rivers) had less than 50 or even less than 20 persons per square kilometer.

The last decades of the nineteenth century were to witness an increase of 50 percent in the total number of people throughout east-central/central Europe, from 98 million in 1870 to 143 million in 1910. While the Balkan zone experienced a 3 to 4 percent greater increase during those four decades, it still remained the least populated part of the region. Associated with overall demographic growth was internal movement from the countryside to urban areas. If, for instance, in 1870 there were 21 cities in east-central/central Europe with a population exceeding 100,000, by 1910 the number of such cities had nearly doubled to 38. Nevertheless, even if by 1910 there were two cities (Berlin and Vienna) with over two million inhabitants, and another nine with between 500,000 and one million inhabitants, the vast majority of settlements in the “urban” category were by present-day standards really quite small, ranging in size from 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants.

Another notable aspect of cities and even small towns was their multiethnic character. In most cases, the towns and cities throughout

east-central/central Europe were like islands composed of populations and cultures that were different from those of the surrounding countryside. Beginning in the medieval period and continuing through the early modern era, Germans, Jews, and, in the Balkan zone, Greeks and Turks had come to form a significant portion of urban populations. For instance, by 1900, Jews comprised as high as 50 percent or more of the inhabitants of twenty cities and towns in east-central/central Europe and a significant portion of the population in some of the region’s largest cities: Odessa (34 percent), Warsaw (33 percent), Łódź (32 percent), and Bratislava (24 percent). As a result, cities and the larger towns were places where several different cultures flourished side by side. And whether or not these various cultures influenced each other – and at times they did – city and town dwellers had by necessity to be multilingual in order to survive.

From this perspective, it is not surprising to learn that Vilnius was a “Polish” city and a “Jewish” city, even though it was “in Lithuania,” and that Bratislava was a “German,” a “Jewish,” and a “Hungarian” city “in Slovakia.” The list of similar examples can go on endlessly. The varied faces of these east-central Europe’s cities were symbolized by their very names: Vilnius (the Lithuanian form) was as much Wilno (Polish) as it was Vilne (Yiddish), and Bratislava (Slovak) was as equally Pozsony (Hungarian) as it was Pressburg (German) or Presburg (Yiddish).

The demographic patterns established before World War I continued throughout the twentieth century. Despite the enormous loss of life in east-central/central Europe caused by the two world wars (16.3 million lives alone were lost during World War II), the overall population in the region rose by 46 percent, from 143 million persons in 1910 to 209 million in 1990. The relatively largest increases came in the Balkan zone, where large portions of territory increased their densities to 50-99 persons per square kilometer, with even higher densities (100-200) in several districts of Walachia, Serbia, and central Bulgaria. This meant that by the end of the twentieth century the demographic disproportion between the Balkan peninsula and the rest



of east-central Europe was substantially reduced.

The biggest change was brought about through urbanization, in particular during the decades after World War II, when the urban-rural dichotomy was reversed. In other words, for the first time in history the majority of the population of east-central Europe did not live in the countryside but rather in the cities (59 percent). By 1990, only three countries – Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Moldova – had less than half of their population living in rural areas. These countries, moreover, were among the smallest in the region in terms of their geographic size and population.

The growth of individual cities was even more dramatic. By the end of the twentieth century east-central/central Europe had four cities with over two million inhabitants (Istanbul, Berlin, Kiev, Bucharest), another eight with over a million inhabitants (Budapest, Minsk, Warsaw, Vienna, Prague, Belgrade, Sofia, Odessa), and over 80 more with a population of over 200,000. In several cases the growth was phenomenal, so that, for instance, between 1910 and 1990 Constanța in Romania grew 2,791 percent to include 347,000 inhabitants and Skopje in Macedonia 2,120 percent to 444,000 inhabitants. The most exceptional example was the Baltic port of Gdynia, a small fishing village of less than 1,000 (1910) which by 1990 had burgeoned to a city of 252,000.

Aside from sheer numbers, the twentieth-century migrations also altered the multiethnic norm that had been characteristic of most cities and towns. The influx of enormous number of people from the surrounding countryside was one factor in the change. The forced expulsion, physical elimination, or national assimilation of long-time urban residents (Germans, Jews, Magyars, Greeks, Armenians) were other factors that, most especially during the second half of the twentieth century, made many cities and towns more unicultural. In other words, Vilnius is now Lithuanian (although for other reasons with a new Russian component) and Bratislava is now Slovak; analogously, most other urban areas have taken on the ethnolinguistic and national character of the country in which they are located.

Along with urbanization came industrialization. This was a particular priority of the centralized command economies of new Communist regimes set up in east-central/central Europe after World War II. For them industrialization became the key to achieving socioeconomic prosperity. One result of often rapid industrialization was not only physical but psychological dislocation. In lieu of an often placid village and small town rural environment, urban sprawl, pollution, and residence in cramped cheaply-constructed apartment blocks was quickly becoming the norm for over half the entire population of east-central Europe.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries also witnessed the introduction of technological advances to improve physical movement and intellectual communication. In the four decades prior to World War I, a relatively dense railroad network was constructed. The hinterlands of each country were now more easily connected to their own political and economic centers as well as to urban centers in neighboring countries throughout the European continent. The high mountain crests of the Carpathians, and the Alps, which had traditionally hindered communication, were breached by engineering feats that tunneled railway lines through places heretofore passable with only great difficulty or not at all.

Not surprisingly, the railroads had a direct impact on migration patterns. Not only did they contribute to increased urbanization, they also permitted easy access to port cities and to emigration abroad. Between 1870 and 1914, an estimated 7 million persons emigrated from east-central Europe to the United States alone. It was from this time that the seeds were laid for the creation of new centers of east-central European culture, whether in New York City, or in subsequent decades closer to home in Berlin and Paris.

The railroads certainly enhanced the ability of central governments to control politically and, through an improved postal system, to tax more efficiently their respective citizenries. The postal services also made possible the relatively quick delivery of the ever-widening range of newspapers, journals, and books produced in

printshops and publishing houses based in the growing cities and towns. Such communicational facilities were absolutely essential to nationalist movements, especially among stateless peoples whose cultures, languages, and understanding of historical tradition were either allowed limited access or were entirely absent from the school system. Despite efforts at censorship, the state could in effect be by-passed by print technology which allowed intellectuals based in cities to reach “their” national constituencies in the countryside. By the second half of the twentieth century new technologies – the telephone, FAX, and the Internet – were quickly adapted to promote anti-Communist political dissent, the demands of national minorities, or the results of “purely” artistic and literary creativity. Since 1989, the increasing use of the neutral lingua franca, English, has placed east-central Europe well on the way to full intellectual integration with the rest of the European continent.

### **Political setting**

At the outset of the nineteenth century, all of east-central/central Europe was within the framework of three empires. By the end of the twentieth century, those empires, as well as the Soviet “empire” that had come into being during the interim, were gone. In their stead were no less than 17 smaller countries, each of which presented itself as a nation-state for one of the peoples that had previously been subjected to rule by one or more of the former multinational empires. All this suggests that the dominant theme in the history of east-central Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has to do with two complementary developments: the efforts of the various stateless peoples to create for themselves independent states; and the efforts of the empires to preserve their territorial integrity by accommodating or suppressing the nationalist movements within their borders.

An important assumption behind these developments has been the belief that each people/nationality has a right to its own nation-

state and that all the members of a given people/nationality should live within common borders. In other words, political boundaries should ideally coincide with ethnolinguistic/nationality boundaries. But because the demographic composition of east-central/central Europe has been – and to a large degree still is – so complex, states have had to resort to various means to include within their boundaries a single people. Among those means have been national assimilation, forced resettlement, physical annihilation, and military conquest, in other words the very phenomena that have characterized much of the political history of east-central/central Europe during the nineteenth and, most especially, the twentieth century.

A brief overview of these centuries might be constructed around a few key dates: 1789, 1848, 1918, 1945, and 1989. Aside from the events that happened during each of these years, the dates themselves really serve as temporal nodes whose importance is largely determined by what occurred before and what immediately after.

The historic nineteenth century, which is generally assumed to end in 1914, could be said to begin in east-central Europe sometime in the 1770s. It was during that decade that one of the region’s oldest states, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, faced its greatest threat. Between 1772 and 1795, the territory of the commonwealth was partitioned three times, after which it ceased to exist. Its territory was divided between Prussia, Russia, and Austria, which together with the Ottoman Empire came to control all of east-central Europe. Basically, Prussia and Russia dominated the northern zone between the Baltic Sea and the Carpathians; Austria ruled the Alpine-Carpathian zone, including (Galicia north of the Carpathian crests and the Danubian Basin encompassed by the Hungarian Kingdom); while the Ottomans controlled virtually the entire Balkan peninsula south of the Sava River and the Carpathian arc (including Walachia and Moldavia).

The 1770s was also the period of the Enlightenment, which in east-central Europe found its greatest resonance in the Austrian Empire. During the reigns of Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and her son and later co-regent Joseph II (1780-1790), the Austrian government

initiated a series of reforms that included legal equality for all religious groups, universal education in vernacular languages, and the regulation – and for a time even abolition – of labor duties connected with serfdom. The Theresian and Josephine period of reform effectively came to an end with the death of Joseph II, within a year after the outbreak of revolution in France in 1789.

During the quarter of century after the French Revolution, the political order of east-central Europe was profoundly disrupted. The success of Napoleon on the battlefield challenged Prussia, Austria, and Russia, resulting in French rule over large parts of east-central Europe either in the form of dependencies (most German states and the Duchy of Warsaw in central Poland) or incorporation as French imperial territory (Illyria – Slovenia and western Croatia). The French ascendancy under Napoleon ended definitively in 1814, and the following year at the Congress of Vienna, the pre-1789 political order was restored with east-central Europe once again firmly under the rule of Prussia, the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. The first three of these states were so alarmed by the collapse in 1789 of the ancien régime and the Napoleonic aftermath that they formed a Holy Alliance in an effort to ward off within their borders any movement – real or suspected – that might be associated with the ideals of the French Revolution. The new atmosphere of political reaction that characterized east-central/central Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century was associated with the name of Austria's arch-conservative foreign minister and was known as the Metternich era.

These same decades witnessed yet another phenomenon – the rise of nationalism. The writings of the late eighteenth-century German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder, and the new wave of Romanticism that was sweeping the European continent praised the unique value of national cultures and the importance of history as the key to revelation of the “national genius” and “national soul.” Ideas such as these were greeted enthusiastically in east-central Europe, where intellectuals set out to record the spoken languages and folklore of the rural masses and to create literary works and histories for their

respective “nationalities-in-the-making.” This was the so-called first, or heritage-gathering, stage of intelligentsia-inspired national movements. The “national awakeners” who carried out such work have ever since been lionized as the “founding fathers” of the peoples they helped to forge.

Whereas during the first half of the nineteenth century nationalist movements throughout most of east-central Europe were limited to the research and writings of the individual national awakeners and, in some cases, to the establishment of “national” institutions (theatres, museums, libraries), the Balkan zone witnessed the first successful “wars of national liberation,” all directed against the Ottoman Empire. Serbia (1813-1817), Greece (1821-1830), and Walachia-Moldavia (1829) each gained a degree of autonomy or independence that was to be consolidated in subsequent decades.

The next important temporal node is 1848, which has come to be known as the “Spring of Nations.” Early in that year revolution broke out in France and soon spread to east-central Europe where it was to have the greatest impact on the Austrian Empire. In mid-March, the hated reactionary foreign minister, Clemens von Metternich, fell from power, and the empire's Austro-German inhabitants successfully campaigned on behalf of guarantees for civil rights, social reform (abolition of serfdom), and the creation of an elected parliament. As the revolutionary fever spread to other parts of the empire, the various nationalities demanded recognition as corporate entities as well as cultural and political autonomy. The Romanian and Slavic peoples pressed their demands through legal channels (including the newly-formed Austrian parliament). The Hungarians, on the other hand, engaged in a full-scale war with imperial Austrian troops and even proclaimed a short-lived independent state which lasted until their defeat on the battlefield in August 1849. Despite the defeat of the Hungarian “revolution” and the return of authoritarian monarchical rule in Austria, it was clear that the national movements had moved from a cultural to a political phase, and that in order to survive the Habsburg rulers would have to address in a more serious manner the nationality

question.

The Russian Empire had not been influenced by 1848 at all, although it had its own problems with the Poles who revolted twice (1830-1831 and 1863). Although both revolts were crushed, the tsarist government became ever more suspicious of the impact Polish “revolutionary” ideas might have had on other nationalities living along the western fringes of its empire, in particular the Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. In the case of the latter two East Slavic groups, they were not even recognized as distinct peoples, but rather as branches (White, or Belorussians and Little Russians) of a single, common-Russian nationality. The tsarist government attempted to improve the efficacy of its rule by initiating a series of reforms during the 1860s, the most important of which was the abolition of serfdom.

At the very same time, Prussia, whose borders reached well into east-central Europe (Pomerania, Prussia, Silesia), was consolidating its influence over the neighboring German states. Under the leadership of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, Prussia defeated Austria on the battlefield (1866) and thereby eliminated Habsburg political influence over the south German states. This made it easier for Bismarck to unite them with Prussia and to proclaim in 1871 the formation of a unified German Empire. As part of its efforts at further internal consolidation, the German imperial government launched a “cultural struggle” (*Kulturkampf*) with the goal to subordinate the Roman Catholic Church and to limit the nationalist aspirations of the large Polish population living in the eastern regions of the country.

The ascent of Prussia/Germany convinced its rival to the south, Habsburg Austria, of its own need for internal changes. The result was a series of reforms that resulted in the re-introduction of parliamentary rule (1861) and eventually a compromise with the Hungarians. With the signing of the 1867 Compromise/Ausgleich, the country became the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, in which the Habsburg ruler functioned as the emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. The various nationalities in the Austrian “half” of the monarchy essentially strengthened their national existence under

relatively benign Habsburg rule. On the other hand, in the dual monarchy’s Hungarian “half,” the aristocracy ruled the kingdom through a parliament whose leaders not only opposed the demands of the various national minorities, but beginning in the 1870s imposed upon them a policy of national assimilation known as magyarization. Nevertheless, the 1867 Compromise did provide a modicum of political stability for Austria-Hungary – ruled throughout this entire period by the same emperor, Franz Joseph (reigned 1848-1916) – that more or less lasted until World War I.

Having consolidated political authority over their respective realms, Germany, Russia, and Austria were able to direct their attention to another part of east-central Europe, the Balkan zone. There the Ottoman Empire was being challenged by Greece, which hoped to expand its borders northward; by Serbia and Romania (Walachia-Moldavia), which hoped to transform their recently won autonomy into full independence; and by the Bulgarians, who hoped to obtain their own state. The Russian Empire eagerly stepped in to assist its fellow Orthodox peoples in the Balkans, whose own success would weaken further the Ottoman Empire and allow the tsarist state to reach its ultimate goal: control of the straits of the Bosphorus and access to the Mediterranean. Europe’s other great powers – Britain, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary – were all concerned with Russia’s interest in the Balkans, where each tried in various ways to assert its own influence. The great power rivalry in the Balkans came to be known as Europe’s “Eastern Question.”

In 1878, at the Congress of Berlin, a compromise was reached between the Great Powers and their Balkan client states which succeeded in stabilizing borders for over three decades. However, as Ottoman power disintegrated further, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia saw an opportunity to expand. Unable to cooperate, they clashed over conflicting territorial claims in Macedonia and Albania. The result was two Balkan wars (1912-1913), after which Macedonian territory was divided between the three warring states, while Albania, which had declared its independence (1912), was recognized by the Great Powers

(1913).

The Eastern Question was still not fully resolved and was to surface next in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This former Ottoman province was, since the Congress of Berlin, held as a mandate by Austria-Hungary, which finally annexed it in 1908. Neighboring Serbia and Serbs living in Bosnia-Herzegovina itself were adamantly opposed to the “Austrian occupation.” In June 1914, a Serbian terrorist/freedom fighter assassinated the heir to the Habsburg throne, which was the event that touched off World War I. The next four years of military conflict were to have a devastating impact on large parts of east-central Europe, in particular along the Eastern Front, which separated the armies of Germany and Austria-Hungary from those of the Russian Empire and that stretched for thousands of kilometers from the Baltic Sea in the north to the arc of the Carpathians in the south.

It was the next temporal node, the year 1918, that initiated the most profound changes in the region. By November 1918, Germany and Austria-Hungary sued for peace and their exhausted troops returned home. All the region’s empires disintegrated. In Russia, the tsarist government had collapsed as early as February 1917, and before the end of that year a Bolshevik regime was installed in its place. Internal opposition to the world’s first Communist worker’s state soon resulted in a civil war and the end of Russian rule in most parts of east-central Europe. In Germany, the imperial government also collapsed, but it was replaced by the so-called Weimar Republic that at least managed to hold on to certain territories in east-central Europe (Pomerania, East Prussia, Silesia). Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, ceased to exist and was replaced by several smaller successor states.

Already during the last months of the war in late 1918, national councils arose throughout east-central Europe to represent the interests of stateless nationalities both large and small, from the Poles and Ukrainians, to the Lusatian Sorbs and Carpatho-Rusyns. Some of these councils hoped to attain independence, or at the very least autonomy for their respective nationality; others joined together to create confederations like Czechoslovakia, in which each of the component

nationalities was to be politically equal. Allied leaders and diplomats at the Paris Peace Conference were deluged by conflicting national and territorial claims, yet in the end they managed to redraw much of the map of east-central Europe. Their decisions were outlined in treaties signed at a series of palaces surrounding Paris (Versailles, St. Germain-en-Laye, and Neuilly in 1919; Sevres and Trianon in 1920).

Guided by American President Woodrow Wilson’s principle of the “self-determination of nations,” the new states that came into being provided – at least for some nationalities – a more just arrangement than that of the pre-war empires. Poland, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia were among the newly-formed independent states; Romania and Greece expanded their boundaries; Albanian statehood proclaimed on the eve of the war was reconfirmed. The principle of national self-determination was not applied to the defeated, however. The inhabitants of Austria were denied their request to unite with Germany, while Germany itself lost the Baltic port of Danzig and was forced to cede a small block of territory to Poland (the later infamous Danzig corridor) which divided East Prussia from the rest of the country. Defeated Bulgaria also lost territory to its neighbors, but the biggest loser was Hungary, which was forced to cede over seventy percent of its territory (including thirty-two percent of all Hungarians living at the time in the Danubian Basin) to each of its surrounding neighbors: Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, even to “defeated” Austria. Despite their relatively large size, nationalities like the Ukrainians and Belarusians received no consideration by the Paris peacemakers, with the result that the lands they inhabited were divided between Poland and the soon-to-be Soviet Union.

In the end, the World War I peace treaties satisfied no one. States like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania may have been territorially large, but each had a high percentage of national minorities among their inhabitants who opposed the governments under which they felt they were forced to live. Interwar Hungary remained unreconciled to the loss of so much of its former territory, and most of its society whole-heartedly supported the popular slogan of the day,

“No, no never!” referring to the provisions of Treaty of Trianon. Even new countries like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which had clearly been favored by peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference, were wracked by conflict between the very peoples who created those states. According to wartime agreements reached by exiled politicians, both countries were to be established on the principle of equality among their founding peoples, but Slovaks and Carpatho-Rusyns were dissatisfied with a centralized government controlled by Czechs, while Croats and Slovenes chafed within what essentially had become a Serbian-led kingdom transformed into a centralized Yugoslavia.

Finally, Germany, whose economy was in shambles after World War I, eventually allowed itself to be ruled by a dictator, Adolf Hitler, the Nazi leader (Führer) who was bent on restoring his country to the status of a world power. Part of that restoration was linked to territorial expansion into east-central Europe, allegedly to protect German-speaking people living outside the borders of Germany (the so-called Volksdeutsche). As a result of Hitler’s designs, several new concepts entered the world’s political vocabulary, and all were linked to east-central Europe: *Anschluss*—Germany’s annexation of Austria (February 1938); appeasement by the “West,” which accepted the Munich Pact (September 1938) that just over half a year later destroyed the Czechoslovak state; and *Blitzkrieg* – Germany’s “lightning war” against Poland (September 1, 1939), which ended that country’s existence three weeks later and which initiated a second world war that was to last for another five and one-half years.

Throughout World War II, Nazi Germany dominated all of east-central Europe. Its sphere of control covered territories incorporated directly into the Third Reich (most of Poland, Bohemia-Moravia, Austria, northern Slovenia), administered by a German civil or military administration (Lithuania, western Belarus, Ukraine, Serbia, Greece), or governed by states allied to it (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia). Those peoples who were brought under direct German rule suffered a wide range of persecution, deportation, and death. This was particularly the case for the Poles, an estimated six

million of whom perished. The percentage of Jews and Roma/Gypsies who perished was even higher, since German death camps (Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibór, Majdanek, Belżec) were built to eliminate systematically not only Jews and Roma living within Greater Germany, but also those deported from countries allied to Germany.

The year 1945 marked not only the end of World War II, but the implementation of Soviet political influence over virtually all of east-central Europe. Soviet hegemony was a direct result of its military role as a victorious Allied Power. The Soviet leader, Josef Stalin, was obsessed with assuring that Germany would never again become a powerful state, and to assure such a scenario he argued that Soviet borders should be moved westward, that the countries in between it and Germany should be Communist-ruled allies, and that Germany itself should be demilitarized and remain divided under joint Allied military occupation. Legend has it that the western leaders, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British prime Minister Winston Churchill, gave in to most of Stalin’s demands and “sold out eastern Europe” during the infamous negotiations at the 1945 Allied conference held at Yalta.

Regardless of what was or what was not agreed at Yalta, the result was the following. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were annexed to the Soviet Union; Soviet Belorussia and Soviet Ukraine expanded their borders westward into prewar Polish territory; the northern half of East Prussia surrounding the German city of Königsberg was annexed to Soviet Russia as the Kaliningrad oblast; Poland was compensated for its losses in the east by the extension of its boundaries westward to the Oder and Neisse Rivers; Germany was divided into Allied military zones, with the Soviet zone forming the loyal Communist state of East Germany; the Soviet Union annexed the former Czechoslovak province of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (gaining direct access to the Danubian Basin) and from Romania both northern Bukovina, which was given to the Soviet Ukraine, and Bessarabia, which formed the basis of a newly-expanded Soviet Moldova.

As for the rest of east-central/central Europe, its boundaries

remained essentially what they had been during the interwar years. Throughout the entire region the Soviets were successful in encouraging from afar, or establishing through direct intervention, one-party Communist-led dictatorships known euphemistically as “people’s democratic” and later “socialist” republics. Eventually, Yugoslavia (1948) and Albania (1961) broke free of the Soviet bloc, although they remained under Communist rule.

World War II and the immediate postwar years witnessed a profound transformation in the demographic composition of east-central/central Europe. Political leaders worldwide were convinced that the excesses of nationalism (epitomized by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) as well as the existence of national minorities were the primary factors causing both world wars. In an attempt to avoid similar problems in the future, many leaders were convinced that populations should be moved so that ethnolinguistic boundaries might better approximate, and ideally coincide with, political boundaries. The Jewish minority problem in most countries of the region was largely resolved by the Nazis, who arranged for the killing of the majority of Jews. Among those Jews who managed to survive, many emigrated to Israel in the immediate postwar years, or to Israel and North America from the western parts of the Soviet Union from the 1970s on.

Germans, too, were displaced in huge numbers. Those who were not already “brought home” by Hitler during the war years, or who had not fled before the advancing Soviet troops, were deported to what remained of postwar Germany: 3.3 million from Poland (Pomerania, Poznań, Silesia); 3 million from Czechoslovakia (the Sudetenland); and nearly a million more from Yugoslavia (298,000), Romania (254,000), and Hungary (213,000). Bi-lateral population exchanges (whether voluntary or forced) took place between the Soviet Union and Poland affecting Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Poles; between Czechoslovakia and Hungary affecting Slovaks and Magyars; and between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union affecting Czechs, Ukrainians, and Carpatho-Rusyns. Unilateral expulsions pushed Albanians, Bulgarians, and Macedonians out of Greece, and Italians out

of Yugoslavia. Aside from cross-border relocation, there was as well extensive internal migration during the late 1940s, whereby an estimated 3.5 million Poles moved from eastern Poland to that country’s western and northern territories recently annexed from Germany, and over 1.9 million Slovaks and Czechs moved into the Sudetenland to replace the Germans who had been expelled. No less than 31 million people were permanently or temporarily moved (sometimes more than once) within east-central Europe during the years 1944 to 1948.

In every Communist-ruled country, whether or not under Soviet hegemony, the governments were anxious to create a citizenship loyal to the new regimes. Most non-Communist political and cultural institutions were closed, churches were persecuted and religious observance discouraged, strict censorship was imposed on the media and publishing industry, and the school curriculum was reformed in an effort to inculcate Marxist-Leninist ideology and to extirpate traditional “bourgeois” moral values and national patriotism that in the case of some peoples (Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians) was traditionally tinged with anti-Russian feelings.

In order to carry out such sweeping social changes, intellectual and physical coercion was necessary. It is not surprising, therefore, that education and re-education was given high priority. For instance, of the 356 institutions of higher learning (universities, polytechnical institutes, professional schools) established throughout east-central Europe between 1918 and 1999, nearly two-thirds (206) were established during the Communist era (1944-1989).

Alongside educational institutions in the traditional sense was a widespread network of prisons and forced labor camps, where elements considered unreliable – non-Communist politicians, Communists accused of ideological deviation, intellectuals and other critics of the Communist system, actual and alleged war criminals and collaborators, national minorities associated with defeated fascist regimes, kulaks/peasants opposed to forced collectivization, religious believers – were incarcerated for life or for a period of time deemed necessary for their transformation into citizens who, after their release, might

function with some modicum of loyalty to the Communist-led regimes. In territories ruled directly by the Soviet Union, re-education took place in the vast system known as the Gulag, located in the northern Arctic tundra and other little accessible parts of that vast country. As for the “independent” Communist states of east-central/central Europe, each had its own “Gulag.” At its height during the late 1940s and 1950s, the greatest numbers of camps were in Hungary (199), Czechoslovakia (124), Bulgaria (99), and Romania (97). The number of prisoners will never be known, but two to three million throughout east-central/central Europe during the entire Communist era (1945-1989) would not be an exaggeration. The analogy with schools and education is not far-fetched, since some prisons did indeed become “intellectual centers,” where the works of figures like Milovan Djilas and Václav Havel were written.

Although the Communist regimes claimed to represent the urban and rural proletariat, working conditions were frequently difficult and made worse by centralized command economies whose disfunctionalism produced chronic shortages of consumer goods and food. Discontent sometimes led to strikes by workers, and in some cases these evolved into nation-wide revolts. The revolts in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), and Poland (1979-1980) were among the most famous uprisings against Soviet-imposed Communist rule. In Czechoslovakia in 1968, there was no revolt, but rather a program of reform known as the Prague Spring that was initiated by the leaders of the Communist party in an attempt to refashion “socialism with a human face.” All the above cases were brutally suppressed either by the local authorities (assured of the backing by the Soviet Army) or by the direct intervention of the Soviet military as in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Such periodic uprisings were unable to alter fundamentally the political order in east-central Europe. Change first had to come within the Soviet Union, and that was to occur with the appointment in 1985 of Mikhail Gorbachev as First Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was basically concerned with reforming and

strengthening the Communist way of life in the Soviet Union. He was not prepared, however, to oppose reformist efforts among his country’s Communist allies in east-central Europe, and certainly not intervene should those regimes be challenged by their own citizens.

This is precisely what happened during the course of the Revolutions of 1989, when one by one the Communist governments of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania collapsed. By 1990, each of these countries had created pluralist democratic systems governed by the rule of law and a free market economy. The physical and psychological barriers with the rest of the continent were removed, and each country set out on what it called the “return to Europe.” Within two years, the Soviet Union itself collapsed, and in its stead seventeen independent states came into being, including Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. At the outset of 1993, the two parts of the federated republic of former Czechoslovakia agreed to separate and form independent states: the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The Revolutions of 1989 in east-central Europe and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia occurred with little or no violence or bloodshed. One glaring exception was Yugoslavia. Actually, that country did not remove its Communist leaders in 1989; rather, the old cadres remained in power, although they tried to restructure the country so that each of its six component republics would have greater control over its own affairs. The Yugoslav federal government led by Slobodan Milošević was reluctant, however, to acquiesce to the growing political demands of certain republics like Slovenia and Croatia. All efforts at restructuring Yugoslavia failed, and between December 1990 and February 1992, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina each declared independence. What remained of Yugoslavia was only Serbia and Montenegro, which together formed a new “democratic” instead of “socialist” federal republic.

The federal government of rump Yugoslavia tried to stop Slovenia’s declaration of independence; it fought a war with Croatia;



and it provided direct and indirect support to the self-styled Serbian government of Bosnia-Herzegovina during that country's brutal civil war among Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs (1993-1995). Not long after the conflict ended in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where a large-scale foreign military contingent continues to maintain a delicate peace between two self-governing entities (a Muslim-Croat Federation and the Bosnian Serbian Republic), the Yugoslav federal government tried to suppress by force a revolt on the part of Albanians living within Serbia's former autonomous province of Kosovo. Again outside intervention (bombing and the eventual deployment of NATO forces) in 1999 was needed to end the conflict.

In the ten years since the Revolutions of 1989, most countries in east-central/central Europe have created stable democratic regimes, whose basic goal is a rejection of their Communist past, redirection toward the West, and full integration with the rest of Europe. Three countries (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) became members of NATO in 1999, and they and another five (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and Slovenia) are expected to join the European Union by 2004.

Paul Robert Magocsi, "Eastern, East-Central, or Central Europe: Where is it and What is it?" *Calendar-Almanac National Slovak Society of the USA*, V113. Pittsburgh, PA: National Slovak Society, 2005. pp. 128-140.