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## CENTRAL EUROPE / EASTERN EUROPE: BEHIND THE DEFINITIONS

### I

In the second half of the 1980s a debate about the nature of the central and eastern European interface sprang up in the western press, prefiguring, but not predicting, the subsequent storm, just as certain animal behaviour is said to be an unwitting portent of earthquakes. In an afterword to the second edition of his book *The Centre Lies East*, the German writer Karl Schlögel claimed, in January 1989, that a bibliography of the symposia, books and periodicals published on the topic since the first edition three years earlier could itself fill the whole volume.<sup>1</sup> This activity was a reprise in a very different situation of debates which, with greater or lesser intensity, engaged the areas concerned from the 1840s to 1945, and which reflected circumstances shaped over the previous millennium and more. A brief survey can only indicate some of the protean forms these regions have taken in the minds of those who have contested them so protractedly.

Europe can be divided into western and eastern zones along a number of lines, according to religious, social or political criteria. In each case, however, the two entities can generate only one relationship. It is the notion of a third, central term which complicates the picture. If the centre is to be not a positional line, but a region in its own right, then it too will have its east and west, and these in turn can enter into relations with each other and with the outlying regions on the flanks. When, too, the central region may be either a buffer zone, subject to pressure from both sides, or the axis around which the whole continent turns, it is clear why the notion of a centre has played a fateful role in European history, so that the German term *Mitteleuropa* has entered the historical vocabulary of other European peoples. But whereas the linguistic border between German and Romance speech is the most stable in Europe, that between German and Slav has been the most fluid. It is thus the central/eastern divide which has become the most important of all European regional

<sup>1</sup> K. Schlögel, *Die Mitte liegt ostwärts*, 2nd edn. (Berlin, 1989), p. 122.

relationships, behind which lies the fraught encounter of the powerful German nation with its Slav, Magyar and Baltic neighbours.

Yet here enquiry enters a definitional bog. Geographers speak with uncertain voice. Karl Sinnhuber showed in 1954 how twelve well-known British, French and German maps of central Europe had in common only the bulk of Czechoslovakia and adjacent snippets of some of its neighbours; the definitions of sixteen prominent geographers between them included every part of Europe in central Europe except for the Iberian peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Not until 1904 was an influential attempt made to define the central European "symphony" in physical terms, in Joseph Partsch's image of the "triple chord" of Alps, central uplands and northern plain. Yet this ringing definition, which brought in the Low Countries, Denmark, Switzerland, small parts of Italy and France and large parts of the Balkans, alongside Germany and the Habsburg monarchy, faltered into incoherence in the German-Russian borderland, where Partsch admitted that only "arbitrary" bounds could be drawn.<sup>3</sup> His successors were much more tentative. The Austrian Hugo Hassinger pronounced it vain to seek in the relevant literature for "a clearly determined, unambiguous picture of central Europe as a geographic concept".<sup>4</sup> The geopolitician Karl Haushofer found *Mittleuropa* "a concept of political will, open to every variety of political interpretation, redefinition and distortion".<sup>5</sup> In the magisterial study of the French geographer Emmanuel de Martonne, central Europe appeared as the states of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania.<sup>6</sup> This was not so far from Partsch's view, compared to the work of most British geographers, who have been inclined to extend the concept of eastern Europe at central Europe's expense. Indeed, in quoting approvingly Sir Harold

<sup>2</sup> K. Sinnhuber, "Central Europe, *Mittleuropa*, L'Europe Centrale: An Analysis of a Geographical Term", *Trans. and Papers Inst. Brit. Geographers*, xx (1954), pp. 17-18, 20.

<sup>3</sup> J. Partsch, *Mittleuropa: Die Länder und Völker von den Westalpen und dem Balkan bis an den Kanal und das Kurische Haf* (Gotha, 1904), p. 4. An English version of this book, abridged to Partsch's displeasure by Sir Halford Mackinder, who had commissioned it, appeared in 1903 under the title *Central Europe*.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in H. Rumpf, "Mittleuropa: Zur Geschichte und Deutung eines politischen Begriffs", *Historische Zeitschrift*, clxv (1942), p. 511.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Haushofer, "Mittleuropa und der Anschluss", in F. Kleinwächter and H. Paller (eds.), *Der Anschluss* (Vienna, 1930), p. 151.

<sup>6</sup> E. de Martonne, *L'Europe Centrale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1930-1), i, p. 3.

Mackinder's famous comment "He who controls Eastern Europe controls the world", the French geographer Jean Gottman in 1950 simply substituted "central Europe" as the name for the area in question.<sup>7</sup>

The categories of historians and political scientists pose equal problems. German scholarship abounds in distinctions between an "old *Mittleuropa*", including northern Italy, and a modern one without Italy, but extending into the Balkans; between "actual *Mittleuropa* in the narrower sense" and "greater *Mittleuropa*";<sup>8</sup> between *Mittleuropa* and a smaller *Zentraleuropa* (also used as its synonym) or a *Zwischeneuropa* alternately larger and smaller; between an east-central and a south-east Europe. At least in German usage the idea of a central European region, however defined, is consistently related to a clear tripartite division of the continent, whose eastern section is identified with Russia and the western borderlands under its control. In the English-speaking world, by contrast, eastern Europe has tended to denote the area of the newly independent Succession States of 1918, leaving obscure the question of Russia's place as a European land. Indeed when Hungarians, Poles and Czechs writing in English claim a central European status for themselves and deny a European identity to Russia, the bizarre situation results of a continent with a west and a centre, but no east.<sup>9</sup> In the interwar years the famous Polish historian Oskar Halecki and the Czech Byzantinist Jaroslav Bidlo quarrelled over the place of Poland, which on a simple bipartite division of the continent Halecki put in the east, while Bidlo claimed it was wholly western.<sup>10</sup> Central/eastern Europe is no place for the tidy-minded.

Yet there is a way out of the bog. Shorn of their scholarly reservations, geographic studies offer suggestive grounds for the

<sup>7</sup> J. Gottman, *A Geography of Europe*, 3rd edn. (New York, 1954), p. 387. For a British view, see A. F. A. Milton, *Central Europe: A Regional and Human Geography*, 2nd edn. (London, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> H. Oncken, *Das alte und das neue Mittleuropa* (Gotha, 1917); E. Jäckh, *Das grössere Mittleuropa* (Weimar, 1916). For the use of other terms, see below, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the views of the Czech novelist Milan Kundera and the Hungarian philosopher Mihály Vajda: G. Schöpfli and N. Wood, "Milan Kundera's Lament", in G. Schöpfli and N. Wood (eds.), *In Search of Central Europe* (London, 1989), pp. 140-2; M. Vajda, "Who Excluded Russia from Central Europe?", *ibid.*, pp. 168-75.

<sup>10</sup> J. Bidlo, "Ce qu'est l'histoire de l'Orient Européen", *Bulletin d'information des sciences historiques en Europe Orientale*, vi (1934), pp. 11-73; O. Halecki, "Ce qu'est l'histoire de l'Orient Européen", *ibid.*, pp. 82-93.

concept of a historical region in the centre of Europe. They reveal a transitional zone of mountains, basins and counter-flowing river systems, shaping a pattern of ethnic splintering implausible in the vast plains of the continental east or extensive peninsulas of the Atlantic west. The plains and river valleys of intermediate Europe allowed the great Slavic migrations of the sixth and seventh centuries; the mountain systems of the Balkans and Carpathians helped the ancestors of Albanians and Romanians to survive, as later the Slavs themselves, in the face of incursions of Magyar and Turk. The openness of the north European plain helps explain Poland's shifting frontiers and equal exposure, compared with Czech Bohemia, to Russian as to German threat. Russia's frontiers have shifted by the same token, with the Bjelorussian people's long uncertain identity as a buffer in between, reflecting the transitional status of its language on a dialect continuum from Polish to Russian speech. Over against this ethnic kaleidoscope, far enough from the Roman empire and the steppe invaders alike, the German people was able to consolidate itself, before moving south-east and east under the banner of Charlemagne.

Given this background the history of the lands of central/eastern Europe, for all its twists and turns, affords an understandable pattern. Crucial to it are the attempts of a clutch of small and medium-sized peoples to assert their identities against more powerful neighbours on their flanks. The smaller nations of the "lands between", the "marchland", or the "shatter-belt", as they have variously been called,<sup>11</sup> with their own internal Polish-Danubian-Balkan division, have not found it easy to play an independent regional role. Depending upon the strength of the pressure on either side, they have at different times appeared as part of a broader central Europe or a broader eastern Europe, as hinterland of *Mitteleuropa* or as Russian glacis. That in most periods German influence has predominated reflects the greater geographical links of the lands between with Germany as opposed to the Russian steppe. In short the geographical region of central Europe, itself characterized by its fragmentation, has created the possibility for a historical region, whose different sectors have moved towards disintegration or fusion according to the flux of events. It is the long-standing association of "central Europe"

<sup>11</sup> A. W. Palmer, *The Lands Between: A History of East-Central Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (London, 1970); D. Turnock, *The Making of Eastern Europe from the Earliest Times to 1815* (London, 1988), p. 1.

with a German sphere of influence, of course, which gives questions of regional definition their historico-political bite.

This perspective removes for historians some of the problems of regional definition which have troubled geographers. Denmark, the Low Countries, Switzerland and parts of France must be excluded from central Europe as here understood, despite the absence of physical obstacles, because their fortunes have not been so crucially bound up with Germany's as those of the peoples to Germany's east. Other problems remain. Some concern further border details in the Baltic lands, the Balkans and perhaps northern Italy. Others are more fundamental. Does the concept of a historical region require only the existence of a framework of interaction, or does it posit also a measure of common traits or interests, whether in culture, social structure, economics or mentality? All definitions involve the aspiration to claim, control or utilize what is defined. What does the history of attempts to conceptualize regional relationships in central and eastern Europe tell us about the development of national consciousness among its peoples? What has been the relationship between national, regional and pan-European identities? The following discussion assumes that on issues where subjectivity is strong the best orientation is provided by a sober setting out of what has been asserted, against the widest possible time-span.

## II

German nationalists have traced *Mitteleuropa's* lineage back to the Carolingian empire, whose eastern borders anticipated closely the postwar Iron Curtain. The concept, however, was unknown to the Middle Ages. The very idea of Europe remained somewhat bookish in the period, as against that of a western (occidental) community, linked with Roman Christianity and, to a degree, the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup> None the less these were formative years, in which the development of the religious conflict between Rome and Byzantium, the creation of Slav and Hungarian national states and the movement of German populations to the east laid the bases for subsequent historical and polemical debate.

The disagreement of Bidlo and Halecki, mentioned above, goes to the heart of this debate as concerns the non-German sector of

<sup>12</sup> H. Gollwitzer, "Zur Wortgeschichte und Sinndeutung von 'Europa'", *Saeculum*, ii (1951), pp. 161-72.

the central/east European lands. Bidlo's simple bipartite division of Europe on "cultural" lines in 1934 effectively identified eastern Europe with the domain of Orthodoxy. "Cultural" was a curious word to use for Bidlo's characterization of east European society in terms of economic backwardness, lack of innovative spirit, tyrannical preponderance of the religious element, state despotism and lack of civic consciousness and a sense of public interest. Halecki's objection, however, was not to this stereotyping, but to the disjuncture Bidlo introduced into the experience of the religiously divided Slavs.<sup>13</sup> The theme of a potential mediating role between east and west Europe for Catholic Slavs has been important to both individual Slav Catholic historians and politicians. Thus the Croat patriot and Yugoslav-minded Bishop Strossmayer in the late nineteenth century was to seize on the ancient Slavonic liturgy surviving among the Catholics of Dalmatia and Istria as an instrument to reunite a Slavdom and Christendom divided, as he saw it, by Greek and Latin sins.<sup>14</sup>

Halecki's attempt at a more discriminating picture argued for dividing-lines to the east and west of Bidlo's single religious border. To the east he separated off Russia as essentially not part of Europe. The Mongol caesura in Russian history, he claimed, fatally obstructed in her case the cultural consolidation which the medieval Balkan Orthodox kingdoms had already achieved prior to their subjection to the Turks. Hence, in contrast to Russia, Balkan Christians retained a European identity, as part of an eastern Europe which emerged from the Byzantine empire, with a glacis of independent states to the north-east, including Poland, just as western Europe developed from the Roman empire, with its own glacis of indubitably European Scandinavian, Irish and Scottish entities. There was therefore a parallelism in the western and eastern halves of Europe which made each equally European. Within the redrawn eastern Europe area, however, further borders should distinguish an east Europe proper in Lithuania and Kievan Rus (very roughly the later Ukraine) from the east-central European lands of Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and the Balkans.

<sup>13</sup> See above, n. 10. For Bidlo's characterization of eastern Europe, see Bidlo, "Ce qu'est l'histoire de l'Orient Européen", p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> R. F. C. Okey, "The Slavonic Liturgy in Austro-Hungarian Diplomacy, 1881-1914", *Slavonic and East European Rev.*, lxx (1992), pp. 258-83.

To them corresponded, in this imposing synthesis, the west-central Europe of the German speakers.<sup>15</sup>

More recent research on socio-economic history has lent support to Halecki's idea of a distinct east-central European zone, while undermining his treatment of Russia and that of Russian scholars concerned to heighten their country's specific "Eurasian" (rather than purely European) heritage. The absence of sub-infeudation and of formal linkage of land grants to military service, adduced by the pro-Eurasian historian George Vernadsky to disprove the concept of a Russian feudalism, was also characteristic of medieval Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Patterns of population and urbanization in the medieval lands between place them clearly on a developmental level between the more advanced lands to the west and the less advanced to the east. Social and economic criteria argue for a continuum of divergence from west to east rather than a break at Russia's borders. Much in the "Europeanization" of Russia from early modern times parallels processes in east-central Europe some centuries before.<sup>17</sup>

While Russia was being cut off from fellow Slavs in the lands between, German contacts with them were growing. Of utmost historical importance is that the perceived need for development in these lands in the Middle Ages was in fair part met by government-sponsored immigration of German artisans, miners and peasants. The German element in east-central European urbanization, the military expansion of the Teutonic knights, the colonization and Germanization east of the Elbe and then the Oder, the role of the Holy Roman Empire: here plainly lie the origins of the *Mitteleuropa* concept of later times, the notion of the hegemony of German civilization in the lands between.<sup>18</sup> What all this came to mean for zealots can be seen from Adolf Hitler's

<sup>15</sup> O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (London, 1950), chs. 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> P. Engel, "The Age of the Angevines, 1301-1382", in P. F. Sugar (ed.), *A History of Hungary* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 44, 47. For Vernadsky's views, see G. Vernadsky, "Feudalism in Russia", in T. Riha (ed.), *Readings in Russian Civilisation* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 75-87.

<sup>17</sup> For a persuasive view of Russia's "Europeanness", see R. Wittram, *Russia and Europe* (London, 1973). Wittram believes the sixteenth-century theory of Moscow's special mission as the Third Rome can be overemphasized: *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> G. Stökl, *Osteuropa und die Deutschen* (Oldenburg, 1967), p. 40, points out that German nationalist historiography wrongly took all Polish towns using German municipal law to be German foundations. See also Z. Kaczmarczyk, "German Colonisation in Medieval Poland, in the Light of the Historiography of both Nations", *Acta Poloniae historica*, xi (1970), pp. 3-41.



table talk or Reinhard Heydrich's inaugural speech to officials of the Bohemian Protectorate in October 1941, recommended reading for those who see Nazism only in terms of the social strains of industrial capitalism.<sup>19</sup>

The medieval reality was of course more subtle. The interwar Austrian *Grossdeutsch* historian Heinrich von Srbik recognized that its key feature was German failure "to make the whole of geographic *Mitteleuropa* German ethnic territory". The defining feature of the region remained for him the lack of coincidence of state and ethnicity and the non-emergence of the "pure" nation state that had allegedly appeared in the west. In this conclusion Srbik betrayed, however, his own nationalist agenda, in which a German-led "universalism", derived from the medieval Reich, was to impose order on ethnic fragmentation.<sup>20</sup> In fact medieval Hungary, Poland and Bohemia were ethnically no more diverse than the medieval English and Scottish states. They were powerful entities which each at times appeared in a position to assume a regional hegemony, whether under the Bohemian Ottakar in the thirteenth century, Louis the Great of Hungary in the fourteenth century, or the Polish Jagiellons in the late fifteenth century. King George of Bohemia (1458-71) is one of several to have been called the "first central European".<sup>21</sup> Only Bohemia had a (limited) formal relationship to the Holy Roman Empire, and the check imposed on German influence by the Hussite wars enabled the "father" of the nineteenth-century Czech national revival, František Palacký, to taunt the Germans about their claims to inherent superiority.<sup>22</sup>

To overstress the coherence of medieval nationhood would, of course, be mistaken. With the exception of the lands of the Teutonic knights, what became international borders were delimited at the agency of local rather than state or national power.<sup>23</sup> The dense contacts between Polish, Czech and Hungarian dynasties were replicated in their contacts with German lands. The

<sup>19</sup> Heydrich's speech is reprinted in *Lesson from History*, ed. V. Král (Prague, 1962), pp. 113-24, esp. pp. 117-18, 121.

<sup>20</sup> H. von Srbik, *Mitteleuropa: Das Problem und die Versuche seiner Lösung in der deutschen Geschichte* (Weimar, 1937), pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> By E. Sontag in *Schweizerische Monatshefte*, xxxiii (1953), cited in B. Doppler, "Mitteleuropa: Glossierte Bibliographie", in the symposium "Mitteleuropa?", *Dialog*, xv, no. 2 (1989).

<sup>22</sup> F. Palacký, *Oesterreichs Staatsidee* (Prague, 1866; repr. Vienna, 1972), p. 73.

<sup>23</sup> See H. J. Karp, *Grenzen in Ostmitteleuropa während des Mittelalters* (Cologne and Vienna, 1972), esp. p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> For these examples and this theme, see H. Lemberg, "Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, xxxiii (1985), pp. 48-91.

but the "improvement of manners" within a recognizably common civilizational framework. Its titles reflected patrimonial assumptions or a sense of a shared urbanity rather than the cultural polarities of east-west or other regional divides.<sup>27</sup>

The period of the north-south axis in European consciousness was therefore one in which educated élites increasingly distanced themselves from ethnocentric or religious zeal in pursuit of rationalistic models in a European state system, a balance of power, a mechanism of progress. It came to an end when the masses began to claim a voice in public life, ideological issues were sharpened, and nationalism focused attention once more on cultural difference. Philological studies strengthened notions of Slavic unity and the identification of "the north" with Scandinavia.<sup>28</sup> The rise of the Eastern Question heightened the derogatory association of the terms eastern/oriental/Asian in the European west and through the opposed position of the powers attached these negative stereotypes to Russia, particularly after the Crimean War. In reaction, long-standing Russian concern at alleged de-nationalizing effects of westernization swelled into the Slavophile and Panslav movements, acquiring a manifesto in N. Y. Danilevsky's *Russia and Europe* of 1869. For Danilevsky the response to a Europe "which only tolerates us to extract advantages, without corresponding reward" could only be disassociation from "Germano-Roman civilization" and proclamation of an independent — Slavic — civilization.<sup>29</sup> The gauntlet was thrown down for ethno-ideological confrontation.

### III

When Danilevsky wrote, the struggle between Slavdom and Germanism for dominance in the lands between still seemed one-sided. By the nineteenth century the determining realities appeared to be the expansion of Prussia, the consolidation of

<sup>27</sup> For a typical example, both in title and content, see the work of the Baltic German J. F. C. Schultz, *Reise eines Liefländers von Riga nach Warschau, durch Südpreußen, über Breslau, Dresden, Karlsbad, Bayreuth, Nürnberg, Regensburg, München, Salzburg, Linz, Wien und Klagenfurt, nach Bozen in Tyrol* (Berlin, 1795). Travel-books are listed in W. Engelmann, *Bibliotheca Geographica: Verzeichnis der Seit der Mitte des vorigen Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Jahres 1856 in Deutschland erschienenen Werke über Geographie und Reisen* (Leipzig, 1858).

<sup>28</sup> Lemberg, "Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs", pp. 64-7.

<sup>29</sup> N. Y. Danilevsky, *Russland und Europa*, trans. K. Nötzel (Berlin, 1920), p. 191.

Austria and the stagnation of an east-central Europe geographically remote from the economic front line since the Age of Discovery. Together these factors seemed to have opened the way for a fusion of the two halves of the centre under a German-speaking hegemony. Before 1800 German had already become the chief language of polite society in Hungary, while in Bohemia Palacký wrote his history of the Czech people initially in German because the "active middle classes" he took to be that nation's core spoke and wrote more German than Czech.<sup>30</sup> More than 1,500 plays were performed in Zagreb by German professional companies between 1780 and 1860, but not one by an equivalent Croatian group till 1840.<sup>31</sup> German was the language of wider commerce in Serbian Belgrade and the Romanian port of Galați; in Russian Poland the census of 1897 recorded seventy thousand Germans in Łódź, the "Polish Manchester". German failure to turn this linguistic and economic preponderance in east-central Europe either into "greater *Mitteleuropa*" or harmonious co-operation with the lands between is arguably the key to European political history between 1848 and 1945.

Why were Germans themselves relatively unconcerned with the broader regional implications of the "German question" over much of this period? Pro-Austrian *grossdeutsch* historians blamed the complacency and lack of vision of the Prussian *kleindeutsch* school of the mid-nineteenth century. The decision of the Frankfurt parliament in October 1848 to admit Austria's German lands into a united Germany only under terms of loose "personal union" with the rest of the Habsburg monarchy was unacceptable to the great majority of German Austrians because they thought it risked undermining the dominant position of Germanism to the east and south-east described above. Their rejection of these terms, therefore, in the *grossdeutsch* view, reflected not lack of German spirit, but awareness of Austria's German mission in lands which, with a weakened monarchy, might fall under Russian or even Hungarian sway. The French historian Jacques Droz has shown the liveliness of arguments for an Austrian- as opposed to

<sup>30</sup> B. Grünwald, *A régi Magyarországnak, 1711-1825* [Old Hungary, 1711-1825] (Budapest, 1910), pp. 95-6; J. Haubelt, *České osvícenství* [The Czech Enlightenment] (Prague, 1986), p. 409.

<sup>31</sup> N. Batusić, *Povijest hrvatskoga kazališta* [A History of the Croatian Theatre] (Zagreb, 1978), pp. 218, 232. For a general treatment of German cultural influence in south-east Europe in this period, see F. Valjavec, *Geschichte der deutschen Kulturbeziehungen zum Südosteuropa*, 5 vols. (Munich, 1953-70), iv.

a Prussian-orientated *Mittleuropa* from the 1840s to the 1860s: whether politically orientated, emphasizing federal solutions rather than integral nationalism, in the spirit of Constantin Frantz; or economic, like Friedrich List's view of the Danube as a German stream, and of a balance of hegemony between continental Germans and insular Britons.<sup>32</sup>

There is, however, an element of special pleading in such rehabilitations. The *Mittleuropa* concept of Austria's famous Chancellor Metternich, presented by Srbik as a counterweight to Russia and France, with an adjunct in northern Italy, but excluding the Balkans, was static and untenable in an age of political and economic change;<sup>33</sup> a dynamic feature of economic *Mittleuropa* was precisely its Balkan orientation. Frantz's call on west Germans to recognize that only an understanding of Germany's eastward expansion, in which Prussia and Austria had shared equally, could bring them to a truer knowledge of themselves, has piquancy in view of kindred theses in the 1980s. Yet his conclusion that a recovered Reich federal tradition could then become a model for gradually looser constellations of central European power, well into the Russian borderlands, strains credulity.<sup>34</sup> The Achilles heel of Austrophile concepts of central Europe was not just their clash with mainstream German nationalism, but also the emptiness of the forbearance to non-German central Europeans implied in their federalist or decentralist ideas — though even this tokenism was lacking in Prince Karl Schwarzenberg and Karl Bruck's economic schemes of the neo-absolutist 1850s. Frantz believed modern circumstances more and more ruled out real autonomy for smaller nations.<sup>35</sup>

The eclipse of Austrian regional hegemony in 1866-70 is therefore unsurprising. The Prussian historian Hans Rothfels argued with some plausibility between the wars, however, that Bismarck shared more of the concerns of his *grossdeutsch* critics than they appreciated. His deafness to the German nationalist movement in Austria-Hungary reflected not so much indifference to the broader view beyond the Reich as the belief that a stable Habsburg

<sup>32</sup> J. Droz, *L'Europe Centrale: évolution historique de l'idée de "Mittleuropa"* (Paris, 1960), chs. 1-4.

<sup>33</sup> H. von Srbik, *Metternich: Der Staatsmann und der Mensch*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1925-6), i, pp. 413-14.

<sup>34</sup> C. Frantz, *Deutschland und der Föderalismus* (Stuttgart, 1921; first pubd. 1885), pp. 71-153.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, C. Frantz, *Quod faciamus nos* (Berlin, 1858), p. 15.

monarchy was essential for the maintenance of German interests in east-central Europe. He talked mutedly of the desirability of German-Slav co-operation in the Danubian lands, even of a whiff of federalism there. The argument, however, was double-edged. If, as appears from Rothfels's work, Bismarck saw German-Slav co-operation as that of the male and female principle in marriage, and had in mind for Austria the lop-sided federalism of the Prussian-dominated Second Reich, then he shared also the illusions of Austrophile advocates of *Mitteleuropa*.<sup>36</sup> Besides, Bismarck overestimated the monarchy's power to pursue German interests. The Austro-German alliance of 1879 led, ultimately, to 1914.

It was the fateful legacy of Bismarck's triumphs that after 1871 most educated Germans thought of *Mitteleuropa*, if at all, as an economic not a political issue. A curious piece of evidence links the popularization of the term with the economic progress of the age. Wilhelm Engelmann's bibliography of German geographic and travel literature, published in 1858, listed in its general section seventy-nine maps of Europe and only four of central Europe: of the equivalent mail-coach and railway maps fourteen were designated European and twenty-four central European, with the latter including three-quarters of those dating from the railway age.<sup>37</sup> Though for the most part these railway maps bore little relation to central Europe as discussed here — they commonly extended to Warsaw, Copenhagen, London, Paris, Rome and even Madrid — the remodelling of terminology in connection with the key instrument of the new bourgeois era is surely suggestive.

This conjunction of ideas was to have three important consequences for German relations with their eastern neighbours. First, to a dangerous extent, economic progress led the German middle classes to elevate their differences with the Slavs in particular into an unbridgeable civilizational divide. Paternalistic views of the relationship were still possible. Felix Kanitz, who wrote of the "civilizing endeavours of the European west" to rescue the lands of the lower Danube from "oriental torpor", was a sympathetic and prolific commentator on the Balkans.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> H. Rothfels, *Bismarck, der Osten und das Reich* (Stuttgart, 1960), pp. 284-5. The relevant essay, "Das Werden des mitteleuropäischen Gedankens", was first delivered as a lecture in 1933.

<sup>37</sup> Engelmann, *Bibliotheca Geographica*, pp. 261-73.

<sup>38</sup> F. Kanitz, *Serbien: Historisch-etnographische Reisetudien aus den Jahren 1859-68* (Leipzig, 1868), p. 341. For Kanitz, see Z. Konstantinović, *Deutsche Reisebeschrei-*

(cont. on p. 115)

The sharper tone set by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848 was more common. The Slav-German opposition, wrote *Westermann's illustrierte deutsche Monatshefte* in 1875, rested on the different organization of economic and civil society, and the absence of a Slav bourgeoisie.<sup>39</sup> It would be beneath German dignity, commented the influential liberal periodical *Die Grenzboten* at the time of the 1863 Polish uprising, to compare Slavic conspiracy-mongering with our "ice-cool, honourable, rational struggle for greater freedom and unity".<sup>40</sup> German intercourse with Slavs was rightly reduced to the minimum required by material processes and involved nothing touching on "sensibility in the broadest sense".<sup>41</sup> This lofty indifference was not just a pose. The most famous professor of Slav philology at the University of Berlin, the Croat Vatroslav Jagić, had no pupils for several years after his appointment in 1874, and during his subsequent tenure in Vienna only 5 per cent of the doctorates submitted in the field were by non-Slavs.<sup>42</sup> German travel-books on Slav countries concentrated on the picturesque and the folkloric — Bosnian Muslims, Montenegrins, Dalmatian "Morlaks", Galician Gorals.<sup>43</sup> The prestigious Vienna daily, the *Neue Freie Presse*, an indefatigable exponent of German hauteur, remarked in 1870 that Dalmatia was perhaps as well known in Vienna as was Honolulu.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, such attitudes lent an ambiguity to German views of east-central Europe. They justified the right to domination, but they also raised the question as to whether this backyard was

(n. 38 cont.)

*bungen über Serbien und Montenegro* (Munich, 1960), pp. 94-107. The long-standing periodical *Das Ausland* was also a source of relatively benevolent news of the Balkans: M. Mojašević, "Kulturno-posrednička uloga časopisa 'Das Ausland' između Nemaca i Jugoslovena (1828-93)" [The Role of the Periodical *Das Ausland* in Cultural Mediation between Germans and South Slavs (1828-93)], *Zbornik filozofskog fakulteta Beogradskog Univerziteta* [Jl. of the Philosophy Faculty of Belgrade Univ.], iii (1955), pp. 421-515.

<sup>39</sup> K. Marx, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* (London, 1971), pp. 58-63: this book was based on newspaper articles written in 1851-2. M. Lammich, *Das deutsche Osteuropabild in der Zeit der Reichsgründung* (Boppard am Rhein, 1977), p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Lammich, *Deutsche Osteuropabild*, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> A. Angyal, "Vatroslav Jagić und seine Zeit", in J. Tetzner (ed.), *Deutsch-slavische Wechselseitigkeit in sieben Jahrhunderten* (Berlin, 1956), pp. 579-636.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Konstantinović, *Deutsche Reisebeschreibungen*, pp. 148-67. The thoughtful anthology, *Njemački putopisi po Dalmaciji* [German Travelogues of Dalmatia], ed. I. Pederin (Split, 1989), pp. 315-29, offers a useful bibliography of German travel literature on Dalmatia and adjoining regions.

<sup>44</sup> *Neue Freie Presse*, 6 Jan. 1870.

worth bothering about at all. There was more French than German investment in the Balkans and Turkey in 1914, and trade with Romania, which accounted for half Germany's Balkan investment, varied from 1 to 2 per cent of German commerce between 1891 and 1913. Less than a fifth of the publications of the Pan-German League before 1914 touched on the area of *Mittleuropa* even in part.<sup>45</sup>

Thirdly, the mood of effortless superiority became grimmer as Polish and Czech national mobilization advanced,<sup>46</sup> and contributed in tipping German collective consciousness in the direction of nationalist *ressentiment* — witness the brooding intensity with which the young Hitler heard out long speeches in Czech in the Vienna Reichsrat.<sup>47</sup> But because of German disparagement of Slavs and the variations on particular national fronts (Poznan and Silesia; Bohemia and the Slovene lands) no collective German eastern policy resulted. The frictions on the German-Slav border fed into broader, international alarms, and it was in this broader context, if at all, that regional remedies were proposed. Thus the geographer Partsch, whose *Mittleuropa* in 1904 clearly evidences a German sense of the Slavic resurgence, concluded with a call for the economic co-operation of central Europe against the British and Russian world powers.<sup>48</sup>

The advocacy of the German liberal politician Friedrich Naumann in 1915 of a fourth, central European world power alongside Britain, Russia and America was not therefore wholly new.<sup>49</sup> To see it as part of a monolithic German imperialism, however, is somewhat indiscriminating. The reception of Naumann's famous book testified to the absence of a united German regional strategy: in the attacks on Naumann by Social Democrats and Pan-Germans; in disputes as to the priority of *Mittleuropa* or *Osteuropa*; and in the weak links with representative non-Germans.<sup>50</sup> Naumann's tone towards these last was markedly more conciliatory than that of other German writers. If he saw their peoples as

<sup>45</sup> H. C. Meyer, "*Mittleuropa*" in *German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 67, 70, 52.

<sup>46</sup> For worsening German-Polish relations in this period, see W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago, 1980), chs. 5-8; H. K. Rosenthal, *German and Pole* (Gainsville, 1976), ch. 2.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kubiczek, *Young Hitler* (London, 1950), pp. 178-9.

<sup>48</sup> Partsch, *Mittleuropa*, pp. 160, 163, 186, 196.

<sup>49</sup> F. Naumann, *Mittleuropa* (Berlin, 1915).

<sup>50</sup> Meyer, "*Mittleuropa*", chs. 9-10.



“planets” around a German sun, was this unrealistic? Had the national revivals Naumann referred to sympathetically done enough before 1914 to suggest that an alternative view of the area between France and Russia was on the cards?<sup>51</sup>

These national revivals, which changed the map of central Europe, are still an under-researched field. The role of socio-economic change, of “modernization”, in the process is undeniable. Yet we may underestimate the historic roots of these nationalisms, just as Germans overrated the power of economics to cement a Germanocentric *Mitteleuropa*.<sup>52</sup> One does not have to be a Burkean conservative to take the point of nineteenth-century Slavs that their peoples’ current lowly status was not the only reality, but that the medieval statehood most of them had enjoyed in some form fitted in somewhere too. However, fledgling entities were not at first in a position to turn beyond this, to wider regional perspectives.

Poles and Hungarians were the exception here. The Poles, an east-central European nation *par excellence*, looked beyond *Mitteleuropa* to the west and particularly France, playing the European card. The Polish left followed the tradition of 1793, as modified by Giuseppe Mazzini, and aimed at a Europe of the peoples. The Polish right sought to make the support of European liberals for a Polish restoration the more painless by setting it in a exclusively anti-Tsarist context. With agents in the Romanian principalities, Belgrade and Constantinople, it was they, before *Mitteleuropa* was conceived, who gave Balkan Christians a functional European role.<sup>53</sup> Polish hopes, and also Hungarian, were dashed by the failure of European revolutionary and liberal solidarity in 1848. It should be noted that schemes for a Hungarian-led Danubian federation were first to have been brokered with revolutionary Frankfurt, and only in exile came to rest primarily on London and Paris. There was a logic to this. A Hungarian regional sub-hegemony over Romanians and Serbs could make a

<sup>51</sup> Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, pp. 165, 81-3. For a more characteristic German approach, see the respected historian Hermann Oncken’s reference to the “unconditionally loyal attitude” which Serbia, Montenegro and Romania would have to observe in co-operating with the “economic-political tasks” of the new *Mitteleuropa*: Oncken, *Alte und das neue Mitteleuropa*, p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> For an influential analysis which in my view does underestimate the historic roots of nineteenth-century nationalism, see E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (London, 1983).

<sup>53</sup> See M. Kukiel, *Czartoryski and European Unity, 1770-1861* (Princeton, 1955).

more acceptable adjunct to a German central Europe than a restored Poland with her pre-partition borders.<sup>54</sup> But Hungary's was to be a *Mitteuropa* on terms; only a couple of her leading politicians supported Naumann's plans in 1915, with their implication of German economic hegemony.<sup>55</sup>

Other peoples of the lands between, the late success of the second Balkan Alliance apart (1911-12), could only choose between affiliations not originally their own. This was true even of the Czechs. Their Austro-Slavic federation, as the Czech *émigré* historian Jan Křen has shown for Palacký in 1848, did not entail the denial of a natural German hegemony in central Europe.<sup>56</sup> Palacký's east-central Europe conceded close relations with a German west-centre; it was not to be, like the east-central Europe of the Poles, a wholly different zone. Small-nation nationalism was about survival. It was defensive, more concerned to prick the pretension of German *Kulturträger* — repaying German prejudice with kind — and to reflate its own ego than, initially, with the blueprints of power. Hence in its opponents' distorting mirror the taunts that Slavs lacked creative gifts and the sense of form.<sup>57</sup>

Panslavism, *bête noire* of the Germans, is a case in point.<sup>58</sup> It was a psychic support mechanism, not a defined programme for a Russian-led eastern Europe. Nor could it be when between 1851 and 1861 there was one Yugoslav student at Moscow University while there were 359 in 1861-2 at the universities of Vienna and Graz alone,<sup>59</sup> when many Czech intellectuals were strongly

<sup>54</sup> T. Lengyel, "La Hongrie et la Confédération danubienne", *Nouvelle revue de Hongrie*, xxxvi.2 (1943), pp. 15-26, 134-49.

<sup>55</sup> J. Galantai, *Oszkár Jászi's Conception of Federalism in the First World War* (Budapest, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> J. Křen, *Konfliktní společenství* [Societies in Conflict] (Toronto, 1989), pp. 127-37, esp. p. 129.

<sup>57</sup> The classic example of the Slav use of ridicule is Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, trans. C. Parrott (Harmondsworth, 1974; 1st pubd. Prague, 1922), but it could be paralleled, for instance, in the work of the leading Croat realist writer August Šenoa or the Bosnian Serb Petar Kočić. For a systematic study of a Slav people's negative view of Germans, albeit for a later period, see F. Goleczewski, *Das Deutschlandbild der Polen, 1918-39* (Düsseldorf, 1974).

<sup>58</sup> For German views, see A. Fischel, *Der Panslavismus bis zum Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1919).

<sup>59</sup> Figures from J. Ramminger, "Nationalismus und Universität: Die Genese des Nationalismus an den cisleithanischen Universitäten, 1859-1900" (Univ. of Vienna Ph.D. thesis, 1981), pp. 319, 326; V. K. Karasev *et al.*, "Ausländische Studenten aus slawischen Ländern an der Moskauer Universität in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. und Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts", in G. Plaschka and K. Mack (eds.), *Wegenetz europäischen Geistes*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1983-7), ii, p. 242. Two "Austrian" students were also recorded at Moscow University, who may have been South Slavs.

critical of Tsarist Russia, and when Russian Panslavs treated their fellow Slavs as a mere stage army to frighten the Europeans who really interested them — in the west. Danilevsky's famous book only once refers to a non-Russian Slav people by name. Indeed with ethnic progress and differentiation came a decline of earlier cross-regional solidarities, which had seen the friendship of Goethe and the Serbian language-reformer Vuk Karadžić, of Pushkin and the Pole Adam Mickiewicz, of the Hungarian national poet Sándor Petőfi and young Serbian *littérateurs*. A Hungarian Croatianist could remark in 1913 that Serbo-Croat-speaking Magyars were as rare as white ravens.<sup>60</sup> Romantic nationalism fell short of its fraternal ideal. Poles in 1848 would have bargained away their Romanian allies to Austria as compensation for getting Austrian Galicia. Egoism was indeed sacred.

It is against this background, with the emergence of east-central European peoples as relatively articulated societies, that the tendency for their more thoughtful spokesmen to turn consciously away from German influence to the bourgeois western model assumes significance. Relevant here are the Czech professor T. G. Masaryk's preference for Anglo-Saxon empiricism over German classical philosophy, the influential and Yugoslav-minded Serbian literary critic Jovan Skerlić's enthusiasm for George Eliot, and the Hungarian sociologist Oszkár Jászi's embrace of Herbert Spencer.<sup>61</sup> Such men wanted not so much to disavow the patriotisms they had inherited as to remould them into new and broader solidarities, guaranteed by the pragmatic needs of bourgeois democratic life rather than the promises of Slavic or Mazzinian messianism. At stake was the aspiration to an unhyphenated "New Europe", which R. W. Seton-Watson's periodical of that name was to oppose to *Mittleuropa*<sup>62</sup> during the First World War. Naumann may be forgiven for underplaying these trends,

<sup>60</sup> J. Bajza, *A horvát kérdés: válogatott tanulmányok* [The Croatian Question: Selected Studies], ed. T. László (Budapest, 1941), p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> P. Selver, *Masaryk* (London, 1940), pp. 107-8; M. Begić, *Jovan Skerlić et la critique littéraire en Serbie* (Paris, 1963); G. Fukasz, *A magyarországi polgári radikalizmus történetéhez, 1900-18: Jászi Oszkár ideológiájának bírálata* [Towards the History of Hungarian Bourgeois Radicalism, 1900-1918: A Critique of Oszkár Jászi's Ideology] (Budapest, 1960), pp. 21-5, 119.

<sup>62</sup> C. and H. Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London, 1981).

for until the war so did nearly everyone else. They had taken intellectual rather than political form.

#### IV

Ideological parallels between the emancipation of east-central Europe in 1918 and 1989 can therefore be striking and, in view of the interwar record, disconcerting. But the first emancipation process faced a special difficulty. It followed a war which inflamed ideological divisions in Europe, for Germany and Russia both came to reject western democracy and to see the Succession States as buffers erected against them on its behalf. In addition, the nations restored to independence had on the whole already been less developed than their western neighbours before the centuries of Turkish rule or feudal empire. Reassembled, with the more advanced areas like Prussian Poland, Bohemia and Slovenia now orientated to their eastern hinterland, the lands between were revealed as largely peasant societies, at the bottom of every European social and economic index. The Masarykian vision of a return of the region to its purported common European heritage was thus doubly compromised.<sup>63</sup>

In its place in the interwar years the earnestly courted westerners received a different impression which still weighs upon the region. It was of a backward and quarrelsome *eastern* Europe, a zone of instability and strife, however sympathetically some writers chose to depict a long-suffering common people and their few true champions.<sup>64</sup> The term "eastern", even "oriental", had often been attached by English and French writers to places in the Balkans, Romania, Transylvania or the Russo-Polish borderlands. Its increasing application to an entire regional state system, observed by Lh  ritier in 1935,<sup>65</sup> broadened the area of its use

<sup>63</sup> Masaryk's ideas are succinctly expressed in the last chapter of T. G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State: Memories, 1914-1918*, trans. H. W. Steed (London, 1927). For contrasting modern assessments, see A. van den Bild, *Humanity: The Political and Social Philosophy of Thomas G. Masaryk* (The Hague, 1975); R. Szporluk, *The Political Thought of T. G. Masaryk* (New York, 1981); R. B. Pynsent and H. Hanak (eds.), *T. G. Masaryk (1850-1937)*, 3 vols. (London, 1989-90), iii, *Statesman and Cultural Figure*.

<sup>64</sup> Examples might be H. Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars* (Cambridge, 1945); H. H. Tiltman, *Peasant Europe* (London, 1934).

<sup>65</sup> M. Lh  ritier, *L'  volution des r  gions historiques: l'Europe Orientale et la Hongrie* (Paris, 1935), p. 12. Lh  ritier was a rare writer giving "eastern Europe" a positive connotation, in that he urged Hungary to associate itself with the eastern Europe of free nations, rather than the imperial world of central Europe.

and inevitably had a distancing effect. The institutes and reviews which were now set up — *Le monde slave*, the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, the Breslau *Osteuropa* Institute, and the Polish West Slavonic, Baltic and Silesian Institutes, reflected scholarly concern for newly important entities, but also the degree to which these were bones of contention.

The fact that the modern standard German term for the lands between, *Ostmitteleuropa* — *Osteuropa* includes the Soviet Union as well — was only intermittently used between the wars indicates German uncertainty over their status. In Srbik's *Mitteleuropa* concept they became *Zwischeneuropa*, a zone of scattered German settlement extending to a line from Riga to Odessa and abutting the "actual *Mitteleuropa*", of solid German speech.<sup>66</sup> This was an updated version of the traditional *grossdeutsch* view, now redubbed "comprehensive" (*gesammtdeutsch*) in a partially successful bid by Srbik to transcend old academic quarrels with the Prussian *kleindeutsch* school. The term *Zwischeneuropa* came from a book of that name by Giseler Wirsing, who with Moeller van den Bruck and the journal *Die Tat* publicized the case for an eastern orientation for Germany, away from the democratic west towards Bolshevik Russia and the allegedly equally unwestern lands between.<sup>67</sup> Finally, the geopoliticians under Haushofer, with their hostile view of east-central Europe as a French buffer zone, came closest to the ultimately triumphant Nazi party.<sup>68</sup>

All schools agreed that *Zwischeneuropa*'s difficulties exposed the folly of liberal notions of self-determination in such an area. Its defective social structure, too, pointed the need for German leadership, which was purportedly to be achieved, at least for the Srbik and Wirsing schools, through natural economic processes and an unspecified role for German minorities, rather than west-

<sup>66</sup> Srbik, *Mitteleuropa*, p. 5. See also H. von Srbik, "Gesamtdutsche Geschichtsauffassung", *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft*, viii (1930), pp. 1-12; the comments of Paul Sweet on the resulting controversy in P. Sweet, "Recent German Literature on Mitteleuropa", *Jl. Central European Affairs*, iii (1943), pp. 1-24, esp. pp. 15-17.

<sup>67</sup> For Wirsing and the *Die Tat* school, see A. Hecker, *Die Tat und ihr Osteuropa — Bild, 1909-39* (Cologne, 1974). The term *Zwischeneuropa* had originally been used by the geographer Albrecht Penck to denote the whole area from and including Scandinavia to Italy and the Balkans. *Zwischen* means "between" in German.

<sup>68</sup> K. Haushofer, "Mitteleuropa und die Welt", *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, xiv (1937), pp. 1-4. Cf. the comment in Haushofer, "Mitteleuropa und der Anschluss", p. 152: "A *Mitteleuropa* which unites the Vistula and the Danube, but excludes the Rhine, has neither past nor future".

ern-style imperialism. However, a persistent vagueness as to the exact political form of a reorganized central Europe, combined with incidental references implying a minimal non-German role, suggest levels of disingenuousness or self-deception difficult to plumb. Srbik's barbed comment that the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 violated the historical fact of German primacy in the Habsburg monarchy sits ill with his pious invocation a few pages on of the "co-operation of equally entitled nations and states" in *Mittleuropa*.<sup>69</sup> And revisionist arguments that the Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein was not a Nazi secessionist, but a federalist, need to admit the problematic nature in historical context of his movement's call for "a new federative structure for *Mittleuropa*".<sup>70</sup>

Moreover a greater concern with Germany's eastern neighbours than before the war rested on no real academic advance. An appeal on behalf of German Slavic studies in 1927 lamented its puny resources and the fact that papers could be published in respected journals on sensitive issues like Slav settlement patterns by authors ignorant of Slav languages and relevant Slav historical literature.<sup>71</sup> For Nazis even the hollow gestures to non-German central Europeans implied in the programmes of Srbik and *Die Tat* smacked of ideological deviation. Helmut Rumpf's survey of *Mittleuropa* ideas in 1942 implied a blunter perspective than that of most non-party ideologists, discounting earlier concepts of the area as making it no more than a counterweight to outside forces. *Mittleuropa*, he asserted, was a self-standing idea; it was, with a side-swipe at the Austrian Catholic Srbik, the Reich demystified (*ohne Mythos*).<sup>72</sup> Yet in view of the curious mix of nineteenth-century echoes, *völkisch* philosophizing and *realpolitik* that characterized most German writing on east-central Europe between the wars and can be found also in Hitler, non-Germans in the area were hard put to know the real state of the game. Who can tell what relationship the puppet president of the Nazi protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia, Emil Hácha, really thought possible when

<sup>69</sup> Srbik, *Mittleuropa*, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> The quotation is from one of Henlein's henchmen, Walter Heinrich, cited in A. Luh, *Der Deutsche Turnverband in der ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik* (Oldenburg, 1988), p. 262.

<sup>71</sup> H. F. Schmid and P. Trautmann, *Wesen und Aufgaben der deutschen Slawistik* (Leipzig, 1927), p. 81, *passim*.

<sup>72</sup> Rumpf, "Mittleuropa", p. 524.

he wrote to Hitler in 1940 about "the great idea of friendly coexistence" of Czechs and Germans?<sup>73</sup>

For the changed situation complicated choices and perceptions for the Succession States, too. Could they shape a regional or a pan-European identity apart from Germany? *L'Europe Centrale* (founded 1926) and the *Central European Observer* (1923-48) appeared in Prague, *L'Est Européen* (founded 1922) in Warsaw; the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga popularized the notion of a south-east European cultural community. In practice, in their texts the journalists of *L'Est Européen* tended to use the phrase "central and eastern Europe", which expressed the Polish sense of Warsaw's wide regional connections. Piotr Wandycz has shown that for Poles the alliance with France had more military than political significance, whereas for Czechs it was the reverse.<sup>74</sup> Once they sensed the decline of French resolve the Poles were willing, therefore, to shape their own political framework, culminating in the concept of the "Third Europe" of Colonel Beck, foreign minister from 1935 to 1939, which assigned Poland virtually the status of a regional great power.<sup>75</sup> Again, others would not play ball. There were territorial disputes with Lithuania and Czechoslovakia. Estonia and Latvia could look many ways and ultimately should be seen as chips of the old "northern Europe".<sup>76</sup> Most decisively, Hungary shrank from a co-ordinated attack on Czechoslovakia to establish the common frontier with Poland which was essential to the "Third Europe".<sup>77</sup>

Truncated Hungary was in still less of a position than before 1914 to challenge the *Mitteleuropa* link. Intellectually her alignment to the norms of German idealism meant denial of cultural influence from other neighbours;<sup>78</sup> politically, Hungarian propa-

<sup>73</sup> *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky, 1939-43* [Documents on Czech Political History, 1939-43], ed. L. Otahálová and M. Červinková (Prague, 1962), p. 363.

<sup>74</sup> P. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-39* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 450-1.

<sup>75</sup> For the "Third Europe", see A. M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers, 1938-9* (London, 1968), pp. 55-6.

<sup>76</sup> Rothfels, *Bismarck, der Osten und das Reich*, p. 274, argued that, despite the evident Baltic links, "the *Mitteleuropa* idea in its acute form" was confined to the lands east and south-east of Germany. Lhéritier, "Europe Centrale", p. 52, omitted the Baltic lands on the grounds that coastal areas could be more closely linked to lands across the sea than to their hinterland.

<sup>77</sup> See B. Winchester, "Hungary and the 'Third Europe'", *Slavic Rev.*, xxxii (1973), pp. 741-56.

<sup>78</sup> P. Horvath, *A kelet és közép-európai Népek jogfőjlődése iránti érdeklődés a magyar burzsoa jogtörténetírásában* [Interest in the Legal Development of the Peoples of Central

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ganda for a "Danubian" entity was welcome to German geopoliticians as a breach in the anti-German *Europe Centrale* they feared France was plotting. Less tendentious attempts at regional co-operation — the voluminous writings of Elemér Hantos on behalf of an economic *Mittleuropa*, the *Revue d'histoire comparée* (1943-8) published in Budapest, then Paris — encountered abiding Czech mistrust.<sup>79</sup> Interwar independence demonstrated what pre-1914 Czech experience had only hinted at. Since geography meant that the immediate regional option for the Czechs was *Mittleuropa* and continued German influence, once they had re-established a national culture their preference was for a purely European orientation, to which the Little Entente with Romania and Yugoslavia was only a feeble regional subtext. Coming to the concept of central Europe in his war memoirs, Masaryk gave it just one sentence, only to say that, culturally, Bohemia belonged to the west.<sup>80</sup> It is not perhaps wholly coincidental that the closest interwar Czechoslovakia came to a Danubian alignment (in 1936) was under a Slovak premier, Milan Hodža. During the Second World War President Edvard Beneš disengaged from early Polish-Czechoslovak confederal plans and pinned his strategy on alliances with the west and the Soviet Union.<sup>81</sup> He also worked to remove the most distinctive feature of east-central Europe, the existence of national minorities, by expelling the Sudeten Germans and urging the Poles to give up their Bjelorussian and Ukrainian lands to the Soviets. This was a rational, if somewhat drastic response to the weaknesses of "independent eastern Europe" as they had revealed themselves between the wars, but in the event it failed no less than Polish policy. Beneš's denial of a regional dimension made the fate of his country dependent on the maintenance of harmony between east and west, and by reducing central Europe

(n. 78 cont.)

and Eastern Europe in Hungarian Bourgeois Historiography] (Budapest, 1968), pp. 64-5.

<sup>79</sup> See E. Hantos, *Der Weg zum Mittleuropa* (Berlin, 1933), for Hungarian regional endeavours on a cultural level; D. Kosary, "The Idea of a Comparative History of East Central Europe: The Story of a Venture", in D. Deletant and H. Hanak (eds.), *Historians as Nation Builders: Central and South-East Europe* (London, 1988), pp. 124-38; the sometimes more dubious work recorded in S. Gál (ed.), *Ungarische Balkanforschung* (Budapest, 1944).

<sup>80</sup> Masaryk, *Making of a State*, p. 370.

<sup>81</sup> The most balanced assessment of Beneš in the war years is by his former secretary, E. Taborsky, *President Edvard Beneš between East and West, 1938-48* (Stanford, 1981). For Polish-Czech confederation plans, see P. Wandycz, *The Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation and the Great Powers, 1940-3* (Bloomington, 1956).



to a metaphor, that of a bridge between the two, with its hint at a mediating role, he may actually have heightened Stalin's suspicions.

The failure of notions of democracy and self-determination to sustain the new international order in central/eastern Europe after 1918 is food for thought. Though overblown or downright uncongenial to English speakers, Srbik's talk of nation, Europe and humanity and Hermann Oncken's of Might and Right, taken together, perhaps provided a sharper focus on regional issues of identity and *realpolitik*.<sup>82</sup> They addressed real choices. Masaryk's skill had been to combine all these considerations in the cause of the lands between, by offering the western allies their support against German *Drang nach Osten* and on behalf of a democratic "New Europe". When the weakness of the Succession States became apparent, the conventional response in the democratic west was to urge the claims of federalism, as the best means to link the principle of self-determination with the need for viability in a tough world. The failures of the various Balkan, Danubian and Polish-Czech (con-)federal schemes which especially proliferated in the Second World War, could be taken by westerners as further evidence of the unregenerate nationalism of east European society. They could also suggest, however, as was noted at the time, that federalism had little to offer where ethnic and socio-economic differences were great, and worked best where relative homogeneity already existed.<sup>83</sup> Certainly the pro-federalist statement of a wartime Yugoslav government minister that the peasant masses from the Baltic to the Balkans must be looked on as a unity,<sup>84</sup> at a time when Serbs and Croats were slaughtering each other, shows a divorce from regional reality in "democratic" rhetoric quite as great as in the rhetoric of Danilevsky or Srbik. This failure, as well as the Red Army, helped smooth the Communists' path to power.

## V

How does central/eastern Europe need to be rethought after four decades of Communism? The border changes linked to the Second

<sup>82</sup> Srbik, *Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung*, p. 5; Oncken, *Alte und das neue Mitteleuropa*, p. 138.

<sup>83</sup> R. Schlesinger, *Federalism in Central and Eastern Europe* (Westport 1970; 1st publ. London, 1945), chs. 17-21, esp. pp. 475-6, 506-10, 519-20.

<sup>84</sup> F. Gross, *Cross-Roads of Two Continents: A Democratic Federation of East-Central Europe* (New York, 1945), p. 20.

World War were minor compared to those following the First, though not insignificant. In Halecki's terms at least the Soviet Union's acquisition of eastern Poland and Bessarabia involved the passage from one civilization to another; Polish accounts stress the astonishment of occupying Soviet troops at Polish living standards after the Nazi-Soviet pact.<sup>85</sup> The westward shift of Poland, expulsion of Germans and collectivization, by changing the landscape which Germans had thought to be a primordial marker of *Mitteleuropa*, led some geographers to re-emphasize the theory of the power of politics to reshape regional entities.<sup>86</sup> Marxist scholarship reinforced the east-west compartmentalization of Europe resulting from political division by defining a historical eastern Europe east of the Elbe, the lands of the so-called "second serfdom" from the early modern period. Yet in general academic parlance, both east and west, the term east-central Europe came to be widely accepted as a neutral label for the lands between. A feature of this usage was that its counterpart, west-central Europe, did not occur. The German Federal Republic became part of the west, and the way was open for "central Europe" to be claimed by Poles, Czechoslovaks and Hungarians in the various "central European federalist" groups operating, for example, in London and New York from the 1950s.<sup>87</sup>

But this is to anticipate. The immediate postwar expectation, of supporters and opponents of Communist rule, was that it would speed regional integration. This appeared confirmed, if ironically, by the widespread reaction in 1956 to common policies of forced industrialization, which incidentally undermined the credibility of non-Communist federalism, heavily based as it was on peasant ideals. Yet the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia and 1980-1 in Poland evoked far less regional response. As time passed it gradually became clear that Soviet power worked on a basis of essentially bilateral arrangements with east European countries. Romania's successful obstruction of regional specialization in Comecon, eastern Europe's equivalent of the Common Market, reflected the autarkic tendency of the command economies which were arising on the basis of old-fashioned heavy industry. The economic bankruptcy of this system by the 1980s had long been

<sup>85</sup> For example, *The Dark Side of the Moon* (London, 1946), pp. 49-50.

<sup>86</sup> Sinnhuber, "Central Europe, Mitteleuropa, Europe Centrale", pp. 32-6.

<sup>87</sup> For early postwar thinking on federal issues, see F. Gross, "The Future of Mid-European Union", *Jl. Central European Affairs*, xvi (1956-7), pp. 353-70.

preceded by the total failure of Russian language and culture to fill the communicative role formerly played by German and other western cultures.

The debate about central Europe that re-emerged in the 1980s was therefore disillusioned and nostalgic in tone. For the first time it was as much a non-German as a German debate, because a driving force in the lands between was to throw off the "eastern" label associated with the hated Soviet system. The retrospective focus was not, however, the interwar years with their geopolitical and economic concerns, but the polyglot urban culture of pre-1914, mainly, but not entirely, of the Habsburg monarchy. Diversity was the catchword of this re-embraced central European world; Jews rather than healthy peasants were the common thread; scepticism and irony were proclaimed the unifying values of the central European intelligentsia, as of European culture as a whole. Indeed European values were better preserved by marginalized central Europeans, it was argued, than in the complacent, consumerist west.<sup>88</sup>

Participants in the debate, besides German speakers, were in particular Hungarians, Czechs and Poles, but also Romanians, Slovenes, Croats, Lithuanians and Triestinos.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, Serbians were less in evidence than earlier in the century, when mobilization of smaller nations bore an anti-Habsburg character. Older divisions were not wholly healed, though contributors were nearly all writers not politicians. For the Czech novelist Milan Kundera, Russia was not European at all, but nor was Germany part of central Europe.<sup>90</sup> Predictably it was a Hungarian, the sociologist Georg Konrad, who came closest to German spokesmen, but old Hungarian ambivalence showed in other arguments that gave the credit for traditions of ethnic tolerance not to the Habsburg monarchy, but to the Transylvanian and Polish com-

<sup>88</sup> These remarks are based largely on material in subsequent footnotes and the following: *Dialog*, xv, no. 2; F. Herterich and C. Semler (eds.), *Dazwischen: Ostmittel-europäische Reflexionen* (Frankfurt, 1989); Schöpflin and Wood (eds.), *In Search of Central Europe*; *Cadmos: cahiers trimestriels du Centre européen de la culture*, no. 39 (autumn 1987).

<sup>89</sup> See *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1982-), for contributions from all these nationalities. The evocative travelogue by C. Magris, *Danube* (London, 1969; 1st pubd. 1986), reflects the Triestino Habsburg inheritance, as does Italian participation in the Hexagonale grouping, alongside Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

<sup>90</sup> M. Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe", *New York Rev. Books*, 26 Apr. 1984.

monwealths which preceded it.<sup>91</sup> Only echoes remained of Poland's historical sense of regional difference — in the fears some Poles expressed that the Solidarity movement had heightened the Polish sense of uniqueness, or that Poles might become disillusioned with a west they saw only normatively, not as it really was.<sup>92</sup> The sharpest break with the past was the determination of the new Austrian nationalist school to visualize a *Mitteleuropa* without Germany.

Austrian and German approaches were alike, however, in their ill-concealed nostalgia for past regional influence, even if only cultural and linguistic. Partly this resembled British nostalgia for the raj, though Communism had destroyed the legal-institutional commonalities which survived 1918, leaving cafés, cake shops, Baroque style and the look of railway stations as intriguing, but somewhat shaky, substitutes. Partly it was the revival of the old theme of *Mitteleuropa* as a (sometimes neutralist) bulwark against alien pressures from the flanks, by now American.<sup>93</sup> Though all disclaimed any link with the political or economic concerns of the 1930s, the emotional vehemence could be disturbing. For Erhard Busek, later an Austrian minister, and Emil Brix, *Mitteleuropa* offered a new political culture of action; it was an "existential question", a chance of escape from money-grabbing peripherality to a sphere where relationships to the "I" and the world, and attitudes to history, right and human dignity were different from elsewhere . . .<sup>94</sup> Plainly, such a central Europe was not a matter of conventional definitions, because it was not a matter of conventional power. It was an idea used by different groups for their

<sup>91</sup> C. G. Kiss, "Dazwischen", in Herterich and Semler (eds.), *Dazwischen*, p. 114.

<sup>92</sup> J. Staniszkis, "Polens Einsamkeit in Europa", in Herterich and Semler (eds.), *Dazwischen*, pp. 70-84; J. J. Lipski, "Liegt Polen in Europa?", *ibid.*, pp. 150-62.

<sup>93</sup> H. Slapnicka, *Österreichs Recht ausserhalb Österreichs* (Vienna, 1973), shows the extent of legal continuity in the Succession States until the Communist takeover; E. Trost, *Was blieb vom Doppeladler*, 5th edn. (Vienna, 1966), records more anecdotal survival. For German *Mitteleuropa* leanings with an anti-American tinge, see Schlögel, *Mitte liegt ostwärts*.

<sup>94</sup> E. Busek and E. Brix, *Projekt Mitteleuropa* (Vienna, 1986), esp. pp. 127, 169. The reference to the "I" is all the more bizarre because it echoes one of the odder offshoots of early twentieth-century German "idealism", the mystical thought of Rudolf Steiner, who writing in 1915 saw Germans and Slavs as "I" people, linked masculine and feminine principles somehow bound up against the rationalist west. For a presentation by ageing acolytes, see W. Schuchardt, "Vom Geistesauftrag Mitteleuropas", in W. Schuchardt *et al.* (eds.), *Mitteleuropäische Landschaften — Völker — Kulturen* (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 58-72; H. Rieche, "Zusammenfassung", *ibid.*, pp. 445-8.

own purposes, whether in their various searches for identity or, as in Konrad's phrase, for an "anti-politics", a symbolic challenge to the power bloc system that knew only an east and a west. For Konrad, it might have a hundred million inhabitants — or two hundred million . . . ; the real central European was the intellectual, unswayed by the nationalist considerations of "mass culture".<sup>95</sup>

Not surprisingly, the anti-politics of this central Europe of the mind had little to contribute to the real politics which broke out after November 1989. The nationalist masses have spoken, but not about central Europe. They share with the intellectuals of the 1980s a commitment to the idea of Europe. But it is a commitment which brooks no central European mediation, whether as power bloc, federal or cultural pluralist model, or Viennese metropole. In what was the region's most federal state, Slovenes and Croats seek direct incorporation into the European Community. The fact that in doing so they are resurrecting an ancient "occidental" definition of Europe, retracing the religious boundary between Rome and Byzantium, should not be taken too seriously, for all the initial electoral success of ex-Communist parties in Orthodox lands; if differences of mentality there are, the Turkish occupation rather than prior religious affiliations holds the key. The attraction of the western model of Europe for Croats and Slovenes is wholly secular. It is its apparent enthronement of national sovereignty, linked to economic success.

What light do events from 1989 throw on the subject matter of this article? Is it that regional or sub-regional labels like *Mittel-europa*, Danubia or Yugoslavia have been primarily tools by which ethnic groups have sought to extend their power or compensate for their weakness; more positively, that such labels are now being transcended in the interests of the common European home? Or does Austro-German support for the old Habsburg lands of Slovenia and Croatia point to a reassertion of regional realities and mutualities? Could the Slovene and Croat appeal to "Europe" in the name of a national sovereignty which west Europeans increasingly question be one of the regional ironies a Václav Havel or a Konrad wryly stress — another twist in the

<sup>95</sup> G. Konrad, "Mitteleuropäische Meditationen an der Bruchlinie zweier Zivilisationen", in *Dialog*, xv, no. 2 (1989), p. 14; G. Konrad, "L'Europe du Milieu", *Cadmos: cahiers trimestriels du Centre européen de la culture*, no. 39 (autumn 1987), p. 25. See also G. Konrad, *Anti-Politics* (London, 1984).

tale of a zone which has always been a step behind the west? To this last gloss conventional nationalists have a ready answer. It is hypocrisy, they say, for old, established European nations which can bargain over the pooling of sovereignty from a position of strength to deny others the right to put themselves in a similar position. This argument is not quite as strong as its proponents believe. There can be an oversimplification of west European history, too, in which the glibly assumed western identification of nation and state leads Croats and Slovenes to take as their west European equivalents, say Holland and Denmark, when they could be Catalonia and Wales.<sup>96</sup> This is a perspective the smaller nations to the east are unlikely to appreciate, though the plausible argument that the situations are incomparable risks undermining the notion of a common Europe altogether. And such a notion is central to the self-perception of the lands between. At the root of their understanding of east and west lies a sense of grievance, of European destiny denied and merit unperceived. Such feelings have, at various times, been echoed, too, by many among their larger German and Russian neighbours, linking the peoples of all the lands of central/eastern Europe into reciprocal relations of ambition and fear, triumphalism and resentment. Thus the hypothesis with which this study began, that these interconnected regions should be defined in terms of a fraught community of fate, appears confirmed.

How far does this community go beyond geography and a shared nationalism? The sobering conclusion of this survey must be that those who knew most about their neighbours' culture, the smaller peoples, have been most sceptical of the notion of cultural ties. It was two members of these who said in the 1980s debates that *Mitteleuropa* to them meant a material culture — a Biedermeier style — not intellectual contact.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps it could be objected that in the context of a common culture of nationalism, with its sensitivity to foreign influence, "they would say that, wouldn't they?", but regional classification in terms of cultural or religious values does seem rather regularly to fall foul of subjectivity and artificial polarization. Thus stress on the religious

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, the otherwise sophisticated study of J. Chlebowczyk, *On Small and Young Nations in Europe* (Wrocław, 1980), p. 14, which includes the Scots in a list of west European "stagnating, vestigial local communities, incapable of development".

<sup>97</sup> Cited in Doppler, "Glossierte Bibliographie".

factor in separating east from west or Russia from Europe has bedevilled Russo-Polish intellectual relations and even today seems fated to produce such formulations as that the preoccupation of Orthodoxy with external form accounts for Russian indifference to the European value of truthfulness.<sup>98</sup> Many nineteenth-century Protestants said the same about Catholicism. Value-based discussions applying a simple opposition of concepts to human reality are all but indefinitely recyclable in this way.

The economic approach to ethno-regional questions can also, as has been seen, be a substitute for real local understanding; it could, for liberals like Naumann or Hantos, appear to square the circle by offering benefits to all without treading on anyone's toes. The fact is that in 1933 trade between the Succession States of the Habsburg monarchy was at a sixth of its prewar level.<sup>99</sup> The only time the vaunted national economic complementarity of *Mittleuropa* was exploited was in the German barter arrangements with south-east Europe negotiated by the Nazi dictatorship.<sup>100</sup> Left to their own devices Germans responded only tepidly to *Mittleuropa* arguments when they could look elsewhere. Soviet trade, too, only followed the flag.

What have been similar over wide areas are the historical structures underlying the frustrated nationalism and social tensions of so much of the modern central/eastern European experience. Dissident scholars in the Communist period sought the origins of these structures by combining Marxist concepts of a "second serfdom" with the classic liberal concern with issues of political liberty. Their work, pointing to a fateful early modern mix of east European serfdom and western-derived noble constitutionalism, provided a distinctive explanatory model for the flawed modernization of Hungary and Poland, and, with more or less adaptation, of other east Elbian lands.<sup>101</sup> How far the negative features of this process were a product of foreign rule or pressure has long been controversial. When, however, a would-be Habs-

<sup>98</sup> G. Schöpfli, "Central Europe: Definitions Old and New", in Schöpfli and Wood (eds.), *In Search of Central Europe*, p. 13. W. Lednicki, *Russia, Poland and the West: Essays in Literary and Cultural History* (Port Washington, 1966), unwittingly betrays the treacherous nature of this intellectual terrain.

<sup>99</sup> F. Hertz, *Economic Problems of the Danubian States* (London, 1947), p. 84.

<sup>100</sup> A. Basch, *The Danube Basin and the German Economic Sphere* (London, 1944), chs. 10-15, is the best treatment of Nazi policy in this sphere.

<sup>101</sup> J. Szűcs, "The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline", *Acta historica*, xxix (1983), pp. 131-84, an approach inspired by the influential Hungarian dissident István Bibó (1911-79).

burg absolutism first gained a footing in Hungary because of Turkish occupation of the Balkans the role of foreign conquest in a zone where geography made for relatively small nations cannot be ignored. Here politics at its most basic linked often unwilling peoples.

The primacy of politics in regional definition was stressed by the geopolitician Haushofer in 1930 in dismissing economic concepts of *Mitteleuropa* as a timid evasion of the factor of will.<sup>102</sup> Yet ruthless power politics cannot be seen as the overriding determinant of central/eastern European fortunes either. Human nature, for all its faults, cannot sustain this mode for long. Conquest is usually followed, eventually, by some broadening of economic and cultural contact, less than the stronger partner likes to think, but more than the weaker willingly admits. Besides, most Germans (like most Russians) were always more interested in the west and a wider world than in their east-central European neighbours. Nationalists like Haushofer put their case aggressively because they felt their countrymen needed to be roused to their geopolitical destiny.

Though this widespread German indifference to their nationalists' eastern concerns was in itself good, the pity was that it often amounted to an indifference to the lands to the east *per se*. There was indeed an element of wishful thinking in the average German's disregard for the facts of geography. When the chips were down, if the alternative fields for German action on the eve of 1914 were, broadly, *Mitteleuropa* or *Mittelafrika*, as some historians have depicted them, which was really the more important? Was it pure mishap that Germany fought two world wars over east-central and south-east Europe? The dénouement after 1945 turned the face of the Federal Republic seemingly decisively to the west, and Russia for the first time became more of a central European power than Germany. These arrangements, however, started to unravel from the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With Chancellor Kohl leading the campaign for economic aid to the former eastern bloc, President Havel choosing Bonn as his first official destination, and Austria and Germany pressing the claims of Slovenia and Croatia, the salience of the German/non-German relationship in central Europe has reappeared. It has reappeared in a new context, in which Germany's concerns are

<sup>102</sup> Haushofer, "Mitteleuropa und der Anschluss", p. 151.



no longer to use *Mitteleuropa* as a means to world-power status or an anti-western identity, but professedly to aid her neighbours' course of convergence with democratic Europe, of which she is an integral part. English usage might aid a better understanding of these new political realities and needs of our continent if it came to regularize the distinction between a European west, west-centre, east-centre and (Russian) east.

Has the primacy of politics, then, this time in a benign cycle, established itself in the troubled lands reviewed above? Even speculation is premature. What must be said is that among the factors shaping their past there has been much that was not of human making. Geography, whose study in recent years of all sister disciplines historians have most neglected, here claims its place. For a millennium or more neighbourhood and neighbours have been a given. The tragic element in the history of central/eastern Europe is best expressed through Marx's words, if not quite in the context he intended: "Men make their own history, but . . . they do not make it in circumstances of their own choosing".

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