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# Does the East of Europe Have a Modern History?

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Joseph Held, ed., *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), lxix + 435pp. + maps.

In February 1990 a major conference dedicated to the recent history of the East of Europe was organised at Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey. The revised papers, edited by Joseph Held, comprise *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. It is the first major Western-language compendium discussing a broad region of Europe which brings together the talents of prominent specialists and exhibits thorough familiarity with the latest scholarship. Such an undertaking was predestined to yield a volume of significance. The kaleidoscopic developments over the last few years make this work extraordinarily timely and important beyond its obvious scholarly merits.

The volume consists of seven articles, each devoted to a different national history. There are brief opening and concluding chapters that deal with area-wide issues. Beyond a few regional maps and bibliography there is a lengthy 'Chronology of Events in Eastern Europe, 1918–1990', which is heavily weighted towards developments in the very recent past. Unfortunately, the editor has provided no introduction to the volume. As a consequence, basic questions about the focus and purpose of the following articles are not addressed. Whatever guiding principles were behind the structure of the Rutgers conference, or the volume which ensued, have to be inferred, for they are not made explicit. This proves to be perhaps the central flaw in the volume, rendering the whole no greater than the sum of its parts.

## I

The Czech novelist Milan Kundera, the Hungarian historian Jenő Szücs, and the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz have made recent declarations<sup>1</sup> which demonstrate that both as a matter of contemporary cultural definition and as a point of

<sup>1</sup> The important essay by Szücs is 'The Three Historical Regions of Europe', in *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 29/2–4 (1983), 131–84; for Kundera, see his 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, 33; for Miłosz, see 'The Budapest Round Table', *Cross Currents*, Vol. 10 (1991), 18 ff.

methodological departure for historical analysis, the definition and applicability of the term Eastern – as opposed to Central or East Central, or Western – Europe is of fundamental significance. Therefore, it is rather disappointing that the *Columbia History* never offers a definition or characterisation of the region. Whereas we are not told what Eastern Europe is, the several authors repeatedly refer to ‘this region’ or ‘this area’, as though its meaning were self-evident. None the less, we may conclude that the working definition of the ‘Eastern Europe’ of the volume can be summarised as the countries east of Germany which became officially socialist after the Second World War, but were *not* incorporated into the Soviet Union. Hence, Czechoslovakia is Eastern Europe, but Austria is not; Albania is Eastern Europe but Greece and Turkey are not. Poland is Eastern Europe, but Finland and Lithuania<sup>2</sup> are not, and so on. Doubtless there is logic to this, yet it accords privilege to one phenomenon of the twentieth century – the Soviet victory following World War II – over all others in determining historical and cultural frontiers. This is certainly an arguable thesis, but one precisely not argued here: it is implicit and not explained or justified.

Rather more objectionable are the repeated generalisations about ‘the region’ without any effort to consider differences among the countries. Thus the pessimistic and rather dubious judgement of Stephen Fischer-Galati in the opening article<sup>3</sup> that ‘present conditions are no better for making Eastern Europe safe for democracy than they were at the end of World War I’ (p. 15), and the contrastingly more optimistic conclusion of Ivan Völgyes in the final article<sup>4</sup> that there is a ‘good chance’ for the emergence of ‘democratic entities’ with ‘Market economies’ in the region (p. 402), both have the same problem. Generalisations that would include Poland, Albania, Macedonia and Bohemia are not very persuasive. At the least, making a distinction between, say, the northern tier of Poland (the former) Czechoslovakia and Hungary – the states that have already come to refer to themselves increasingly as the ‘Visegrád triangle’<sup>5</sup> – and the southern states would be useful. But even that perpetuates the unfortunate tradition in Western scholarship of speaking in glib generalities about the East of Europe.

If questions of geography cause difficulty, chronology is also a problem in this volume. The seven countries ostensibly comprising ‘Eastern Europe’ are each the focus of a separate chapter by a different author (Hungary, the exception, is a joint

<sup>2</sup> Vilnius, Lithuania’s capital, was recently described as ‘the very epitome of central Europe’. None the less, here it is excluded from even ‘Eastern Europe’. See Tomas Venclova, ‘The End of the World in Vilna’, *The New York Times Book Review*, 23 July 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Fischer-Galati, a specialist on Balkan, especially Romanian, history, is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

<sup>4</sup> Völgyes, a specialist on Hungarian affairs, is Professor of Political Science at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

<sup>5</sup> See Rudolf L. Tökés, ‘From Visegrád to Kraków: Cooperation, Competition, and Coexistence in Central Europe’, *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 40 (Nov.–Dec. 1991), 100–14, for an insightful commentary regarding the historical and current significance of the ‘Visegrád Triangle’ or what may well become the ‘Visegrád Rectangle’ according to Lech Wałęsa, should an independent Slovakia wish to participate along with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

piece by Peter Hanak and Joseph Held). However, the chapters, and hence the national history that each discusses, cannot be compared because the authors have freely interpreted what constitutes the 'twentieth century' for each country. Indeed, some of the articles omit the bulk of the century.

Finally, there are features of all these lands which are essential to consider in any overview of their recent history. Several of these are omitted. We should note, for example, the significance of demographic developments. Certainly the stunning demographic stagnation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – which in 1950 had almost 75 per cent of the population of Poland, but by 1990 had fallen to less than 45 per cent – is the most striking example of relative regional demographic trends. The Hungarians' stagnant birth-rate and their concomitant decline *vis-à-vis* the Romanians has exacerbated the traditional Hungarian perception of vulnerability and fuelled the rise in bellicose Hungarian nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Contrariwise, the relatively vigorous rate of Polish population growth for the period after 1945 helps explain the etiolation of minority problems there despite the post-1989 admissions that the number of Germans (among others) had been artificially diminished by the PRL.<sup>7</sup> However, except for a few words about the Albanians, the question of demography is also ignored.<sup>8</sup>

A further unfortunate omission concerns the emigré and immigrant populations of 'East European' origin, which are virtually unmentioned. The role of Czech, Slovak and Polish emigrés, for example, as an influence group in the West is of obvious importance in their respective national histories. This is true for what their efforts accomplished as well as for the effect these accomplishments abroad had on the political and cultural consciousness of their respective societies at home. Another noteworthy omission is the authors' preoccupation with politics and economics almost to the exclusion of cultural history, even very broadly defined. As a result, the text does not convey a convincing, let alone full, history of this century in the region.

<sup>6</sup> We may note in this context the remarks by the leaders of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, overwhelming victors in the 1990 parliamentary elections, especially the recent reference by József Antall concerning the '15,000,000 Hungarians', 'united regardless of the citizenship some may have acquired in the tempest of history'. See Zoltan D. Bárány, 'The Hungarian Democratic Forum Wins National Election Decisively', in Lyman H. Legters, ed., *Eastern Europe: Transformation and Revolution, 1945–1991. Documents and Analyses* (Lexington, MA: Heath and Co., 1992), 451–2. Hungary's relative demographic torpor in relation to its neighbours has provoked periodic warnings of 'nation-death' over the last decades; see Barnabas A. Rác, 'The Twelfth Communist Party Congress and the Politics of Neo-Conservatism in Hungary', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 15, no. 4 (1981), 525–6. This is a traditional Hungarian obsession. See Robert M. Bigler, 'Heil Hitler and Heil Horthy!: The Nature of Hungarian Racist Nationalism and its Impact on German–Hungarian Relations, 1919–1945', in *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 8, no. 3 (1974), 254–5.

<sup>7</sup> In this regard see Abraham Brumberg, 'A Problem that is no More?: National Minorities in Poland Today', *The Polish Review*, Vol. 37, no. 4 (1992), 423–30; and Piotr Pacewicz, 'Polish and German Minorities: Asymmetry of Problems – Symmetry of Solutions', *ibid.*, 445–54.

<sup>8</sup> A pioneering effort in this regard is John F. Besemeres, *Socialist Population Politics: The Political Implications of Demographic Trends in the USSR and Eastern Europe* (White Plains, NY: Sharpe, 1980), a volume now obviously out of date despite its continued usefulness.

## II

The introductory essay by Stephen Fischer-Galati, 'Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century: "Old Wine in New Bottles"', assesses the likelihood of democracy 'taking root' in Eastern Europe in light of the experience of the twentieth century. He argues against the notion that the fall of communism has removed 'the barriers to democracy' by stressing that the failure to sustain a democratic polity in the region in this century has been due to essentially domestic factors, which, ominously, he sees as perdurable. Hence, the failure of democracy in interwar Eastern Europe was due to 'confrontational situations involving immature political organizations tending to encourage and exploit prejudices held by the masses' (p. 9). It was this, rather than 'external factors', which is 'primarily' responsible for the 'abandonment of democratic practices'. Following the Second World War, Fischer-Galati admits, it is difficult to judge what the probability of democratic inclinations of the population was. However, he is sceptical and argues his point *a posteriori* by contending that nationalism, religion and the desire to maintain property were the real sources of opposition to communist totalitarianism, rather than any profound attachment to democratic values. As a result, the current experiment in democracy rests on immature foundations.

This is a provocative thesis which, on closer examination, is not particularly persuasive. First, the primacy of external over internal causation in explaining the politics of interwar Eastern Europe is debatable. What must be kept in constant view was that external and internal causation were inextricably intertwined. Whereas this is true for any state, the extraordinary strategic vulnerability of the region, amplified the sensitivity of internal politics to international changes. Czechoslovakia is certainly the best example of a state whose internal stability was undermined by a threatening strategic position. Similar arguments could be made concerning other countries of the region: Hungarian paranoia, Bulgarian *revanchisme*, Polish security apprehensions, were all provoked by strategic situations and each militated against domestic liberality. When the Great Depression or the rise of Hitler are also considered as radicalising agents in area politics, the situation becomes yet more clear. Criticism of the political immaturity and clumsiness of the interwar regimes of 'Eastern Europe' is entirely deserved. There were, however, major differences in the area: the relative liberality of Czechoslovakia versus the crude unfreedom of Romania, for example. Secondly, internal politics in the region existed in a horrendous strategic context which was beyond the control of the weak states of the region, yet detrimental to their very survival.

And yet it is the interwar era which is crucial to Fischer-Galati's argument. The Second World War was obviously *sui generis*, and the possibilities for regional democracy in the post-1945 era – absent their forcible communisation – is, by the author's admission, 'a matter of pure speculation' (p. 12). Hence, the Fischer-Galati theory concerning the likelihood of democracy for the region rests on a base that is both speculative and problematic.

A second thesis propounded by Fischer-Galati is equally debatable, namely that a

'strengthened' role for religion and religious institutions will be likely to follow upon the destruction of communism. The role of religion as a sanctuary in times of social stress is obvious. However, the creation – or re-creation – of a civil society and, perhaps more important, the rise of a market economy and its culture, will, and indeed are, marginalising the traditional role of the church in everyday lives. The secularisation of 'Eastern Europe', in the broadest sense of the two terms, is inevitable once communism has been removed. Simply put, in the absence of an ideological opponent the necessity of an ideological champion is less pressing. Hence, though Fischer-Galati has raised intriguing and even provocative questions, he has not discussed the focus and purpose of the subsequent articles.

Albania is the first country to be considered, and it is fortunate to be the subject of one of the strongest chapters in the book, written by Nicholas Pano.<sup>9</sup> The author begins his discussion, entitled simply 'Albania', with the emergence of an independent state issuing from the First Balkan War in 1912. The coverage is well balanced: Pano has tried to cover the entire period since 1912 evenly. His writing is crisp and he has an eye for the telling detail. The notes make efforts to guide the reader through the meagre Western literature devoted to Albania. In fine, this is a splendid introduction to the least accessible region of Europe.

My only substantial criticism is the relatively off-handed way in which he treats the explosive Kosovo question, where the astounding demographic vitality of the Albanians has made the Serbs a small minority in their most historically significant territory. The meaning of this issue for the future, given the tradition of Balkan ethnic rivalries, is far greater than implied by the laconic remarks Pano devotes to it.

The chapter entitled 'Bulgaria' by Marin Pundeff<sup>10</sup> is also deserving of high marks. It begins, with admirable logic, with Bulgaria's long-delayed reappearance on the map with the 1878 Congress of Berlin. Pundeff masterfully sketches the complex history of Bulgaria within its international context through the Balkan Wars. He stresses the drastic consequences of these wars for Bulgaria, and the fact that the ensuing First World War was, from Sofia's vantage point, essentially a Third Balkan War. All ended disastrously for the Bulgarians, who were during the interwar years embittered and aggrieved. What followed makes for perhaps the ugliest history – Romania excepted – in the East of Europe: the gruesome assassination of the agrarian leader Stamboliiski in 1923 was followed by a proto-fascist government, a bloody attempted coup by the communists, and an era of gangster politics as IMRO (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, dedicated to gaining Macedonia from Greece and Serbia) engaged in a murderous ten-year campaign to control the country. Bulgarian politics descended into a tripartite brawl among the communists, IMRO and an increasingly violent government. After a brief attempt to return to democratic norms, the coup of 1935 brought the

<sup>9</sup> Pano, Professor of History at Western Illinois University, is the author of the pioneering standard text *The People's Republic of Albania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Pundeff is Professor of History at California State University, Northridge, and a specialist in modern Bulgarian history.

royal dictatorship of Boris, closely allied with Nazi Germany, which stabilised, rather than improved, the situation.

The link with Germany ultimately brought the Bulgars into the Second World War – again on the losing side. Initially profiting from the German connection, the Bulgarians later suffered Soviet invasion, defeat and communisation. The Bulgars have cause to rue their foreign policy alignments in this century.

Pundeff has presented this ghastly and complex era well, though a bit too compactly for the uninitiated. However, a word or two of caution seem warranted. The author occasionally indulges in a bit of Bulgarian flag-waving as, for example, giving the reader the impression that it was the Bulgarian army that defeated Serbia in 1915, rather than the Austro-German campaign that actually caused the collapse of the thitherto stalwart Serbian resistance. Similarly, the fact that Stamboliiski adopted a policy of ‘agrarianism’ in the interwar period is not surprising, as it was a common phenomenon in the East of Europe at the time, agrarianism being particularly strong in Czechoslovakia, but with a significant following in Poland and elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> Pundeff fails to make it clear that this was a general reflection of regional socio-economic conditions and implies that it was somehow unique to Stamboliiski and Bulgaria.

Also noteworthy is the obvious imbalance between Pundeff’s careful attention to the pre-1945 era in comparison with the events of the very recent past. The last thirty years are given very short shrift.

The poor articulation between the chapters is clearly demonstrated in comparing Pundeff’s ‘Bulgaria’ with the article on ‘Czechoslovakia’ by Sharon L. Wolchik.<sup>12</sup> This article begins rather abruptly in 1918 and omits any discussion of the rise of the Czech and Slovak national movements and the events of the First World War. The interwar period receives only brief treatment, and the Second World War is dispensed with in less than a page. As a result, the article is heavily weighted towards post-1945 developments – exactly the opposite of what Pundeff has done. Even this is misleading, however, for Wolchik has devoted her attention primarily to post-1967 Czechoslovakia. This is risky as events are speedily rendering any account of the immediate past obsolete.

The organising principle behind Wolchik’s essay is that three important factors distinguish Czechoslovakia from the other communist-bloc nations of the East of Europe: a relatively ‘advanced level of economic development’, ‘diverse ethnic composition’ and a ‘particular blend of political attitudes and values’ (p. 120). The first two of these factors, Wolchik argues, combined paradoxically to prolong the Stalinist era in the country (pp. 133–4) as well as to postpone the creation of an effective opposition until the late 1980s (p. 138): the strong economy delayed

<sup>11</sup> See G. M. Dimitrov, ‘Agrarianism’, in Feliks Gross, ed., *European Ideologies, A Survey of 20th Century Political Ideas* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948); Andrzej Zakrzewski, ‘Z Geografii politycznej ruchu ludowego’, in Andrzej Garlicki, ed., *Z Dziejów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1986), 208, 220–1.

<sup>12</sup> Wolchik is the Director of Russian and Eastern European Studies and Professor of Political Science at George Washington University. She is the author of a large number of works concerning women in ‘Eastern Europe’ as well as on contemporary Czechoslovakia.

opposition to the government, and the Czech–Slovak frictions prevent the rise of an articulated opposition. Peculiarly Czech traditions, Wolchik argues, explain the extraordinarily peaceable ‘Velvet Revolution’ and provide ‘a better basis for reconstructing democracy’ than elsewhere in the region. However, the Slovak separatist movement, the paralysis of the Czechoslovak presidency of 1992 and the ‘Velvet Divorce’ have made this evaluation somewhat less compelling.

Wolchik has certainly provided a reliable and gracefully written review of the events of the last twenty-five years; however, an essay that ostensibly recounts the history of twentieth-century Czechoslovakia and yet barely mentions Masaryk, Beneš, Gottwald and Novotný, and omits any mention whatever of Kramář and Štefánik, has rather obvious structural deficits. Moreover, the three factors the author emphasises prove difficult to discern. The superiority of the Czech economy is beyond question; however, the economy of the eastern, Slovak, part of the country is more typical of the region. And Slovakia is, or at least was, part of the state. Secondly, a diverse ethnic composition is certainly not a distinguishing feature in this region. The final factor, ‘a particular blend of political attitudes and values’, is too diffuse a formulation to be a useful analytical instrument.

There is a similar problem with the longest article in the volume, ‘Hungary on a Fixed Course: An Outline of Hungarian History’, the work of Peter Hának and Joseph Held.<sup>13</sup> Hának begins his account with the birth of the Admiral Miklós Horthy regime in 1919. This is doubly unfortunate, for it omits many crucial years and plunges the reader straight into a most confusing era through which the clumsily written (or perhaps badly translated) text is not a useful guide. Hának, who is a distinguished authority in this period of Hungarian history, is not well served either. Murky formulations and the absence of guiding dates leave the reader perpetually confused. Hence, the comment that Prime Minister István Bethlen ‘was able to combine the Liberal tradition with conservative ideas and authoritarian governing techniques’ (p. 172) requires elaboration. The footnote observing ‘terms such as *conservative* or *liberal* applied to Eastern European societies have meanings different from those in the Western political tradition’ (p. 172n) is certainly appropriate though monumentally unhelpful; it merely serves to justify rather than to relieve the reader’s confusion. ‘Hungary’ unfortunately features copious citations of statistics and specific argumentation without any references to sources. In fact, the lengthy article of more than sixty pages is virtually without notes. Most troubling, however, is the practice of ascribing all of interwar Hungary’s errors and problems, whether foreign or domestic, to an understandable reaction to the Treaty of Trianon (the 1920 ‘diktat’ imposed on Budapest by the victors at Paris). Iniquitous as it was, the harm done to Hungary by Trianon cannot bear such a burden of historical reductionism. Budapest’s paranoiac interwar alignment with Hitler’s Germany can – and in such an article should – be elucidated by citing several factors,

<sup>13</sup> Hának is Division Director of the Institute for History at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Professor of History at Ötvös Korant University in Budapest. Held is Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University, Camden. He has published works on both Hunyadi, and Hungarian agriculture.

not simply explained by Hungary's having 'little choice but to fight back with a major power's backing' (p. 188).

Held discusses post-1945 events in Hungary and continues Hának's unfortunate tendency to make pronouncements without supporting citation. Hence, we are told that Stalin 'hesitated' to include Hungary in the bloc until 1947 (p. 205), but the only substantiation is a reference that has neither date nor provenance. Later, we are told that, in 1947, Stalin 'would have been willing to trade Hungary for Poland' (p. 227), without elucidation, source or substantiation. Concerning the Hungarian Communists Rákosi, Gerö, Révai and Farkas, Held's pronouncement that 'none of these men considered themselves Hungarian' (p. 215) crosses the line from a judgement of actions to an indulgence in psychoanalysis at a distance. Because Held devotes considerable space to the early 1950s, the very era ignored by Wolchik and slighted by Pundeff, comparisons among the various countries of the region in specific eras, which this volume should have prompted, become impossible.

Andrzej Korboński's 'Poland: 1918–1990'<sup>14</sup> (he, too, inexplicably omits the first eighteen years of the century) proceeds according to the 'developmental approach . . . of Gabriel Almond' while employing the 'five systemic components outlined by [Samuel] Huntington' (p. 230). Korboński simultaneously adopts a chronological approach and subdivides the two main eras (the Second Republic, 1918–39, and the PRL, 1945–89) into a series of themes: 'nation-building', 'state-building', 'political participation', 'economic conditions and policies' and 'systemic issues' which in turn includes the topics 'culture', 'structure', 'groups', 'leadership' and 'policies'. The arbitrary and duplicative nature of such a schema is obvious. For example, the Jewish minority or the Solidarity movement could be considered under virtually any of these headings. The structure adopted by the author produces some useful insights, but the cost to organisational clarity is high.

To be sure, the article has many strengths. There are a number of imaginative formulations, and the discussion of economic problems is particularly well informed and argued and shows familiarity with recent scholarship. In addition, we may mention the balanced assessment of the achievements of the interwar Second Republic, a shrewd analysis of the structure of populist politics in modern Poland, and a well-argued appreciation of the pioneering role of the organised Polish opposition in bringing about the great transformation in the East of Europe in the last few years. However, Korboński is not an historian, and he has not devoted his substantial scholarly talents to pre-1945 Poland.<sup>15</sup> As a result his discussion of this period often displays factual inaccuracies as well as a tendency to make sweeping, often dubious pronouncements. In combination the result is a problematical essay.

He presents the re-creation of Poland in 1918–21 as a struggle between a 'Great Poland' and a 'Little Poland' camp. The terminology is misleading (and unfortunate

<sup>14</sup> Korboński is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has published widely on the former Soviet bloc, especially agricultural questions in Poland.

<sup>15</sup> Korboński had written his first 'venture into the interwar period' only shortly before composing this essay; see 'Final Discussions', in Timothy Wiles, ed., *Poland between the Wars, 1918–1939* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Polish Studies Center, 1989), 299.



in employing terms that denote historic regions of Poland), and the arguments are inaccurately presented (p. 232). The essential struggle was between a 'federalist' and an 'incorporationist' territorial programme. Neither envisaged a 'Little Poland' as both accepted the notion that, given its unalterable geographical position, a small Poland was not strategically viable. The statement that 'Poland's traditional socio-economic structure did not undergo substantial changes until the eve of World War I' (p. 242) ignores at least one generation (post-1863) of Polish history.<sup>16</sup> The claim that, in interwar Poland, 'there was no separation between church and state' (p. 243) is incomprehensible.<sup>17</sup> The contention that 'most of the minority parties were strongly anti-Polish and worked actively for the demise of the Polish state' (p. 246) is over-stated, and the author's discussion of the minorities in the Second Republic fails to make important distinctions.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the claim that 'one-third of the population [of the Second Republic] was bound to deny the legitimacy of the Polish republic' (p. 251) is another dubious pronouncement. Why were minorities 'bound' to 'deny' the legitimacy of the state? Were Belorussians or Jews, for example, by definition incapable of being loyal citizens? I think not. The argument that 'pluralism, *however broadly defined*, had *never* [my emphasis] been an integral part of Polish political culture' (p. 247), dismisses, in a grandiose *obiter dicta*, several centuries of Polish history. Korboński seems to be intent on positing the existence of a 'Western' and 'Eastern' Pole as epitomising factions contending for influence in post-partition Poland (p. 234). This is not a particularly helpful analytical device. First, the partitions created three, not two, Polands, and thus the bifurcated system falls by its own weight: were Austrian Poles 'Western' or 'Eastern'?

Secondly, to describe the territorial diminution of Poland at the end of the Second World War as rendering the country 'on paper . . . a clear winner' (p. 256) is problematic at best, as is the curious conclusion that the 'territorial decisions managed to introduce an element of optimism with regard to the country's future' (p. 256).<sup>19</sup> The statement 'if, indeed, the church is still popular in Poland today' (p. 266) is, at best, sarcastic, and the author's snide comments about the 'presumed religiosity of the Polish people' (which, he contends, is based 'on mostly anecdotal or impressionistic evidence') ignores abundant evidence to the contrary.<sup>20</sup> A discuss-

<sup>16</sup> The last third of the nineteenth century witnessed peasant emancipation in Russian Poland, the rise of industrial capitalism, rapid urbanisation and the rise of modern Polish politics, among many other fundamental transformations.

<sup>17</sup> The status of the Roman Catholic Church in interwar Poland was defined by the Concordat of 1925. See Kazimierz Gołąb, 'Concordats between Poland and the Holy See', in Jerzy Braun, ed., *Poland in Christian Civilization* (London: Veritas Foundation Press, 1985), 581ff., cf. Neal Pease, 'Poland and the Holy See, 1918–1939', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, no. 3 (1991), 521–30.

<sup>18</sup> The well-organised, influential German minority is hardly comparable to the Belorussian (White Ruthenian) population of the Polish east which was distinguished by grinding poverty and a low level of national consciousness. The numerous Jewish population and the politically significant Ukrainians present quite separate problems.

<sup>19</sup> Had Korboński qualified this statement to mean that the task of rebuilding the newly acquired 'recovered territories' from Germany was used by Warsaw to generate enthusiasm the reader might agree; as it stands the statement is bizarre.

<sup>20</sup> There is far more than 'anecdotal or impressionistic evidence' upon which to consider the role of Catholicism in Poland. In addition to many soundings of public opinion, we have available significant

ion of the role of the Catholic Church in twentieth-century Poland deserves more than a few dismissive remarks.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the few appended notes do not guide the reader to further exploration of the many controversial issues raised in the essay.

For this reviewer the greatest disappointment in the volume is Trond Gilberg's article 'The Multiple Legacies of History: Romania in the Year 1990';<sup>22</sup> *prima facie* this could not be a history of Romania in the twentieth century. It begins with a rambling introduction which purports to discuss Romania 'at the Time of World War I' but which wanders from the beginning of the century through the 1930s. The gravamen of this is that the Romanians have 'never developed' the phenomenon of *noblesse oblige*, without, however, any attempt to explain why the Romanians have failed in the enterprise to which Gilberg attaches enormous importance. Hence, what could have been a useful discussion of the comparative social history of the region becomes instead a catalogue of nasty behaviour at various times and in various ways. Romanians are, in this ill-defined era, characterised by political corruption, cynicism, intolerance, anti-semitism, authoritarianism, public *Schlamperei*, and so on. It is a damning picture, indeed, the more depressing because it is not explained.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, it contradicts the recent carefully researched assertion that interwar Romania, though 'not a model of democracy', did none the less 'take genuine steps toward creating a democratic system'.<sup>24</sup> After all, interwar Czechoslovakia had no *noblesse oblige* and yet its political élites demonstrated considerable civic virtue; Hungary could be described in opposite terms. What factors rendered Romanian political culture so different that Nestor Ratches can conclude, 'There is Eastern Europe, and then there is Romania'?<sup>25</sup> Gilberg regards this political culture as 'a serious and dangerous legacy' (p. 293) but provides minor help in understanding it.<sup>26</sup>

scholarly studies on religious sociology by Piwowarski and Pomian-Śrzednicki among others. See, for example, Maciej Pomian-Śrzednicki, *Religious Change in Contemporary Poland: Secularization and Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> A valuable recent discussion of the Church in Poland can be found in the section entitled 'The Church', in Janine R. Wedel, ed., *The Unplanned Society: Poland during and after Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 185–219.

<sup>22</sup> Trond Gilberg is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Soviet and East European Studies Center at Pennsylvania State University. Here, he goes over much the same ground as in his *Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu's Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> For example, there is the brief article by Stephen Fischer-Galati that attempts to explain the 'quintessence of the broadly accepted political ideology of twentieth century Romania' in his 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nationality in the Twentieth Century: The Romanian Case', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 18, no. 1 (1984), 25–34.

<sup>24</sup> Gale Stokes, 'The Social Origins of East European Politics', in Daniel Chirot, ed., *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 230–4; cf. Vasile Puscas, 'The Process of Modernization in Romania in the Interwar Period', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 25, no. 3 (1991), 325–38.

<sup>25</sup> The latest 'hero of choice' in Romania is the fascist dictator Ion Antonescu; see Nestor Ratches, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 141–5, 169n.

<sup>26</sup> A far more satisfactory treatment of this phenomenon can be found in Mary Ellen Fischer, 'Politics, Nationalism, and Development in Romania', in Gerasimos Augustinos, ed., *Diverse Paths to*

After a few pages about the late interwar period – although the chronology is difficult to follow – Gilberg brings us to the communisation of Romania after World War II, having neglected to discuss the war. He then jumps to Ceausescu in 1989, creating another huge gap. It is therefore perplexing to read Gilberg's conclusion that 'a systematic analysis of Romanian history and the legacies of the communist era . . . produces an essentially negative assessment of the prospects for this unfortunate country in political, socioeconomic, and cultural development' (pp. 300–1). Since we have been provided with no such 'systematic analysis', the author is asking a great deal of us. Finally, despite the fact that the author has chosen to concentrate his attention on the events of the very recent past he has omitted any mention of such significant topics as the current and future significance of the Transylvanian issue vis-à-vis Hungary,<sup>27</sup> and the serious question of 'Transdniestria' and Moldova.<sup>28</sup>

Dimitrije Djordjević<sup>29</sup> had perhaps the most difficult task in being called upon to deal with what he deems the 'Yugoslav Phenomenon' in the twentieth century. To the author's credit he actually attempts to discuss the entire century, and does so with authority and many insightful observations. The result is perhaps the strongest article in the volume. There is a concise and informative discussion of the evolution of pre-1918 'Yugoslav' nationalism that raises many valuable points. The discussion of the period of the First World War underscores what an important omission this formative period was from most of the other articles. The interwar years are also well handled, but so complex an era should have been given more space. Discussion of the 1939 *Sporazum* (Agreement), which reformed the state's constitutional structure by creating a virtually autonomous Croatia within Yugoslavia, would seem particularly relevant given the fundamental significance of Serb–Croatian relations for the area.<sup>30</sup> This is a minor reservation, however.

Djordjević presents a guardedly positive assessment of pre-war Yugoslavia, in conscious contrast to 'Communist-inspired historiography' (pp. 322–3). The long-delayed rehabilitation of the pre-communist regimes of the former Soviet bloc is proving a stimulating enterprise for Western historians – now working in earnest co-operation with their colleagues in these countries. Having said this, the pre-War Yugoslavian regime may not be the happiest place to start. Western scholars who

*Modernity in Southeastern Europe: Essays in National Development* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 135–68.

<sup>27</sup> The Hungarian minority issue in Romania has implications for the potential liberality of the regime that will emerge in Bucharest, as well as for the relationship between Romania and Hungary. For the former phenomenon see Matei Calinescu and Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'The 1989 Revolution and Romania's Future', *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 40 (Jan.–April 1991), 42–59, esp. pp. 57–9. For the latter see J. F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC–London: Duke University Press, 1991), 107, and Karen Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 46–7.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding Moldova, see Nicholas Dima, *From Moldavia to Moldova: The Soviet–Romanian Territorial Dispute* (Boulder, Co: Westview, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Djordjević is Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

<sup>30</sup> See Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919–1953* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 128–33.

can hardly be accused of susceptibility to communist propaganda have presented a damning portrait of the interwar state.<sup>31</sup>

In his discussion of the last few decades Djordjević gives less attention than would seem warranted to the Albanian problem in Kosovo and the larger demographic questions it epitomises. Similarly, the 'south–north' economic disparities in recent Yugoslavia deserve considerably more attention. Finally, he should have noted the significance of Edvard Kardelj in his too-brief discussion of post-1945 federal 'Yugoslavism'.<sup>32</sup> Despite this, the author deserves credit for a succinct formulation. Given the failure of the pre-World War II 'unitary Yugoslavism', a choice emerged between what Djordjević deems 'Strong Serbia–Weak Yugoslavia or Weak Serbia–Strong Yugoslavia' (p. 327); the communists, with the support of the non-Serbs chose the matter. Only recently have the consequences of this become apparent, namely the Milošević-led attempt of the 1990s to re-create the 'Strong Serbia' option eschewed in the quest for a larger unity a generation earlier.

Melvin Croan's<sup>33</sup> 'Germany and Eastern Europe' is rather awkward. First, the very membership of the GDR in 'Eastern Europe' is debatable. Secondly, the lengthy section on 'West German Ostpolitik' is a bit intrusive. Finally, the author concentrates largely on intra-German and German–Soviet relations and slights what should have been his obvious task of emphasising the German relationship with 'Eastern Europe'. For example, Brandt's *Ostpolitik* as regards Poland is given but a single sentence, and the significant letter of 1965 from the Polish episcopate to the Germans is not even mentioned.<sup>34</sup> The German minorities scattered throughout the former Soviet bloc deserve discussion, and the occasionally associated question of the stability of contemporary borders would seem to warrant at least a speculative word. The Kaliningrad *oblast'* is an obvious case in point. These criticisms notwithstanding, this is a well-crafted overview of the GDR.

Iván Völgyes's brief 'By Way of a Conclusion' brings the volume to an end. His point seems to be that now, after they have been relegated to the dust-bin of history, the communist regimes in 'Eastern Europe' can be seen as devoid of 'any real legitimacy at all' (p. 401). On the wreckage are re-emerging older, more profoundly rooted, structures than those imposed by Moscow or its satraps. Given the victory of the old, or at least the perdurable, over the evanescent, Völgyes argues

<sup>31</sup> For example, note the conclusions in Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between Two World Wars* (hereafter Rothschild, *Europe*) (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1974), 278ff.

<sup>32</sup> For Kardelj's important role, see Cynthia W. Frey, 'Yugoslav Nationalisms and the Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 10, no. 4 (1976), 444ff.; cf. Ivo Banac, 'Political Change and National Diversity', in Stephen R. Graubard, ed., *Eastern Europe . . . Central Europe . . . Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 145–64.

<sup>33</sup> Croan is Professor of History, and holds the Chair of Soviet and East European Studies, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>34</sup> From the Polish point of view these contacts are discussed in the recent volume, Antoni Czubiński, ed., *Droga Niemców do ponownego zjednoczenia państwa, 1949–1990 [Germany's Path to a Re-United State, 1949–1990]* (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1991). Cf. Adam Bromke's articles in *Poland: The Last Decade* (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1981), 118–37. The Church's role is developed in Ronald C. Monticone, *The Catholic Church in Communist Poland, 1945–1985: Forty Years of Church–State Relations* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1986), 39ff.

that, in accepting the artificial as real in the East of Europe, we can now see that we have performed an act of moral compromise:

While we were all perhaps children of realpolitik and practitioners of compromise, I think that we were wrong in lowering our ethical standards and making the compromises we—willingly or unwillingly—made with these regimes. The ethical rectitude of an uncompromising anticommunist in years past may not have been politically correct or the most popular tack to take, for such people were regarded as fossils when the world appeared to accept communism as a legitimate force (p. 402).

There is something to ponder here. However, the ultimate legitimising force is time, and we are not able to analyse the affairs of the day *sub specie aeternitatis*. Essentially the force of the argument rests on the meaning to be given to 'legitimate'. Whether they deserved to be or not, the communists were in effective control of these territories: a reality that even the most devout anti-communist has to acknowledge. None the less, it is good for Voľgyes to remind us that what is expedient is not always honourable.

### III

We are left to consider the overall value of this volume. It is decidedly not a history of 'Eastern Europe' in the 'Twentieth Century' for it fails to define the first term and often ignores the chronological limits of the second. This is a pity because it is past time for a synthesised study of the East of Europe. The works by Halecki and by Hugh Seton-Watson are hopelessly obsolete, the Macartney–Palmer work only slightly less so, as is the latter's *The Lands Between*.<sup>35</sup> Even the excellent studies by Polonsky and Rothschild were written almost two decades ago.<sup>36</sup> A more recent survey by Okey is largely focused on Danubian developments.<sup>37</sup> The mammoth multi-volume series under the general editorship of Sugar and Treadgold is a masterpiece but hardly a manageable survey.<sup>38</sup> Rothschild's *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*<sup>39</sup> is outstanding, but works within obvious chronological confines.

Certainly there is justification for the publication of the history of the former satellite regimes of the USSR, and, despite its title, this is what we have. The writing is, with minor exceptions, lucid; the scholarship generally sound and up to

<sup>35</sup> Oskar Halecki, *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe* (New York: Ronald Press, 1952). Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars, 1918–1941* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967 [1945]). C. A. Macartney and A. W. Palmer, *Independent Eastern Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1962). A. W. Palmer, *The Lands Between: A History of Eastern Central Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (London, 1970).

<sup>36</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Little Dictators: The History of Eastern Europe since 1918* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). Rothschild, *Europe*.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe, 1740–1980: Feudalism to Communism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

<sup>38</sup> Peter F. Sugar and Donald W. Treadgold, eds., *A History of East Central Europe* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1974– ).

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

date. Scattered about are a great many intriguing and provocative *Gedankensplitter* that make the volume important for any student of the region. Some of the articles are solid contributions; Pano, Djordjević and Pundeff stand out, despite the shortcomings discussed above. Each of these shares the common attribute of providing a clear introduction to the national experience of the twentieth century and discussing, albeit adumbratively, the major developments of the era. The fundamental weakness of the book is its failure to provide an integrating framework for the national articles. Equally important, the authors do not cover the same ground. This is more than a little disappointing. Thus, we have a fine collection of articles, some stimulating scholarship and much more that is worth attention. However, the imposing title, *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, suggests something different, indeed, something more, than what we have been given.