

INTRODUCTION

IT WASN'T THAT the European Union deliberately conceived of the Balkans as the test of its nascent Common Foreign and Security Policy and Europol. Or that the United States conceived of "Southeastern Europe" as the proving ground of its twenty-first-century crusade for global democratic transformation. Or that the post-9/11 Bush administration thought of this as the pioneer region in the nation building that it first scorned, then reinvented in order to avert Afghanistan's reversion to a failing state that would invite recapture by al Qaeda. Or that social engineers resolved to compare and contrast postwar soft power in the Balkans—making others want what you want—with coercive regime change in Iraq. Or that the new ad hoc international criminal courts formed for Yugoslavia (as for Rwanda) deliberately set out to hand down the world's first convictions under the half-century-old Genocide Convention. Or that Japan, whose donated buses now provide essential transport in Sarajevo, saw the Balkans as a prime venue for demonstrating Tokyo's expanding engagement outside of Asia. It all just happened that way.

The European Community (EC), as it was still called in the early 1990s, was simply muddling through reactively, as was its wont with all those pan-European policies that were not purely economic. The United States, glad to turn the cantankerous Balkans over to European crisis management as the cold war ended and the mortal dangers on the old continent seemed to have been dispelled, focused instead on the Herculean tasks befitting the sole surviving superpower, especially in Saddam Hussein's Middle East.¹ And however much it criticized "Madeleine Albright's war" in the Balkans as frittering away American power on the remote fringes of any real national interest, the successor administration of George W. Bush eventually reconciled itself to finishing what the administration of Bill Clinton had begun there.

For the European Union, the Balkans, like most items on its agenda, were as much a domestic as a foreign policy issue. The same ambiguity attended “enlargement,” aka “widening,” the post–cold war improvisation for exporting to infant post-Communist governments both security and the democracy to underpin it. Though it was far less articulated than the drive for worldwide democratization that would become the declared organizing principle of U.S. policy after the disappointments of the 2003 Iraq war, democratic regime change became, *de facto*, the foreign policy of the EU in its own neighborhood.

This endeavor already had an honorable tradition. By the 1960s the EC had achieved its original goal of ending two millennia of war in the bloody European heartland by reconciling the residual archenemies, France and Germany. Under NATO’s protection, the EC devised a unique form of supra-national cooperation that fell well short of federation but went far beyond a confederation in the unprecedented meddling in fellow members’ internal affairs that it authorized.² In the 1970s the European Community expanded its political mission to embrace democratic transformation, through the integration of postdictatorship Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Inculcating this novel political culture in southern Europe was accomplished through tutelage in domestic governance, as rendered especially by the German political foundations that had played such an important role in democratizing post-Hitler West Germany—notably the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which offered a robust social democratic alternative to the Communist and radical left utopias that U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger so feared. Institutionally, the process was promoted by setting democratic as well as market criteria that the three Mediterranean states had to fulfill before they could be granted the privilege of EC membership.³ By the time the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union imploded in 1989–91, the system had already ensured the European heartland’s longest period of peace in its history. “There is no precedent in world history for war being ruled out of forward calculations at such a high level,” concluded the awestruck megahistorian Paul Johnson.⁴

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact, the fledgling democracies in Central Europe, gazing wistfully at Western Europe’s peace and prosperity, all yearned to join the European Community. The foreign policy of the EC toward the post-Soviet neighborhood quickly became a domestic EC policy of deciding who might be allowed into the exclusive club, and by what process. If liberalized Madrid, Lisbon, and Athens could accede, why not liberalized Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, too? If impoverished Ireland, through EC membership, could leap in one generation from a residual potato-famine exporter of emigrants to become a high-tech

importer of those lucky enough to have Irish grandparents, then why not let the Central Europeans follow the same trajectory? Germany and Britain became the chief promoters of European Union enlargement as both an economic and a security measure. In this advocacy, part of the British motivation was to ward off French-German desires to “deepen” the EC into some kind of political union, by confining the EU to a politically unwieldy, large free-trade zone. The motivation of the Federal Republic of Germany (by now incorporating the erstwhile Communist German Democratic Republic) was the desire to end its frontline status by surrounding itself with friendly democracies to the east as well as to the west.

With the end of the cold war, then, the earlier EC enlargement process was repeated for the new democracies that emerged as the Central Europeans were freed from Moscow’s external empire. The iron curtain that on the one hand had ring-fenced Western Europe against Soviet meddling and allowed the EC to spread security and prosperity throughout the region had for decades, on the other hand, cut off “Eastern Europe” from Western Europe’s golden age. Austria and Finland, which had not been much better off than neighboring Hungary and Latvia in 1945, were by 1989 viewed enviously by the latter. In the 1990s the Central Europeans clamored to “rejoin” Europe as both symbol and means to effect their belated modernization. “Rejoining” Europe may have been a myth for most of them, but it was a useful myth. On a popular level, the mantra of striving for EC accession perhaps signified little more than a hazy feeling that if Western European members of the EC were so unimaginably safe and rich, then newcomers to the club would magically partake of these qualities too. But a core of Central European elites saw the EC project precisely as a way to apply outside pressure to make up for their countries’ lost half century. In the words of Polish finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz, reformers seized on the brief period of “extraordinary politics” afforded by the euphoria over release from the Soviet grip to raze old structures and start afresh.⁵ On the whole, Polish, Czech, and Estonian nationalism worked positively, enhancing populations’ solidarity in disavowing Russia’s authoritarian urges and pressing for democratic self-determination.

The Central Europeans’ mission of carrying out in one generation the political, social, and economic revolutions that the British, French, and Americans had completed in a more leisurely two centuries was a formidable one. Democratization had not proved durable in the 1980s in Latin America, the region where transitions to democracy had been studied the most intensively. Experts therefore tended to be pessimistic about its sustainability in Central Europe—or even to suggest that the Central Europeans were now more likely

to go the way of the third than of the first world.⁶ Nor had liberal economic transformation been an unalloyed success even in Europe. It was all very well that Ireland was on its way to surpassing the United Kingdom in per capita income, but Greece was still viewed by wary Polish economists in the early 1990s as an example of what to avoid.⁷

Under Central European badgering and German and British lobbying, enlargement proceeded—despite French fears that widening would only bring in low-wage Polish plumbers and a Trojan horse of admirers of that American superpower whose sense of its exceptionalism and civilizing mission so closely mirrored France’s own self-image. The European Community signed ad hoc “Europe Agreements” with Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in 1991 and with Romania and Bulgaria in 1993, and at its 1993 Copenhagen summit regularized them with a formal promise to grant these partners membership as soon as they met the “Copenhagen criteria” of democratic and market standards.

Their challenge was even more daunting than that which the Spanish, Portuguese, and Greeks confronted twenty years earlier. While the southern Europeans may have been unfamiliar with an open political system, they were old hands at market economics. In Central Europe, by contrast, no one under the age of seventy had personally experienced a private-enterprise system. Balcerowicz and other Polish economists had managed to acquire a sophisticated theoretical understanding of the genre, and the occasional Bulgarian economist had begun the intellectual trek by learning Polish in order to wrestle with the professional literature from Warsaw. But basically the economic system was a greenfield undertaking. The Central Europeans had to learn not only how democracy works, but also how the market works. They did so with impressive speed. In particular, those that got the pain of “shock therapy” over with as fast as possible—Estonia above all, Poland with more ambiguity—set a solid foundation, began attracting foreign investment, and generated enough growth for a new prosperity to seep from the major cities into the countryside.

The future success of Central European transformation was by no means clear as Yugoslavia broke up in the early 1990s, however, and it was at first no model for the Balkans. A European Community that was groping to cope with the bewildering post-cold war world was slow to react to the Balkan bloodshed. It stretched credulity to believe that Yugoslavia, the liberal darling of the West during the cold war, could lapse into such barbarity when the post-cold war *zeitgeist* was so obviously the outbreak of peace. As the Serbs conquered 70 percent of Bosnia, the EC dithered and initially did no more than try to build a firewall to shield itself from any spillover of the Balkan violence. After

half a century of configuring their troops to repulse a mass armored ground attack, EC members did not have the right kind or number of troops to intervene militarily, even if they had known, in the initial fog of war, which side to back. And after a half century of habitually deferring to U.S. leadership for their own defense, they certainly did not have the political will to intervene alone.

The 1995 Srebrenica massacre, the worst mass murder of civilians in Europe since the Holocaust, was the wake-up call. The United States responded first, strong-arming Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic, Croatia's Franjo Tudjman, and Bosnia's Alija Izetbegovic into a Dayton Accord that was flawed but ended the war. The European Union, reacting more slowly, then offered the "Western Balkans"—a neologism covering ex-Yugoslavia (minus Slovenia) and Albania—the same promise of eventual EU membership that it had extended to the Central Europeans. This became the incentive to deep reforms that, it was hoped, would mold the Balkan future. It moved the EU beyond firewall containment to the premise that a peninsula an hour's flight away from Vienna must be regarded as part of Europe—and that the only way to ensure European security was to adopt and transform the Balkans.⁸ Once again, EU "foreign" policy was transformed into "domestic" policy.

Citizens of the new Western Balkan candidates-in-waiting were gratified by the prospect, above all, of visa-free travel to Munich and Paris if they became part of the European family.⁹ But to qualify for EU membership they faced a third hurdle in addition to the dual task of democratization and marketization faced by the northern Central Europeans—as well as the Romanians and Bulgarians, who had failed to join the first accession but were better prepared than the Western Balkan states and were next in line for membership. Not only were the Western Balkan populations, with a standard of living a fifth of the Western European niveau, incomparably poorer than the Central Europeans—who had at least started out at a third of Western European levels—and proportionally less able to pay for social welfare to ease the pain of reform. Not only did most of the Balkans lack anything like Poland's defiantly pluralist civil society. Not only did their corruption far surpass Central European levels to approach Russian heights (if without the same mineral riches to plunder). The new states that emerged as Yugoslavia disintegrated (and as hermetic Albania rejoined the world) were also vastly less cohesive domestically than the Central European nations—or at least what cohesion there was tended to be dysfunctional, rabid chauvinism in a region of intermixed ethnicities.¹⁰ The Poles, Hungarians, and Bulgarians all knew who they were and (for the most part) where their borders lay; the Macedonians and Bosnians

did not. Nor did the Western Balkan nations share the Central Europeans' galvanizing myth of (Western) European identity. Theirs was not a positive nationalism that bolstered solidarity in the search for democracy, but a lethal authoritarian ultranationalism that stoked war passions. Like the Central Europeans, they sought the bliss of becoming "normal," which by definition meant like Western Europe.¹¹ But before they could become normal they had to do some elementary nation building of a sort that would accommodate rather than demonize the "other." And this in a region where 100,000 had just been butchered, often by known neighbors, in Bosnia alone.¹²

For its part, as the EU expanded its concept of enlargement to include the Balkans, it also shifted its rationale for the crucial conditionality that was helping to discipline the Central Europeans into building democratic institutions. Judgments about the readiness of candidate countries to withstand the rigors of membership were always as much subjective as objective, as recently attested by the EU's simultaneous admittance in 2004 of ten heterogeneous candidates who could not conceivably all be equally prepared. But with the starting level of the Western Balkan states so far below that of the Central Europeans, political encouragement of the candidates on their long road to membership took on more weight relative to robust fulfillment of the criteria set at Copenhagen in 1993. More (and tinier) steps of progress—like the new Stabilization and Association Agreements—were invented to give some interim rewards to the few politicians who began to glimpse the vision and nudge their countries toward a cooperative Europe in which the significance of fierce sovereignty, borders, and ethnicity would fade. Indeed, popular approval of the goal of EU membership in each of the eight Balkan candidates or prospective candidates rose and fell in clear correspondence with the attainment or failure to attain the various lesser stages en route to membership. This mattered. When citizen approval for EU accession increased, so did the capacity of pro-EU elites to implement essential but uncomfortable reforms. When approval decreased, the blocking power of the ultranationalist and often enough criminal resisters of reform was enhanced. In 2003, just after Croatia was accepted as a full candidate for quick entry into the club, some 82 percent of Croats favored the idea. In 2005, as the EU postponed the beginning of the real entry negotiations because of the country's failure to deliver war crimes indictee Ante Gotovina to the Hague, 57 percent of Croats opposed the idea.¹³

By the first anniversary of the "big bang" EU enlargement of 2004, the economic and political success of the new Central European members was already impressive.¹⁴ Economic growth, projected at 4.5 percent in these new

member states in 2005, was double that of sluggish Western Europe. Their exports, led by foodstuffs, were up 20 percent over pre-entry levels, while rural incomes were 50 percent higher, even though EU agricultural subsidies to the newcomers were only a quarter of Brussels's largesse to French farmers. Cumulative foreign direct investment in Poland was \$73 billion. Estonia and the Czech Republic were beginning to rival India in data outsourcing.¹⁵ "Social capital" (essentially, "trust" between strangers, as measured by participation in civil associations, networking, and the like) was growing toward Western European levels.¹⁶ Moreover, in Kyiv in November 2004, Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski adroitly played his country's new membership to mobilize the weight of the EU to avert violent suppression of the Orange Revolution and ensure the peaceful succession of the elected Viktor Yushchenko to the Ukrainian presidency. By 2006, on the second anniversary of their accession, the new members had advanced from 44 percent of the average income of the fifteen old EU members to 55 percent—and they had also contributed to growth and trade in the EU-15 without swamping labor markets, increasing unemployment, or depressing wages.¹⁷

All this the Balkan onlookers know very well. Although many despair of their region's perpetual backwater status in Europe, others draw vicarious hope from the Central European success. Macedonia's vice premier Radmila Sekerinska spoke for all of her Southeast European colleagues when she told listeners in Austria that the EU's 2004 "enlargement round brought those countries democracy and economic development" and concluded, "We want more or less to use the same recipe for the Balkans."¹⁸

Here it is worth noting that the EU-Balkan interaction is not a one-way street. Even as the European Union is changing the Balkans, the Balkans are changing the European Union. The debacle of Europe's attempts at crisis management in the region in the early 1990s stimulated perception of a need to build more flexible European military capabilities, along with the political will to use these forces even outside the traditional NATO area for peacemaking by coercion. The outcome was European as well as U.S. approval of NATO's first-ever hot war, in Kosovo in 1999, in order to stop Milosevic's "ethnic cleansing" of a million Kosovar Albanians.¹⁹ German foreign minister Joschka Fischer, who singlehandedly brought his pacifist Green Party around to elevate the precept of "no more genocide" above the precept of "no more war," insisted on adding to military intervention the civilian nation and state building encompassed in the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe.²⁰ With this, the EU committed itself to an enormous outlay in money and manpower

for a generation to come. It provided the bulk of the \$4.5 billion in international assistance to the 4 million Bosnians in the country's first two postconflict years—a more generous package than the \$4.1 billion the 75 million Japanese received in 1946–47. To tiny Kosovo, the EU and its member states bilaterally gave four times as much aid per capita (\$800) as the victors of World War II gave West Germany in 1946–47.²¹ The costs in the Balkans have been low only in comparison with the alternative costs of war.

Whether or not the EU's (and America's) huge investment in nation building, state building, and institution building in the Balkans over the past decade is actually working to transform the “crooked timber” in the Balkans is the question this book seeks to answer. Put another way: is the magnetic attraction of EU membership strong enough to pull the Balkans through the pain of reform to the democratic and market “normality” they long for?