

The following report is aimed at a broad analysis of the most important changes that I have observed in my travels and studies in Eastern Europe over a period of 50 years. The main theme behind all these changes has been a transition toward modernity. The countries of Eastern Europe (including Albania) have been transformed from static societies with traditional social structures and long-standing cultural ties with Western nations (especially during the interwar period) into societies that have modernized many of their outmoded institutions, indoctrinated new generations, and adapted their socioeconomic conditions to modern life in the second part of the 20th century.

The last few decades have brought revolutionary changes to East European societies. Communist rule has imposed an alien philosophy on Eastern Europe, just as other conquerors have left their mark on the region in the past. In recent years, however, the traditional potential of East European peoples for absorbing and adjusting to foreign influences has come to the fore again. As a result, Communist rule has had to adapt to local conditions. It has become stabilized, and in the process it has had to recognize "nationality" and the peculiar problems of the peoples of Eastern Europe. Since World War II, "international communism," once completely subservient to Moscow, has changed into national and sometimes nationalistic forms of government, such as in Yugoslavia and Albania. These governments struggle to retain their national identity, but they are always aware of the influence and ultimate power of the Soviet Union.

Yugoslavia under Josip Tito was successful in extricating itself from the influence of the Soviet Union in 1948, but after years of experimentation it is still trying to find its raison d'etre. The question remains whether the Yugoslavian government can provide its people with a growing economy and a rising standard of living.

All East European countries are going through a process of national self-assertion despite considerable constraints imposed by Moscow. Even Albania is in the process of finding its future between the increased political and economic participation of its population, the rivalries of the neighbors, and slowly increasing contacts with outside world.

With such changes, a new intelligentsia is being created. This new urban proletariat, like the conservative peasantry, is displaying strong national pride. As can be seen in the Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, and Polish uprisings (and even in the East German uprising), in spite of supranational indoctrination by communist leaders, many East Europeans have retained strong national feelings that act as a barrier to Sovietization.

The countries of Eastern Europe are characterized by great diversity expressed in their physical, economic, and cultural makeup. These countries do not comprise a demographically homogeneous region; their social institutions have undergone numerous transformations over the years. Their "crossroad" position between East and West, characterized by easy accessibility and the movements and conquests of many peoples, played an important role in this

diversity. Regional development processes throughout Eastern Europe have been conditioned by a long history of foreign domination that has resulted in an extremely diverse cultural landscape. Their marks are still visible in the form of pagan temples, pre-Christian tombstones, old weathered coins, Roman walls, roads, baths and forums, Byzantine churches, early frescoes and fortress walls, medieval castles, Turkish mosques and Austrian baroque architecture, medieval city layouts, churches of various periods, and Hanseatic port characteristics, etc. The urban landscape was subjected repeatedly to cultural influences from neighboring regions as well as from indigenous sources. These historical interactions resulted in regional differentiations that in turn greatly influenced the transformation of settlement patterns. The pride that some East European countries are taking in these cultural monuments is especially fascinating.

Few areas in the world show as great a spatial complexity as the four countries usually described as Southeastern Europe -- Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia.¹ The complex relief of the Balkan peninsula with its high degrees of fragmentation encouraged particularism and isolationism and was largely responsible for the absence of political unity. The crossroad position of the peninsula subjected various parts of the region to cultural and political influences from Central Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Orient, thus contributing to the region's lack of political unity. There is no country in Eastern Europe in which internal spatial inequalities and contrasts brought about by historical forces are not reflected

in cultural and economic diversity, i.e., patterns of ethnicity, illiteracy, birth and death rates, social values, perceptions of rural life, and the degree and spread of industrialization throughout the region.

These cultural and political influences have complicated relations with both neighboring countries and intranational ethnic minorities. Centuries of invasion and domination by foreign powers have left a deep impact on the various regions of Eastern Europe, and nowhere is this more visible than in the settlement patterns of the interwar urban landscape and the distribution of numerous national minorities in the region.

The Interwar Period

The interwar period in Eastern Europe was characterized by a number of conditions that left their impact on the socioeconomic development of each individual country. These conditions generally had a negative impact on the process of building strong viable national states. For example, the deplorable condition of the transportation infrastructure of each country often prevented the exploitation of important mineral deposits and the expansion of agricultural exports. In addition, agrarian reform and industrialization were hampered by large and impoverished surplus agrarian populations living at subsistence levels on small land holdings. These surplus populations were prevalent especially in underdeveloped peripheral and mountainous areas from which they eventually migrated to the fertile plains.² The movements of surplus

peasant populations began in several countries with the establishment of national states; it continued in the interwar period and resumed after World War II on an increased scale. The various migration process at work, especially those directed toward large cities that served to facilitate an extension of urban values, were related to the employment situation. During the interwar period, these processes generally occurred at a slow pace and were tied closely to the spread of industrialization in each country. In spite of great efforts, "in 1938 East Central Europe still produced only eight percent of the industrial output of all Europe minus the Soviet Union, and of this small share, a third was recorded by Czechoslovakia."³ Major economic changes did not occur until the postwar period.

To varying degrees, numerous attempts at agrarian reform and industrialization were forced by large surplus populations that contributed to the backwardness and poverty of a substantial part of each country. Backward land holdings based on subsistence farming suffered from underemployment, and their size discouraged investment for technical improvements. The widespread use of outmoded methods of animal husbandry was also a depressing sight. Moreover, peasant land holdings were subdivided so often that, according to the Croatian economist Rudolf Bicanic, they were scarcely big enough to adequately provide for the food needs of the peasants or raise enough money for taxes, debts, and highly priced industrial goods.⁴ In Croatia alone, peasant land holdings were subdivided five times in 150 years.

Industrialization in the Czech part of post-World War I Czechoslovakia reached a level in the 1930s where a substantial part of its surplus population could be absorbed. This was not true of the Slovakian or Ruthenian parts of the state. Czechoslovakia's transportation network was becoming increasingly able to support its economic needs, but this was not the case in most Eastern European countries, especially those that were organized after 1918 or obtained new territory, the transportation systems of which were oriented toward other countries. Parts of Western Poland and Hungary, as well as parts of Slovenia and Croatia in post-World War I Yugoslavia, were more advanced than other East European countries. Although industrialization was the declared prewar goal of all East European governments, it was only accelerated by postwar communist regimes.

Many of the urban problems associated with 20th century Eastern Europe stem from the period of nation building in the preceding century, and for the most part are a legacy of various conquerors. The East European legacy of insuperable backwardness, both in urban and rural regions among poverty-stricken peasants and many ethnic and religiously diverse groups living in urban areas, has contributed to great spatial differences and internal political problems in several East European countries.

Throughout Eastern Europe, important constraining factors hampered improvements in standards of living and discouraged the spread of innovations in general. Such factors included increasing

state intervention in economic affairs and huge military expenditures that absorbed between one-fourth and one-third of national budgets. In addition, heavy reliance on foreign capital attracted by a variety of protectionist policies resulted in serious indebtedness. Moreover, a breakdown of long-established trading channels left a negative impact on every country in the region. This region-wide breakdown was brought about by the dissolution of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy and encouraged by nationalistic policies. Faulty economic policies led to strivings for economic autarchy and constantly increasing competition. Finally, the extended economic crisis of the 1930s affected the newly established national states of Eastern Europe especially hard.

One of the major reasons that the East European countries had difficulty building strong and viable national states was the instability of their government institutions, often complicated by the actions of irresponsible political parties. Internal quarrels and external pressures from Germany, Italy, and Russia contributed to the demise of the independent states of Eastern Europe during the interwar years.

All the countries of Eastern Europe had reached a similar level of social and economic development by the outbreak of World War II. There was no question that traditional economic and social structures were changing, but what was really needed was a thorough reconstruction. Unfortunately, this could not be achieved in the few years between the two world wars because of the breakup of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, the establishment of new national states

(Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia), and the addition of a sizeable territory to Romania (e.g., Transylvania from Hungary). Furthermore, the impact of the international economic crisis of the 1930s was by no means over when World War II started in 1939. The aftermath of this war, with all its human and material losses, not only brought new masters to the region; it brought thorough social and economic reconstruction faster than anyone had thought possible.

The Postwar Period

Since World War II, few countries have experienced such far-reaching basic structural changes in their cultural, economic, and political life as the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Broadly speaking, the major emphasis in each country has been on industrialization, the greatest possible use of domestic resources, and the goal of equality between diverse national regions.

As the primary vector of change in Eastern Europe, industrialization was intended to absorb the undernourished surplus peasantry into an increasing number of new industries and provide a rapidly growing number of secondary and tertiary employment opportunities. It was hoped that industrialization would lead to increased agricultural mechanization and in turn permit accelerated migration of underdeveloped rural labor. The emphasis on industrialization also created increased demands for domestic natural resources, many of which were exported in raw form before World War II. Finally, planned investments influenced the location of new industries and thus contributed to a wider regional distribution network and the spread of modern economic activity. Agriculture in all socialist countries

received low priority and generally stagnated until the 1960s when many governments became concerned about low production outputs, low productivity, and the importance of agricultural modernization.

The first priority of postwar Eastern Europe was the repair of war-damaged industry, housing, and transportation networks. New projects were undertaken in certain countries, such as the construction of a road from Zagreb to Belgrade that served to connect Yugoslavia's two major cities. However, reconstruction was slowed by Soviet exploitation of East European resources. The Soviets transferred machinery and sometimes entire industries to the USSR under the excuse that such transfers came from former enemies, Yugoslavia and Albania excluded. In addition, the establishment of so-called "joint stock companies" in which the Soviets invariably held 51% control enabled the USSR to take a significant slice of Eastern Europe's industrial output while "paying less than world market prices for their commercial exports." Paul Marer has estimated that "the value of the unrequited flow of resources from Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union during the first postwar decade to be roughly \$14 billion, or of the same order of magnitude as the aid the United States gave to Western Europe under the Marshall Plan."⁵

Once essential reconstruction was completed by 1948-49, East European development strategies followed the Soviet centralized planning model, prerevolutionary market economies were replaced by the strictures of the Soviet model including a large bureaucracy organized in a series of parallel functional hierarchies. This huge bureaucratic apparatus was coordinated by fitting it into identical administrative

regional molds, each of which was supervised by communist party officials controlled through the separate hierarchy of the party secretariat. Industry received the highest priority in investment planning and became the prime vector of change in spatial economic structures. Industrial investment decisions became an integral part of state and party policy making processes.

It was clear that the Soviet Union gave the socialist countries of Eastern Europe very little choice between the Soviet model and possible experimentation with development strategies better suited to their specific needs. Yugoslavia stepped out on its own after it was expelled from the Cominform in June 1948, and after a long period of experimentation it formulated its own model of economic development -- a process fraught with danger as anyone following internal Yugoslavian affairs can readily testify. The emphasis in the rest of Eastern Europe was on centralized planning and quick industrialization with priority on heavy industry (especially metal working and power facilities) at the expense of consumer products and light industry. In addition, Soviet development strategy emphasized a maximum degree of self-sufficiency and reliance on internal sources of capital accumulation.

Investment in consumer industries and infrastructure (especially in transportation and housing) received secondary attention and was dependent on the availability of scarce resources to a far greater extent than heavy industry. In view of poor energy and mineral resources and wasteful import consumption patterns, this resulted in greater dependence on Soviet raw materials, especially energy resources.

Paul Marer has pointed out that "the Soviet policy of encouraging Eastern Europe to specialize in heavy industrial products regardless of their raw material base may have been designed to reorient trade to the USSR and to heighten each state's dependence on Soviet raw materials (which at the time would not readily be sold on world markets) and the Soviet market (at a time when the Western embargo limited Soviet access to Western goods).⁶ This led to an inefficient allocation of resources, parallel industrial capacities, and exhaustion of key raw materials (except in Yugoslavia, which did not join CMEA, the Soviet bloc economic organization). It also led to increased dependence on the Soviet Union and slowly declining standards of living after the 1960s. The result was increasing popular resentment that contributed to political upheavals in the mid-1950s in Poland and Hungary.

The turmoil in Eastern Europe during the 1950s brought home to Soviet and East European leaders the need for greater participation in the overall economic planning process. After 1956, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (established in 1949) became a useful tool for expanding Eastern Europe's economic ties with the Soviet Union while at the same time giving the impression of greater East European participation and independence.

Most industrial expansion during the 1950s and 1960s occurred near existing towns and in connection with older industrial concentrations. This precipitated a rapid growth of urban populations and often led to spontaneous and uncontrolled expansion of towns, either by absorption of surrounding rural settlements or by the

creation of new residential areas. The migration of a large number of people from rural areas resulted in a number of constraints, i.e., housing and utility shortages, poor transportation facilities, deficiencies in the work performance of commuting workers, split families, and illegal and squatter residences on the outskirts of several large cities. The rapid migration from rural to urban areas also gave rise to numerous social problems. Apart from the need for migrants to quickly adapt to urban life, the breakup of family life created many serious family and community problems. Emigration has exacerbated social problems and has become a serious dilemma for Yugoslavia and Poland.

Nearly 700,000 Yugoslavian workers are employed in Western Europe. Many of them are single or without other family members. At the height of this phenomenon, over one million Yugoslavs worked in various West European countries. As a result of the oil crises of the 1970s and the economic slowdowns in most Western nations, the number of foreign workers has declined and their return has added to Yugoslavia's economic problems by increasing unemployment and reducing hard currency transfers from money earned by foreign workers. In addition, at the height of Solidarity in 1980-81 most Polish workers in East Germany and Northern Czechoslovakia were sent home because it was feared that the Polish strike movement would spread to Polish workers abroad.⁷ On the other hand, labor emigration has tended to serve as a safety valve to siphon off official and hidden unemployment.

It is often asked whether rapid modernization in Eastern Europe is leading to urbanization of rural areas or to the peasantization of the city. Any visitor to Eastern Europe is aware of this problem, which is only slowly being solved by various government institutions. Once perceived expectations of the advantages of urban life have been raised, it is difficult to slow rural-urban migration. The transformation of the urban landscape in Eastern Europe ultimately will follow the pattern of all industrial nations where "differences in living standards between rural and urban areas will decrease through a gradual assimilation by the rural population of an urban life style, its work patterns, dwelling arrangements, recreational pursuits and services."⁸

In recent years, industrial dispersion was enhanced by increased economic growth in underdeveloped areas, especially for labor intensive and footloose industries. Thus considerable industrial growth has been diverted to small and intermediate size cities and towns. To a large extent, this deliberate policy of bringing industry to underdeveloped areas has obviated the need for workers to travel long distances to and from work, though the peasantry remains an important exception in certain regions. While industrial growth enterprises initially absorbed surplus labor directly from agriculture and often served as growth centers that created additional employment opportunities, employment growth has spread to numerous areas in every East European country.

Agrarian surplus populations have declined throughout Eastern Europe. Individual countries now give increased attention to agrarian problems, and several have experimented with more efficient productive units such as producers' cooperatives and agro-industrial complexes. It must be emphasized that the private agricultural sector has shown its superiority in terms of yields and efficiency in every East European country regardless of its form of agriculture. Private agriculture is predominant in Poland and Yugoslavia (nearly 80%); in Hungary, it represents only a small percentage of total outputs; and it is restricted in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Only the future will tell if greater private incentives will bring East European agriculture closer to Western standards.

Economic reforms tied to the centralized system of physical planning began in the 1950s and emphasized the need for increased planning efficiency except in Yugoslavia where political considerations have been the main cause. Reform measures varied from country to country, but certain factors were common throughout Eastern Europe and all were undertaken very cautiously.⁹ Most reforms emphasized decentralization, a loosening of central planning, and enterprise autonomy was increased, especially with regard to decisions affecting investments, wages, foreign trade, and employment. Growing consumer demands for additional and better quality products and improved standards of living (at least not a decline) forced most East European governments to pay increased attention to the modernization of their economies.

Western credits, readily available for the modernization of East European economies during the 1970s, were used for ambitious projects, but often they were squandered because of mismanagement. The resulting balance of payments crisis was compounded by serious economic problems in the West that caused Eastern Europe's economic and political problems to worsen as the demand for its products greatly declined and international competition increased. Economic slowdowns were especially serious in Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia, where drastically reduced standards of living led to increased dependence on Soviet economic support, usually in the form of special arrangements for fuels and investment in Soviet energy and mineral resources. Even Yugoslavia was forced to appeal for increased Soviet oil and natural gas deliveries paid for through barter arrangements. While the reason for each country's problems were different in nature, overambitious growth targets were the basic problem.

Yugoslavia's multiethnic character complicated problems caused by overambitious growth targets, and since Tito's death the federal government's ability to make necessary decisions ensuring the implementation of urgently needed economic reforms often has been paralyzed. This has resulted in a crisis that has become endemic in the Yugoslavian system of federalism and self-management. It has also complicated a solution to Yugoslavia's nationality problems, especially for ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and the increasingly restive Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These problems have led to strong popular pressures, even from high party members, to

increase the efficiency of the federal system, with special emphasis on its multinational character. Obviously, this will not be easy, but the alternatives are less acceptable.

The upheavals in Poland resulting from the Solidarity movement added to Poland's economic problems. Romania's foreign policy has been muted somehow by increased dependence on Soviet oil since the disruption of Romanian oil imports due to the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. In addition, Hungary's attempt to decrease the role of central planning and rely more on market forces was followed recently by the Soviet Union's most loyal allies, Bulgaria and East Germany. The latter have initiated a greater emphasis on technology than ideology that according to their officials "will lay the basis for further changes in the highly centralized economy."

It is evident that the Soviet Union has difficulty committing its East European allies to joint projects, especially those dealing with technology and energy sources developed in the USSR. But considering East European dependence on Soviet energy supplies and Soviet opportunities to sell raw materials and fuels on Western markets for vital hard currency, East European choices are limited. The recently signed 15-year agreement regarding cooperation on production, technology and science between the Soviet Union and the GDR requires that East Germany "in order to receive continued deliveries of oil, gas and raw materials from the Soviet Union, is to invest in the reconstruction and modernization of those of its industries that produce and deliver the products needed by the Soviet economy."¹⁰

According to most economists, Eastern Europe has become a net cost to the Soviet Union. However, the USSR seems to be willing to underwrite that cost because its paramount goal in the region is stability and the avoidance of upheavals and economic crises that could become politically dangerous. One of the most important issues in Soviet-East European relations centers around East European difficulties in obtaining access to advanced technologies unavailable from the West due to export restrictions. Such difficulties have resulted in an awkward situation wherein Eastern Europe has lost its competitiveness in international trade. All the socialist countries of Eastern Europe (except Yugoslavia) are now more than ever caught between a vague desire for closer ties with Western industrialized nations and the need for Soviet economic assistance, which is of immediate tangible value to them.

Eastern Europe Today

In the fall of 1984, it was obvious that the economic and political systems of Eastern Europe have changed significantly as a result of fundamental economic and sometimes political reforms. Increased reliance on Soviet economic assistance can be avoided only through further reforms.

The East European way of life has been described as "living with differences."¹¹ The fact is that "the differences are much greater than anticipated, some would even say, much greater than admitted by those in the West who like to put all Eastern European societies on the same footing." Such differences have been enumerated recently in the Belgrade daily Politika and are obvious to all

those who follow developments in the region. For example, private enterprise and travel abroad are tolerated in some countries, while in others they are not.

Erich Honecker's planned visit to West Germany, which was cancelled in late 1984 because of the Soviet pressure, was praised by the Hungarian press, but condemned by Czechoslovakia as "national deviation." (Nicolae Ceausescu shortened his own visit to West Germany, for different reasons.) Bucharest and Budapest are quite close in terms of their foreign policies, but they disagree strongly about the Hungarian minority in Romania. Solidarity was condemned in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, condoned with an awareness of its causes in Hungary, and only briefly taken note of in Romania and Yugoslavia. Differences between East European countries are concealed for the most part, and the same can be said about their disagreements with the Soviet Union. However, their views on East-West relations are much more openly discussed than in the past. East European governments and party officials often mention their frustrations in private discussions, and even East European citizens are apt to criticize their governments and even Soviet policies to a greater extent than ever before. The recent press coverage of the trial of secret police officers in Poland is something that would have been unheard of even a few years ago.

Despite considerable political, economic, and cultural constraints, my numerous journeys to Eastern Europe since 1934 provide evidence of continuing evolutionary change in the region. In the long term, this may lead to more open and independent societies that will

leave an important impact on the Soviet Union and its relations with Western nations, including the the United States.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
NOTES

- 1.) Hungary and Greece sometimes are included in this more or less artificial division.
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- 3.) Rothschild, Joseph, East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 15.
- 4.) Probably the best description of prewar peasant life is a privately distributed study by Rudolf Bicanic, Kako Zivi Narod, Zivot u pasivnim krajevima (How People Live. Life in the Passive Regions,) Zagreb, 1936, Translated by Stephen Clissold, London, 1941.
- 5.) Paul Marer, "The Political Economy of Soviet Relations with Eastern Europe," in Sarah Meiklejohn Terry (ed.), Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe (New Haven: Yale University Press 1984), 156; and Paul Marer, "Soviet Economic Policy in Eastern Europe," in John P. Hardt (ed.), Reorientation and Commercial Relations of the Economies of Eastern Europe. (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 135-163.
- 6.) Paul Marer, "The Political Economy of Soviet Relations with Eastern Europe," op. cit.
- 7.) George W. Hoffman, "Currents in Yugoslavia: Migration and Social Transformation," Problems of Communism (November-December, 1973), 16-31; and Elizabeth Lichtenberger, Gastarbeiter, Leben in zwei Gesellschaften (The Foreign Worker. Life in Two Societies) (Vienna: Hermann Bohlaus, 1984). In collaboration with Heinz Fassmann of EFT-Technologie. The former stresses the problems of Yugoslavian workers, and the latter emphasizes broader sociological problems of the foreign worker.
- 8.) L. Van den Berg, et. al., Urban Europe, A Study in Growth and Decline, Vol. I., European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 4-5.
- 9.) Michael Gamarnikow, Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1968); and George W. Hoffman, Regional Development Strategy in Southeast Europe. A Comparative Analysis of Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia. Praeger Special Studies in International Economics and Development (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972).

- 10.) Frederick Kempe, The Wall Street Journal, February 8, 1985.
- 11.) Slavoljub Djukic, Radio Free Europe report on article published in the Belgrade daily Politika, June 4, 1984.

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