

UNITY IN DIVERSITY: REFLECTIONS OF A  
BORN-AGAIN EUROPEAN

---

ARPAD VON LAZAR

---

Crown Prince Rudolf, son of Emperor Franz Josef and heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire, ended his life in a suicide pact on January 30, 1889. With him died a dream, a dream for a modernized empire in a peaceful Europe. Rudolf's dream was one of diversity and unity. Although contradictory, the emotions for identity and ethnic self-determination combined with the power and creativity of the commonly shared and the notion of the commonly attainable to unite the forces of Europe. Crown Prince Rudolf was the first *post-modern* European, who lived even *before* the feast and famine of "modernism" which descended on the societal stage of a convoluted Europe presaging two world wars, fascism, and communism. The romantic seclusion of Mayerling, where Rudolf passed from this world, neatly covered the amazingly clear tracks of a born-early post-modernist who, while having had much to say to his contemporaries, actually speaks to our times and problems with the far away voice of the consummate contemporary European. But what is the message? In the following brief essay a born-again European attempts to become the *messenger*, travelling along a path which contemplates the contemporary essence of European-ness. Let the reader beware. Travel along at your own peril if you merely wish to find comfort in the customary and the platitudinous.

In the 1980s, the rich and democratic part of Europe raced to build a common house of Europe—a comfortable, peaceful, well-planned, and above all *orderly* house where the "haves" felt at home and a few poorer younger brothers were welcome. They employed a reasonable, albeit stern and often boring, nanny as the housekeeper and *major domo*. The keeper of the house, who they called a Eurocrat, was given Brussels as her broom closet.

The date for the house-warming party was set—1992. As the caterers arrived something unpredictable and unexpected happened. A few uninvited guests showed up for the festivities with the full expectation, not only to come and see and be merry, but to stay—and stay for good. And now the common house of Europe included a good number of distinctly un-common people. "Oh horrors," groaned many in Brussels. "What will it cost me to feed and clothe them," wondered the rich brothers. "Who else will sleep in our bedrooms," wailed the poorer sisters.

---

*Arpad von Lazar is a Professor of International Politics at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.*

We know the fable well: we live it. But Europeans also have to reexamine some cherished and by now well-molded thoughts on what Europe *is*, where it is heading, and what its purpose is in light of the total reality of the fable. *First of all let me submit that there is nothing inevitably wrong with nationalism.* And equally emphatically I suggest that there is no reason why we should view the creation and reemergence of small states as something anachronistic and painfully reminiscent of a twenty-first century version of nightmarish Balkanization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Try and tell Lithuanians, Croats, Macedonians, or Slovaks that they are “nonviable.” They will merely remind you that given a millenium’s worth of history (at a bare minimum) they are *very* viable as their language, tradition, culture, and very being proves day after day. The freeing and opening of the eastern part of the European family agonizingly exposed the inherent weakness of the modularistic-minded and order-craving Eurocrats of Brussels. In constructing the house of Europe they have seemingly forgotten that the growth process is not orderly and that once a house is built one has to provide a mud room for the children.

---

In the 1980s, the rich and democratic part of Europe raced to build a common house of Europe—a comfortable, peaceful, well-planned, and above all *orderly* house where the “haves” felt at home and a few poorer younger brothers were welcome.

---

Nationalism in contemporary Europe is inevitable. Neither as a contemplative emotion nor in its violent forms of socio-political outbursts should it be viewed as an aberration. Instead of moaning and groaning about the disorder of geographical Balkanization, the Euro-minds of the next century should learn how to interpret in a non-confrontational fashion the concepts of nationalistic diversity and the harmony of interests in diversity. Of course the question is how to do this as a matter of practical politics.

First of all, Europe should proceed with the “1992 and Maastricht” process. It should do so with humility and expectations of a rocky road lined with the screaming, complaining, and clamoring of poor cousins of all ages and sizes surrounding the house of Europe—they might be out on the lawn but they will not go away. Second, Europeans should stop worrying about “where Europe ends” and who is a European or not. The fact is that Russia—along with its past, its pain, and alas its responsibility—is a part of Europe. The good Tatars of Kazan might trace their roots a thousand years back in Asia, yet their contemporary predicament lies within the socio-political and economic realities of a greater Europe. Third, Europeans should immediately de-fang the Eurocrats of

Brussels. They abhor creativity with the challenges of noise, disorder, and the politics of impatience as practiced by the poor. Clearly, then, the best favor the Eurocrats could do for all of us is to return to what they really ought to do—macro-manage regulatory processes, collect data and information, and above all *serve* those who ought to make decisions: the elected representatives of the people.

Europe will get rockier before it manages to steady its course. Instead of worrying about worst case scenarios, it is more sensible to simply accept the fact that rich Europe's responsibility is not to keep the politically unfeasible edifice of Central and Eastern Europe together but rather to talk and act in a language of realism to the poor brethren. What does this realism entail? First of all, rich Europe should not set any conditions or steps for the East's entrance into the European Community. Instead, it should allow the East Europeans to join when it makes sense for them. *It certainly does not make sense now*, not even for Hungary, the most advanced and well-off of the entire lot, because its economy is not ready to play by the rules of the free market. Second, for the sake of common sense and everyone's sanity, it should not matter whether the Germans are investing too much or the Americans too little since the problems of the Germans and Americans are *not* the problems of the Czechs, Hungarians, or Bulgarians. You know you are in the wrong company when you hear "who lost Eastern Europe?"

### Escape from the Last Lie

The nightmare of communism was that everything permissible was so only for appearances, while everything forbidden enticed the citizenry to devise ways to circumvent prohibitions. Hence Eastern Europe developed a black-market of ideas, behavior, and attitudes toward everything from work to birthday parties. Kafka was reborn and did walk the streets of Budapest in the fifties, Prague in the sixties, and Vilnius in the eighties.

The terrible upshot of four to five decades of living in the womb of a conceptual lie is that everyone in Eastern Europe developed a second-nature habit of endlessly expounding the dictum "...but you cannot do that here." In essence, everyone would hide behind this pronouncement, especially when something *new*—new thinking, new ways of looking at things, new ways of doing things—was demanded by the outsider.

Well, that hide-and-seek game is over. The development of a democratic personality demands the development of a can-do attitude in all aspects of life. Unfortunately, today we continue to encounter the negativism of forty years of spiritual hiding and shadow-boxing in the institutions of society: banks, businesses, universities, factories, and just about everywhere else. The problem is that while many of the institutions and structures are new, the mind-sets of the people who populate them are not. How can we from the outside foster such changes? First and foremost, we cannot allow them to get away with this posture any longer. We have to insist that they continually test the boundaries

of a new and still evolving political system, which itself is not clear about the parameters of authority and legitimacy. Second, given our lengthy experience with the study and practical implementation of law and development concerns, we should be encouraging the new democracies to openly debate and develop their own codes of conduct. And third, we should not forget that the outrageously bad, the apparently crazy, and the foolishly frivolous can often serve as the testing ground for the new (which is unfortunately rooted in the past).

During a recent trip to Budapest, I noticed the apparent reticence and apprehension that dominated my testy conversations with Hungarians. East Europeans were very well aware that a sense of negativism permeated their answers, especially when queried about why they do not do things differently. But this time, the tension and unease must have, at least in part, rested on the realization that we *shared* the knowledge, that circumstances are not the same anymore. Equipped with this painful realization, East Europeans will step out of the shadows of the cage whose trap doors have flown open with the tides of change.

### Stuck in the Mud Again

Europe must do something about the politics and economics of its countryside. Agricultural policy and peasant politics have run amok in both rich and poor Europe. In rich Europe, rural politics carries a real weight: politicians pamper peasants, prices of products have no relationship to market conditions, and governments are willing to risk friendships and endanger treaties, whether international or regional, in order to defend a system of production and social values which is seriously flawed.

While all this mess and confusion reigns in the backyards of Bonn and Paris, the rich and their Eurocrat troops in Brussels piously admonish the poor of Eastern Europe to decontrol their food process, play the market by the rules of the open market, and above all cut governmental subsidies. Oh, and just as a matter of fact, make sure that you compete in export markets with your agricultural products—after all we do not want you to remain the hungry and poor cousins forever.

This is completely insane. The rich and comfortably healthy peasants of the West will go on prospering in their governmentally subsidized cocoon, while the poor and disorganized peasants of the East are supposed to fend for themselves in a market economy, where nothing much makes any sense or works with any predictability.

In the great hoopla of “inventing” democracy and the market for Eastern Europe, rich Europe lost the *real* forest from its sight—agriculture. Industry, insurance, banking, commerce, transport, and just about everything is being changed, uplifted, analyzed, and moved around while the agricultural sector stumbles along unreformed and uninformed. The point is that Brussels can offer precious little in advice or guidance on how to build a healthy and well performing farming system in a free market system. It did not build one and

did not practice it, nor probably does it actually believe in one as a matter of political reality. Yet the vast agricultural systems of the East need more than precious advice and admonition along the lines of “modernize, privatize, and decentralize.” The pressing issues are 1) what land-tenure systems to adopt and implement; 2) how to finance the adaptation to new market pricing and production realities; 3) how to counteract, in terms of technology and finance, the five decades of ecological devastation in the countryside; and 4) how to utilize market and export structures in a period of budgetary constraints. Anyone with bright ideas should head for Eastern Europe—*without* an intermediate stop in Brussels.

---

The best favor the Eurocrats could do for all of us is to return to what they really ought to do—macro-manage regulatory processes, collect data and information, and above all *serve* those who ought to make decisions: the elected representatives of the people.

---

So how does a born-again European view the existential experience of “unity in diversity” again. First of all, it is reassuring to rediscover that the European experience of living the modern with the well-worn is not a lost art. As a matter of fact Europe and Europeans, rich or poor, are much more at ease in reaching back to the recesses of the past in an attempt to define their future. Political squabbles, futile probings and ethnic hysteria will naturally accompany this process. But let it be. Europe’s innate strength has always rested on its kaleidoscopic diversity with a convoluted and competing backdrop of political developments, behind which the individual cultural traits flourished and continually redefined the essence of being European.

The malefic twentieth century is now over. Europe has learned what *not* to believe in and where not to take any short-cuts. Let me suggest that for the coming decade Eastern Europe will be more free than most parts of the world. It will be free because it will be testing the parameters of innovation and also the practical meaning of unity and diversity. These poor countries do not need guidance and advice as much as they need the comfort of merely knowing that the shelter of a common house of Europe is there for them to run to in case of a downpour. I think Rudolf would have liked and understood this vision.



