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EASTERN EUROPE'S SILENT REVOLUTION

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Coming home to Europe? Central and Eastern Europe in EU and NATO

by *Jahn Otto Johansen*

I shall not give a comprehensive summary of my book: "Hjem til Europa? Sentral- og Østeuropa i EU og NATO (Aschehoug 2004) – in English translation: "Coming home to Europe?"

I shall rather discuss some of the problems I raise in connection with the enlargement of EU and NATO. I don't discuss the Baltic states in my book, since they are neither Eastern Europe nor Central Europe. The Baltic States are a different group av countries oriented towards the Nordic lands, although I must add that we will not be able to understand Lithuania without studying her historical relations with neighbouring Poland. What the Baltic States have in common with Eastern and Central Europe is the Soviet politico-economical system that was forced upon them. Neither do I discuss Slovenia in my book. Slovenia is Central Europe all right, but also a part of the former Yugoslavia. But Slovenia was never a Soviet satelite. Slovenia continued to be a kind of Habsburg even during communist times, very different from the rest of Yugoslavia.

The four countries that entered EU in May 2004 – Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – regard themselves as Central European, not East European. This is a very important, but problematic distinction.

Central Europe or Mitteleuropa is according to the Czech writer in exile, Milan Kundera, "a small arch-European Europe, a model of Europe built according to the principle of 'maximum of diversity in a minimum of living space'".

And he adds: "How could Middle Europe not have been terrified when it crashes with Russia, which believes in the opposite principle, a minimum of diversity in a maximum of living space'?" The basic instinct of the Central European peoples towards the East was inspired by the obvious faults of the Soviet Communism which was enforced on them in the late 1940s.

It was not their own choice, but a consequence of the advance of The Red Army in the Second World War and a result of the Teheran and Yalta Conferences. The forced friendship under the red banners never produced a real cultural and civilisational togetherness. The heated debate between Russian officials and representatives of the Central European and Baltic states about the real meaning and consequences of the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 illustrates this. Many Russians still don't understand the feelings of the peoples that against their own will were socialized and sovietized, and the Central Europeans and the Balts underestimate the heavy price the Russians paid in the war against Hitler-Germany. Milan Kundera developed his ideas on Central Europe in an essay in *The New York Review of Books* more than 6 years before the opening of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc (April 26. 1983).

Due to the Yalta-agreement between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers Europe lost Central-Europe, which was indeed the real European part of the continent. Kundera had in mind the Habsburg Monarchy, which he regarded as a multiethnic Europe in miniature, an "intellectual Commonwealth". The Austrian-Hungarian Empire was indeed a unique multinational state, which many in Central Europe today regard as the precursor of the European Union.

The only Central European people who mostly remained outside the framework of this empire were the Poles, except for Galicia. Poland was since the end of the 18. Century divided between Prussia, Tsarist-Russia and The Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Of course, Austro-Hungary didn't become the "United States of Europe", melting the cultures of its peoples into one. After all, the model of statehood chosen in 1867 was not acceptable to all loyal subjects. Among the more than twenty nations living under the sceptre of the dynasty, only two were really privileged –the German speaking and the Hungarians. The Slavic majority of the population opposed the Germanisation in the Western part of the Empire and the Magyarisation in the East.

This historical fact was underplayed by the Czech Milan Kundera, who used Central Europe/Mitteleuropa to demonstrate that he was not at

all interested in Russian politics and culture. Russia was not Europe, according to Kundera. I have a personal experience with the great Polish writer Andrzej Andrzejewski back in the early 1960-ies. Learning that I was going further east, to Moscow, he looked at me sadly and said: "You shouldn't do that, Janek, you will be leaving the European Civilization!"

Another well known Central European writer, the Hungarian György Konrád, also dealt with the metaphor Central Europe. For him this was a rhetorical tool in his fight against the partition of Europe due to Yalta and the Cold War.

Konrad stressed the Central European connection to demonstrate that the Hungarians, the Slovaks, the Czechs and the Poles were indeed European and very different from the Non-Europeans. Konrad argued not geopolitically, but culturally. Therefore Kundera still regards Central Europe or Mitteleuropa as a useful tool to distinguish these countries from Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine. It's not quite clear to me where he would place Romania and Bulgaria. Moldova and the Balkan countries are of course not Central Europe, but Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria are indeed Eastern Europe.

The ideas of Central Europe or Mitteleuropa were useful and operational during the Cold War, but many political scientists regard them as a little out of fashion today. The Russian Yaroslav Shimov remarks wittingly in a critical essay in *Neprikosnovennij Zapas* 2002-10-11 (also in @eurozine): "Quite simply, there can be no greater difference than that between the snowstorms sweeping across the Russian steppe, and the sparse white flakes quietly falling on the crooked streets of Cracow, Prague or Buda on a Christmas evening. Even though both are made of snow".

In my view, Central Europe or Mitteleuropa as analytical tools are not so useful anymore, after Poland led the EU in supporting Ukraine's "Orange revolution". Can Ukraine be a member of the EU, as the Poles want? Probably not, at least not in the foreseeable future.

Poland has more people and a bigger economy than the other three Visegrad countries put together and has aspirations to regional leadership. Poland does not regard her Eastern border as the end of Europe. For its own security and national interests she wants to bring the Ukrainians in to the European family.

Neither the Czechs and the Slovaks nor the Hungarians are interested in seeing Ukraine enter EU in the foreseeable future. That would complicate their own interests as new members. The Czechs regard Ukraine more as a nuisance than a hopeful prospect.

The Hungarians rather want to see Croatia in the EU, although that opportunity was missed for the time being by Zagreb's refusal to cooperate with the UN War Criminal Tribunal. Hungary has collided with its partners in trying to bring Austria and Slovenia, once parts of the Habsburg's Mitteleuropa, in to the Visegrad Group. The others won't accept that at all. Being insiders in two clubs, NATO and the EU, the Visegrad countries have wider choices of policies and allies. Now they pursue their own national interests more strongly than when they had to work together to get inside.

The Central European Countries have had somewhat different experiences as newborn EU-members. Although some prices in Central Europe went up, exports and foreign investments rose even more. Few of the fears associated with the expansion materialised, but there is no doubt that the enlarged EU mulls future challenges.

Poland now exports one-third more foods to Germany and other EU countries than before. Polish farmers received 1.5 bn euro's worth of subsidies, which made them less vocal opponents to EU than before. Many Polish farmers are today enthusiastic supporters of the Union, although small farmers are the definite losers.

For Hungary's farmers EU has however been too slow. Hungarian farmers are complaining that delays in the payment of subsidies are causing them hardship. The farmers' protest in Budapest was among the angriest political events in Hungary in 2004. The protests preoccupied Hungarian

public opinion for weeks and were the longest in the 15 years since the fall of communism. The fact is that the Hungarian agricultural producers have made the largest pre-tax earnings over all in recent times, but unprofitable farmers will have to go out of business.

European affairs specialist, Geaza Varga, admits that the government failed to prepare properly for EU membership. That is a key point. Both Bruxelles and the national capitals too often fail to inform their citizens of the challenges that the EU membership will cause.

In Slovakia the mood is quite different. The Slovaks point of departure was much lower than that of the other new member countries. Slovakia's capital, Bratislava, is gleaming with foreign investment. "Slovakia has become the Eastern (read: Central European) darling of the multinationals", reports BBC from Bratislava, "foreign investment is expected to total about 1.5 bn pound sterling – 2.2 bn euros – in 2005, twice the amount attracted in 2004."

Low labour costs, low taxes and political stability make this one of the most attractive economies in Europe. Slovakia is also well placed geographically.

We should not in retrospect underestimate the true feelings of the Poles, the Czechs, the Slovaks and the Hungarians when they entered the EU. At that time the Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, The Czech Republic and Slovakia) were a mutual assistance group to push its members into NATO and the EU. They all wanted to get into the Europe to which they historically and culturally belonged. The Slovak foreign minister Eduard Kukan told a German paper: "We belong to the European family".

The same feelings were expressed by leading politicians in the other new member states. That is something that is too easily forgotten by the West Europeans and by the Central Europeans themselves. The Polish president, Aleksander Kwasniewski, expressed this feeling in 2004 after the invasion of Iraq and secretary Rumsfeld's infamous and unhistorical division of Europe into "New" and "Old" Europe:

"Poland belongs to old Europe. We have lived here for a thousand years".

For the Poles membership in the EU was the fulfilment of the dreams of generations. Poland is back in Europe. Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary are back in Europe. It's a real home coming which the Romanians and the Bulgarians hope to experience in 2007. The English historian and specialist on Polish history, Norman Davies, correctly stated that Poland's place in history must now be reconsidered by the West:

"After Poland and the other Central European countries became members of the EU, their history is a part of our history."

The same could be said about the Baltic States and Slovenia. Therefore it is very important for the old members of the EU, and for the Norwegians as well, to study the history of the new member countries and their strong cultural connections with Europe.

The West Europeans today are largely ignorant about this history, for example the very meaning of the Warsaw uprising 1944, brilliantly discussed by Norman Davies in his last book (Rising '44. The Battle for Warsaw. New York and London 2003).

When I wrote about this book in my *Aftenposten*-column (signed), many readers e-mailed or called me, saying they were not aware of this very important event in Polish and European history. Without knowing the real history of the Warsaw uprising of 1944, we shall not be able to understand why the Poles reacted as they did to the transatlantic conflict caused by the Iraq War and why they behave the way they do in the new EU.

The Poles seek American support to balance off their historical enemies, the Russians and the Germans. They don't trust Russia, but they don't fully trust Germany either, although they cooperate much better with Berlin than with Moscow and they of course are allied with the Germans in both EU and NATO. That does not mean that we indeed accept at face value everything the Poles say and do, but we have to know and understand before we accept or reject. However, in discussing the difference between Central and Eastern Europe we should not draw a new border in Europe which will result in excluding the poorer parts of Europe and keeping them poorer in delaying their modernisation.

Contemporary cultural anthropologists have given up on the notion that there has been a social evolution. They favour a multicultural perspective that pronounces all cultures more or less equal. This is of course the opposite of Samuel Huntington's "Clash of civilizations" that proposes a clear value hierarchy, with the West as a morally superior. In his last book "Who are we?" Huntington ends up in a racist corner by arguing that the WASP is the only solution for the US. That excludes, paradoxically, even the large Bush family with its Latin-American members. Both Huntington and many contemporary cultural anthropologists deny the validity of the old functionalist-evolutionary theory that sees humanity's history as a long march toward a common, modern type of society first reached by the West, but accessible to all other humans.

With the increasing confrontation between fundamentalists of all kind – Muslim, Christian and Jewish (even Hindu) – that theory may look like a summer night's dream. But there is something in the functionalist-evolutionary theory that might be relevant to Central and Eastern Europe.

I cannot accept the idea that somehow people born in a certain part of Europe should have the capacity to become modern while others do not. Insisting that the differences in levels of economic success between various parts of the post-communist world are related to very deep cultural legacies makes them seem more permanent than they really are (cfr Daniel Chirot: "Returning to Reality", Transit 2002-01-11, also available in @ eurozine).

I'll make my point. Some backward parts of Eastern Europe have elements in place for a rather rapid modernisation, although their prospects may look hopeless today. In my view, all of post-communist Europe has the capacity to catch up to Western European levels in one or two generations.

What does the history of the European Community/ the European Union tell us? 40 years ago Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland were so backward that nobody believed they might reach Western levels of modernity by 2000. In 2000 Ireland's per capita Gross Domestic Product was 29 800 US dollars and that of the United Kingdom 25 900. The backward, Catholic

Ireland had passed the advanced, Protestant England. As late as 1970 Ireland's level of economic development was rated equal to Hungary's. In 2000 Hungary's per capita Gross Domestic Product was 6 830 US dollars.

May I propose that we bid farewell to Max Weber's famous theory that modernity would basically come to protestant countries in North Western Europe, Lutheran or Calvinist.

There has been and is indeed today very different socio-economic levels in Central- and Eastern Europe. The differences between the new membership countries and within these countries are still great.

The American political scientist Andrew Janos (East Central Europe in the Modern World. 2000) has rightly argued that in Eastern Europe the division between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism made an important political and economic difference. The Catholic parts of the region demonstrated a much stronger political opposition to Communism before 1989, and they have performed better economically since the fall of Communism. But I agree with the French sociologist Daniel Chirot (@ eurosine 2002-01-11) that these facts should not serve as an excuse for claiming that such big differences could never be changed. Under favorable conditions the differences might be overturned within two-three generations.

One might argue that Orthodoxy and Communism reinforced each other's anti-development cultures, but this does not mean that Eastern Orthodoxy per se will result in backwardness and misery for ever.

Greece and Greek Cyprus are interesting cases. They are Eastern Orthodox like Eastern Europe, but they remained in the Western orbit and were able to modernize. They made impressive economic progress in one to two generations. Greece's per capita GDP in 2000 was 12 400 US Dollars, more than twice as high as Hungary's. But only 50 years earlier, in 1950, the Greek GDP was only 60 % of Hungary's.

Where does this observation lead us?

I'm rather optimistic in the long term as far as Central and Eastern

European members of the EU go. By now they have received more than the total Marshal Plan in grants and assistance from EU. With the help of EU and their own efforts they will be able to modernize in a decade or two.

I am, however, less optimistic in the short and middle long perspective. It takes time to overcome not only the Communist past, but the pre-communist past as well. Communism pushed urbanisation, mass literacy and industrialisation, the criteria of modernity. But Communism lacked other and just as important parts of modernisation, like teaching individual responsibility. It takes time to change people's attitudes, but the Revolution of Rising Expectations has made people expect too much too soon.

While all the Central European peoples voted in favour of EU membership and almost everybody celebrated May 2 2004, the excitement has somewhat faded. It has been not only a European Home Coming, but a return to a sobering reality of high unemployment, welfare payments that bankrupt state budgets, corrupt administrations and lack of an independent judiciary.

In the spring of 2003, when these countries had their EU referenda, the support for membership reached its zenith. A year later according to the Eurobarometer there were 15 % less who regard membership as good for their country (2003: 58 % favoured EU membership; 2004: 43 % did the same). For the first time the percentage of people regarding membership as favourable for them was lower in the new member countries than in the old ones.

In the first elections to the European Parliament the turnout in all ten new member countries was 27 %, compared with 50 % in the old 15 member countries. Slovakia with a turnout of 16,7 % set the record for abstention. However, in Slovakia voters did not turn against their government, as they did in all other new member countries.

Righthwing parties like Fidesz in Hungary and Civic Platform in Poland as well as populist groups like Law & Justice and the League of Polish Families in Poland did well. That is a bad omen for EU and the new members.

I agree with the historian Tony Judt (BBC April 29, 2004) that the Central and East Europeans have not only a different experience from the West, they are not even being asked to join the union as equal partners. Little by little many of the promises made by the EU have been withdrawn or weakened. And too often the EU bureaucracy have treated the newcomers with arrogance and "Besserwissen". It takes two to tango. It's not only up to the new members, but to Bruxelles and the old member states as well.

The problems and the misunderstandings we have seen, make it easier for nationalists and populists to stir up dissatisfactions. That raises questions about whether deeper integration is really possible in the near future.

We won't necessarily see much open revolt against membership, but there will be less enthusiasm for deeper integration. This, and a EU without democratic legitimacy, might create backlashes in the new (as well as in the old) member countries. It takes better knowledge and understanding of the historical background and popular psychology of the new member countries to avoid the impression of arrogance and high handedness that the Bruxelles bureaucracy sometimes might give.

The new member states should be given the benefits of doubt. We should not expect that they shall provide greater miracles in a shorter time than the old members did. The integration of Central and Eastern Europe in EU takes patience and soberness on both sides of the former Iron Curtain.

I will conclude my observations with a literary metaphor. The well known Austrian author Robert Musil's novel "Man without qualities" (Mann Ohne Eigenschaften) deals with a group of European idealists in Vienna. They are enthusiastic, but rather impractical artists and noblemen who want to do something good for the Europe they know, the Habsburg Monarchy.

One of them, count Leinsdorf, travels to Brno in the Czech lands (Brünn in German) where the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans are fighting each other like hell. But when count Leinsdorf, an outsider from far away Vienna, tries to teach them how to solve their problems, the Czech and the Germans join forces and throw him out of town. The Austrian Do-Good-er is almost killed.

Will we hear the same words in the Central European and Baltic States when enthusiastic, but unrealistic EU-bureaucrats meddle in their internal affairs:

"Go back to Bruxelles! Down with the the European Guardianship!"

We can observe such tendencies in some of the old EU countries. There is a general feeling among observers both in the East and the West that Europe at large is in a rather bad situation; "Europa is heute in einem miserablen Zustand", as the German Philosopher Jürgen Habermas expresses it in a Die Welt-interview with the Polish publisist and Germany-expert Adam Krzeminski. National myths and social egoismus are, according to Habermas, splitting the enlarged EU Europe. And the citizens don't trust their national leaders nor the Bruxelles bureaucrats.

It stands to reason that the new members will react critically when the Bruxelles-bureaucracy meddle too much in their internal affairs without real knowledge of the local conditions and the popular psychology.

The Central and East-Europans won't easily forget how they were dictated to by far away Moscow. They don't want Bruxelles to become a new Moscow.

The EU bureaucracy and the democratic deficit in the Union might create counterforces that will be exploited by populists. A union that the citizens can't identify themselves with, might easily be the target of demagogic anti-European propganda. Wouldn't it then be better for the EU to advance slowly and steady than to rush forward to an ideal, but for the time being not very realistic goal?

EASTERN EUROPE'S SILENT REVOLUTION

By Nils Morten Udgaard

Only very rarely is the event which doesn't take place the great piece of news. However, when we look back on the developments in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Iron Curtain, we are seeing a quiet revolution – with 75 million people having their economic and political system completely changed – without a single drop of blood being spilled. That is not a very familiar experience in European history. This book is trying to offer part of an explanation of why it happened in this way, at this point of history.

In the course of 2004 we may say that Eastern Europe passed the political finishing line, as seven countries entered NATO at the end of March and eight countries joined the EU on May 1st. It can be argued that a broader political consensus has never been witnessed in our part of the world. And it has all the way been a negotiated change of system, first internally in each country and then on the European level. And this change happened where the world wars took place, with genocide and ethnic 'cleansing', and where tanks were used against civilians in 1953, 1956 and 1968.

When we look at the eight countries which entered the EU, we see that six of them also had to re-establish themselves as sovereign states – with a central bank, a new currency, their own defence, national courts and an upgrading of the role of the government, the parliament and the civil service. In particular this was the case with the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, pulling themselves out of the Soviet Union and out of Moscow's grip. It also applies to Slovenia, detaching herself from what used to be Yugoslavia, to Slovakia and – to a lesser extent – the Czech Republic, creating two states out of what used to be one. Only Poland and Hungary live on within borders that existed before 1989.

All the new EU-members in the East asked their voters for approval of that membership, and all got a very clear "yes" – albeit with a voter-participation of less than two-thirds (except for Latvia, where 72,5 percent participated).

A CONTINENTAL POLITICAL PATTERN

All eight Eastern European countries have decided to establish parliamentary democracies; they have a large number of parties, in spite of an electoral system that requires a minimum percentage of votes to get into parliament – generally 4 or 5 percent. The formation of governing coalitions is the rule in these countries. None opted for a presidential system as in the United States, or a pure two-party-system as in the United Kingdom. Election systems with proportional representation have been adopted, which conforms to the political pattern of continental Europe. The model has clearly been Germany, with its relatively recent experience in re-establishing a “fighting democracy” on the ruins of a violent dictatorship. The Germans actively promoted their political ideas in the East, with the assistance of financially strong foundations run by the main political parties of Germany.

Although Eastern European emigrants to the USA have been actively promoting democratic developments in their countries of birth, basic impulses on how to re-establish a post-communist political system have to a large extent been influenced by the German experience. More than half of the initial financial support for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the transitional phase came from Germany. Hungary introduced large chunks of German laws into its own lawbooks, to promote the new economic system, and other countries have adopted whole sections of their laws from Germany.

The eight new members of the EU all adopted new constitutions, where fundamental human rights are anchored. And to defend these constitutions all of them, with the exception of Estonia, also established strong constitutional courts. The authority of the courts is increasing, in conformity with a trend that affects all of Europe.

The standing of the parliaments is generally strong. In none of the new member-countries is the government in a position to dissolve the national parliament and call an election, and in none of them the president – the head of state – has the freedom to call an election on his or her own.

ENGLISH BEFORE GERMAN

The role of Germany is not surprising, considering the fact that Eastern Europe for centuries has been part of a German sphere of influence. In the field of languages, however, the Germans have experienced a classical set-back: English has become the number one language, as the full 'Americanisation' which engulfed Western Europe after 1945 now has reached the East. The Russian language has not left a strong mark in that part of Europe. One could say that the use of Russian has moved in tandem with Russian military strength in that area.

As a second language German is still strong, as 53 percent of pupils in secondary schools in Poland were taught German five years ago – while 80 percent were learning English. These changes have had a high cost, affecting the ability to communicate with the outside world. In a country like Lithuania the dominating foreign language in academic life has changed three times in fifty years: first German until 1945, then Russian until the upheavals of 1989-1991, and thereafter English. For the slightly older ones, from the ages of 40 to 50 years and upwards, this has been a rather painful change.

VOTERS AND GOVERNMENTS

While the establishment of political systems has proceeded very smoothly in the East, the stability of governments formed after 1989 has been very low. "We have not a single example of a government in Central- and Eastern Europe being re-elected. Freedom comes first, at once, while economic improvements come step by step, maybe very slowly. In the meantime a gap in the confidence (of the voters) opens up", the Polish social-democrat and president of the Senate, Longin Pastusiak, told Aftenposten in the autumn of 2004. The political parties are weak, they have few members, are not very professional (with the exception of some former communist parties) and change a lot. Governments are voted down again and again.

The decisive element of stability in all this has – so far – been the popular support for, and belief in, democracy and in a market economy. The voters remember the dictatorship and the command-economy, and the fact

that the communist and socialist systems in the East produced no results, economically and politically, that stand a comparison with European countries to the West.

A LIBERAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

For a Scandinavian it is a little surprising that the "new" EU--members are not particularly concerned with the "welfare-state", whether of a French, German or Scandinavian complexion. The economic means are not there, in the first place. Moreover a very liberal economic outlook receives distinctly more support than is the case in countries farther West on the European continent. Even young social-democratic leaders like Hungary's Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, emphasised the priority for a competitive private sector in the economy, for a flexible labour market and for a strong education system. He sounds like an Eastern Tony Blair, much more than a Hungarian version of Gerhard Schröder or even Jacques Chirac.

Poland generally favours a liberal economic policy, today with strong support from the former finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz – a veteran of the Solidarity movement and now the head of the Polish central bank. Fifteen years after the upheavals of 1989 Poland is leading the race in the East for economic growth, with a gross domestic product (GDP) around 30 percent above the level of 1989. However, the unemployment rate is close to 20 percent. The Baltic countries are still below their GDP-level of the Soviet period. Balcerowicz advocates still less state intervention in the economy and points out that the number of colleges and universities in Poland has increased fourfold – thanks to new private centres of learning, financed through fees. And the number of students is five times higher than in 1989.

We now see a European Union where the East-Europeans give added weight to liberal economic views in internal discussions. These new members tax their firms less than the old EU members do, which have even accused them of "tax-dumping". And rather than taxing labour, with a high personal tax-rate and a number of social contributions – like in Germany – the new members prefer to tax consumption, through a higher value added tax.

As members of the EU the Eastern European countries can expect yearly transfers to the order of some 100-125 billion euros (and Norway contributes one percent as an EEA-member), when the EU's budget-crisis has been resolved. In per capita terms these transfers roughly represent three to four times the transfers Western Europe received under the Marshall Plan – calculated on the basis of purchasing power. As with the Marshall Plan, however, not the money counts most, but the cooperation following in its wake: Free trade, a payments union, free capital movements. And, most importantly, a stable political framework in which to pursue economic activity.

AN EU-NATO DIVISION OF LABOUR

Despite the traditional trans-Atlantic disputes, and the serious disagreements surrounding the Iraq war during 2003, the EU and the United States have managed to arrive at a sensible division of political labour with regard to Eastern Europe. The US and NATO accepted Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as new members of NATO in March 1999, just a couple of weeks before the Kosovo war.

At that time nearly all Eastern European countries had been accepted as potential members of the EU, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria adopted in June 1993. They listed first – and, with hindsight, this was a wise precaution – the ability of the EU itself to “maintain the momentum of European integration”. Then the new entrants should establish stable political institutions to guarantee democracy, rule of law, human rights and the rights of minorities – and defuse any border disputes. And the new members should have a functioning market economy, which could stand up to competitive pressures and market forces on the inside of the EU.

It took more than nine years until the EU decided, again in Copenhagen in December 2002, that eight of the Eastern European countries were now ready for admission. For nearly a decade, closely monitored by the EU, they had worked to fulfil the criteria – ranging from the rights of the accused in police arrest to the border regime, from environmental standards to rules on trade competition. The changes amounted to a silent revolution, as they moved these societies in the direction of competitive politics

and markets. The revolution was a silent one, of course, because these countries and their inhabitants wanted a change in the given direction – seen as harbouring the most promising future – and so did the “old” members of the EU as well as the US. The world observed a rare moment of ideological consensus.

The Eastern European countries got the best of two worlds. On the one hand the optimal security of being an ally of the United States, as the rest of them joined NATO as full members in 2004. Their fear of Russia, for centuries a historical fixture, was now reduced to a minimum – though never completely discarded. At the same time they were made members of the ambitious – but not finally defined – European project of the EU, embracing an open market and receiving support in catching up economically. They were now invited in to participate in defining that project.

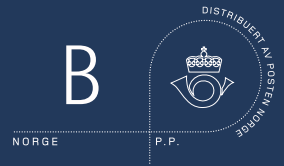
Post-war history had cost these new member-states a generation, at least, of lost economic development, and confined two generations to living without the freedom to move around in the world. Furthermore, the European project now also granted them protection from – and cooperation with – one country, Germany, with whom they had conducted a number of wars and which for long stretches of history had dominated their part of the world.

And perhaps even more important: The Eastern Europeans joined a new legal space that practically covers all of Europe, that is still developing within the framework of the EU and to which national judicial systems tend to adapt. That points to the future – and back to Roman times and Roman law, which for two thousand years has been a common heritage for most of Europe.

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