

## Eastern Europe and the Cold War: Perceptions and Perspectives

---

By Stephen Fischer-Galati

Boulder, CO: Eastern European Monographs, 1994, 111 pp., with notes, \$29.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Howard Madnick

Stephen Fischer-Galati is one of the best-known authors, scholars, and observers of events in Romania. His latest work can be divided between pieces that focus on Romania and those that address Eastern Europe as a region. Though one may suffer initial disappointment because *Eastern Europe and the Cold War: Perceptions and Perspectives* includes no new work, chagrin changes to intrigue as one realizes what the book actually has in store. Between the covers rest eight articles written by Fischer-Galati, two focusing on Romania and six on Eastern Europe more broadly, spanning the period from 1966 to 1993. The components of this book are not chapters *per se*, not only because they were written as separate pieces, but also due to the time elapsed between their publishing dates. What ties them together is a central and coherent emphasis on the trends and repetitions throughout the history of the Eastern European and Balkan states. It is rare that a reader can compare and contrast the development of another's thoughts as easily as this book permits, although there has been little variance in Fischer-Galati's opinions across the decades. Three articles from this book will be examined more closely; two concern Eastern Europe as a whole (the first more reflective, the second more speculative) while the third focuses more on Romania and is not only prescient but, as some of the predictions have already come to pass, accurate.

Fischer-Galati examines the popular sentiment and leadership of several of the former Eastern bloc states and finds that they have, in fact, changed very little over the course of the twentieth century, regardless of their ideological leanings. He contends that since the post-Napoleonic era, neither domestic politics nor international relations have been governed by high ideals or by *realpolitik*. Rather, he claims that the same kind of hyper-nationalism that led to the prewar rise of Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy has been the guiding force behind the rise of several of the preeminent nationalist political figures in Eastern Europe today. Whether left or right, from before World War I to the present, most of the decisions made by Eastern European statesmen,

---

*Howard Madnick is a doctoral candidate at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.*

masses, and dissidents alike can be chalked up to the troubled discourse of unbridled nationalism.

Fischer-Galati asserts that this historical influence is particularly critical for Western readers and policymakers to understand, for only in comprehending this phenomenon can we better fathom current socio-political struggles. To Europeans, the events of 1989 have come to epitomize a concept more than merely a date, just as to Americans, Vietnam refers more to a period of time than to a country. The fall of Europe's communist regimes was meant to mark for Eastern Europe the introduction of modern capitalism, an end to totalitarian rule from Moscow, and a resumption of democracy. Fischer-Galati does not address the economic realignment except in passing, undervalues the importance of rule from the Kremlin (citing how several Eastern European states had already begun to drift away from central rule), and questions any reinstatement of democracy almost unreservedly. His view on the matter of "returning to democracy" is, essentially, that one cannot return to a place one has not yet visited; having no democratic background whatsoever in most of these states makes the proposition that democracy can take root there in the near future very unlikely.

This view does not totally discount the surge of anti-communism flowing through some of Eastern Europe, particularly in the year or two immediately following 1989, but Fischer-Galati puts this reaction into a proper frame of reference. Many in Eastern Europe may be anti-communist, but there are three reasons for this self-description: it is a reaction to the influence the Soviet Union and its predecessor, the Russian empire, had previously exerted; it is a means to differentiate the rehabilitated from the unreformed, or the New Guard and the Old; and it is a tool to garner support and aid from the West. As Fischer-Galati notes, "Anti-communism was clearly the motivating force in the people's actions, but anti-communism does not necessarily represent a commitment to Western-style democracy" (p. 14).

Authoritarian rule had been the norm in Eastern Europe for some time, and only the flavor it adopted—fascist anti-communist, communist, monarchical, and so on—was influenced by outsiders. It should not, therefore, be blamed on Hitler or on Stalin, but rather on Gheorghiu-dej, Tito, and other home-grown political extremists, who practiced ethno-nationalism, communist nationalism, socialist patriotism, post-communist anti-communism, or whatever the quasi-ideology of the day happened to be for the same hyper-nationalist, anti-other motivations which have been in vogue throughout Eastern Europe, and particularly the Balkans, since World War I. After the fall of the Russian and Ottoman empires following World War I, this authoritarianism was institutionalized by most of the leaders of Eastern Europe, who were either monarchs or military men, usually with the support of the armed forces. Fischer-Galati outlines the rise of such regimes through the 1920s and 1930s in Hungary, Romania, Albania, Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and other states and notes how similar they were to more recent regimes, both before and after 1989.

Although it appears as the first article, "Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century: Old Wine in New Bottles," was not written until after half of the other articles had been published. The title has two clear meanings: first, that the communist leaders of Eastern Europe followed in the footsteps of their predecessors in their authoritarianism, intolerance of dissent, nepotism, and willingness to use or create scapegoats out of religious or political minorities; and second, that the post-1989 leadership in many of these countries continues in the style of those who ruled from 1945 to 1989. Although the labels are fresh and bear the names of new vineyards, the same wine has been recycled repeatedly over the years and remains unpalatable to most of those who have tasted Western-style democracy.

The metaphor of old wine in new bottles reappears in "The Revival of the Political Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: The Historical Perspective." Here, Fischer-Galati focuses more on what he calls "historic parties" that were in existence in Eastern Europe before 1948, some pre-dating World War I. The leaders of these parties, operating as opposition-in-exile in Western host countries or in secret at home during the Cold War, espoused "anti-communism, a firm commitment to a market economy, respect for minority and religious rights, for constitutionalism, and for all other normal prerequisites for democratic societies" (p. 82). When they returned home or emerged from the shadows after 1989, they discovered that they were out of step with those who had languished under communist-era leadership. Spending so much time away from their countrymen and outside their native political systems obscured their impressions of the region's political ethos. The very values that had distanced them from the old authoritarianism, and thus legitimized them as dissidents, now served to isolate them from the new authoritarianism and kept them from being included in the current successor governments. Some of these historic parties came to resemble democratic organizations only after rewriting their own histories, as when the Romanian Iron Guard, which was modeled after the Third Reich, was "reinvented" to become ostensibly center-right in orientation.

Current political elites in the region resemble the regimes of inter-war Eastern Europe more than they do any in Western Europe today:

[I]t is quite likely that in the event of further deterioration of the economic and political crises of Eastern Europe that the Right, old and new, moderate and extreme, will at least consolidate its present gains, if not necessarily become the dominant force in East European politics. *And that would be all the more likely because of the convergence of the interests of the supporters of nationalist, anti-democratic, causes of the former Left and the traditional and new Right.* (p. 84; emphasis added)

The international community looks for the continuity of democracy despite intervening communism; what exists instead, according to Fischer-Galati, is

the continuity of nondemocratic principles because of the intervention of Stalinist communism.

The kind of nationalism Fischer-Galati accuses the Eastern Europeans of practicing goes beyond chauvinism; he describes it as being "generally intolerant of religious and ethnic diversity and focused most explicitly on territorial issues" (p. 3). Using terms like "right-wing clerics" and "clerico-fascism," Fischer-Galati describes how Jews were often singled out for their rejection of Christianity, prominence among early supporters of Bolshevism ("Judeo-Communist conspirators" p. 29), and alleged extra-national allegiances, much as American Catholics were alleged to have been more loyal to Rome than to Washington. Indeed, the very existence of the Jews meant that a state was obstructed from achieving nationhood, for what Jew could be part of a true Romanian, or Bulgarian, or Polish nation? Even when these far-right elements worked with ethnically or ideologically different partners against a common enemy, as in World War II, they would often betray their allies as soon as they were assured of their own safety, a tradition carried on in some parts of Eastern Europe to this day.

One important change under communist leadership was that the legitimacy of hyper-nationalism, which had previously come from reactionary religious circles, had to be replaced with a significantly weaker ideologically based authority. Nonetheless, when it came time to pick scapegoats based on ethnicity, nationality, or religion, Fischer-Galati shows many instances when the church and state cooperated as though religion and communist ideology were just two sides of the same coin.

Fischer-Galati labels as hyper-nationalist "not only [Eastern Europeans] in Warsaw, Bucharest, Budapest, Sofia, and Bratislava, but also [those] in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Paris, London, Munich . . . and other places which the length of this paper prevents from being enumerated" (p. 55). That is, the same feelings of anti-other nationalism can also be found in the Eastern European diaspora, even in those places that adhere to principles in conflict with hyper-nationalistic intolerance. The history is too long and the feelings too deep, Fischer-Galati maintains, to be washed away with a change of citizenship or address.

In part, this trend of hyper-nationalism is traced to the pervasive twisting and perverting of traditional national heroes by the former and current power-elites. Whether or not Stephen the Great or Michael the Brave were really men to be admired and emulated by the Romanians, they became powerful symbols in a brilliant two-step political sham. First, the histories of these and other historic personages in Romania and in neighboring states were aggrandized, embellished, and whitewashed until they towered above even the greatest fictional examples of chivalry, bravery, and duty. Second, they were co-opted by the ruling elites, who likened themselves and their own actions to those of the enlarged, traditional, nationalist heroes. For these leaders, democracy had nothing to do with the rights of people or limits to what a government can do within its own borders. Rather, democracy meant that outside

hegemonic powers would no longer be in a position to dictate policy downwards, and the national leadership would reign supreme.

Throughout the modern history of Eastern Europe, the political stripe of the ruling powers was almost an afterthought; when Antonescu called himself a fascist, it was just as much to forge some sort of alliance with Hitler, and when Ceausescu dubbed himself a communist, it was to gain aid, or at least to stave off another invasion, from the Soviets. Internal politics changed little; political parties merely denoted adherence to an alliance structure. If the alliance sought was with NATO or the European Union, claiming that one's country adheres to democratic-capitalist principles seemed to help.

Published at the beginning of the last hurrah of the Cold War, the essay "Romania's Development as a Communist State" traces the history of Romania from its so-called liberation by the Soviet Union in 1944 through 1981. Ceausescu's foreign policies—mediating between China and the United States and between Egypt and Israel, irritating Moscow within the Warsaw Pact, defying the Kremlin by establishing ties with Israel and tacitly supporting Hungarian nationalism in 1956, and sending Romanian athletes to the 1980 Los Angeles Olympics as the sole representatives of the Eastern bloc—are shown to be a fairly unique method of establishing and gaining credibility, at home and abroad, for a regime which otherwise would have had none. Ceausescu's foreign policy stances were also designed to ingratiate himself with the noncommunist world, making internal intervention by Moscow a risky proposition, as he tried to chart his own path for Bucharest. Ceausescu was politically oppressive; some claimed he was more Stalinist than Stalin himself. He also produced an economic disaster; Romania went from being a net exporter of foodstuffs to not having enough internal production, foreign-bought, and donated stores combined to adequately feed its own people. Hence, he survived only by acting as a nationalist and a statesman. As the Cold War wound down and his defiance of Moscow decreased in significance, even these last shreds of legitimacy were denied him. The world watched the result in the winter of 1989, but the outcome was misinterpreted. Ceausescu was not overthrown and executed for being communist, autocratic, or inefficient, nor for standing in the way of capitalism, democracy, and human and civil rights. Rather, it was because he had crossed the line of acceptable dictatorship and entered the realm of the personally reprehensible. Romania has had a legacy of autocratic, dictatorial, and inefficient rule, but Ceausescu was simply unpalatable.

The essay also includes a salient prediction. Fischer-Galati writes that:

Romania's development as a communist state is predictable only for the duration of Ceausescu's rule. The circumstances of the termination of that rule are a matter of conjecture. They will, however, determine the further evolution of Romania whenever they will occur. And the ensuing changes should be drastic. (p. 46)

Each of Fischer-Galati's essays, written over a period of nearly three decades, addresses a topic at least marginally different from the others. While he fails to demonstrate an evolution of his perspective, he succeeds in fully articulating his views on the future of Eastern Europe as a whole and Romania in particular. With only the smallest of exceptions, he finds the past to be prologue and the future in the past. Further, he highlights this tragedy for those who must live it. We can only hope that he is wrong, while preparing ourselves for the possibility—or, as his case is quite strong, the probability—that he is right.



## Burma in Revolt

---

By Bertil Lintner

Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, 335 pp., with bibliography, notes, and index, \$63.50 cloth.

## Cambodia's New Deal

---

By William Shawcross

Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, distributed by Brookings Institution, 1994, 103 pp., \$9.95 paper.

Reviewed by Vincent O'Neil

**B***urma in Revolt* is a well-researched analysis of Burma's internal strife since the end of World War II. Beginning with the 1947 assassination of President Aung San, Bertil Lintner describes the civil strife that has continued to the present day. Although he often assumes too much background knowledge on the part of the reader, overuses acronyms, and is given to tangential anecdotes, Lintner presents an in-depth analysis of Burma's tumultuous postwar history.

A note of caution: although subtitled, "Opium and Insurgency Since 1948," this book is long on insurgency and short on opium. Lintner treats the opium industry as one divisive factor among many, so anyone looking for an analysis of the Golden Triangle should look elsewhere.

The assassination of Aung San ushered in almost 50 years of strife, including civil war, rebellion, foreign incursions, and a military dictatorship which took control in 1962 and is still in power. Lintner is right to begin his story with the death of Aung San who, as the only ethnic Burmese politician trusted by the country's minorities, represented a lost chance for unified government. Just prior to his assassination, Aung San had negotiated an agreement bringing several of those minorities into the proposed Union of Burma. Less than a year later, most of those minorities, along with rival communist and socialist Burmese factions, were in armed revolt. Lintner accurately points out that the real issue underlying all of Burma's separate conflicts is a desire for autonomy on the part of the minority peoples.

Lintner is a reporter with extensive personal experience in Burma. His involvement began in 1981, but his coverage of events previous to that is thorough and well-researched. Although many of the struggles of that period are now over and might seem to lack relevance, they are key to understanding

---

*Vincent O'Neil is a master's degree candidate at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.*

the situation in Burma today. Each of these conflicts is covered in depth, from the independence movements of the separate minorities—the Shan and the Karen minorities, for example—to the more recent student protests.

One important area Lintner covers is the presence of former Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma since 1949. Many readers will be surprised to learn that the former soldiers of Chiang Kai Shek are still there and are a powerful link in one of the many opium chains in the region. Using their shared ancestry, the former Nationalists have established strong links with the Chinese of Yunnan province as an alternative to shipping opium through Thailand. Prior to this development, they received covert support from Taiwan and the United States, going so far as to invade the People's Republic of China (with predictable results) in the 1950s. At yet another time, they were supposed to have been evacuated to Taiwan. Such background makes this book important for an overall assessment of Burma today.

At the same time, however, this background information can be confusing and tedious. People unfamiliar with the language may find the Burmese names difficult to remember. There is also an entire alphabet of acronyms for the various groups in this region, and it is not easy to tell the myriad organizations apart. Finally, Lintner frequently refers to characters mentioned earlier without restating their relevance, and often seems to assume the reader remembers the character's place in the scheme of things.

In 1995, one year after Lintner's publication, Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, was released from house arrest that began in 1989. This was a significant concession from the ruling military leaders and would have been a fitting end to a book beginning with Aung San's death. Aung San Suu Kyi, who was arrested in a military crackdown on her political activities, is a hugely popular figure viewed by many Burmese as representing the same unifying presence as her father.

Lintner makes the point that Burma's misfortunes, from drugs to war, are all related to the country's internal divisions. The rebellions of the minorities may have ended, but their desire for autonomy and basic distrust of the government has not. Although the release of Aung San's daughter is a reason to hope for a brighter future, the military is still firmly in control and the opium is still moving. Just as in 1947, there is reason for hope, but only if some kind of unity can be achieved.

On the other side of Thailand is Cambodia, whose new constitutional monarchy is described by William Shawcross in his book, *Cambodia's New Deal*. Shawcross traveled to Cambodia when the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) transferred authority to the new government in September 1993.

Shawcross brings a wealth of experience in covering this region, and his report is a comprehensive analysis of the political, social, and economic situation in Cambodia today. He quickly covers the background to the Cambodian peace process by describing the country's violent history. He then moves on to UNTAC's efforts from 1991 to 1993, the elections which reestablished the monarchy, and Cambodia's prospects for the future.



The report ties Cambodia's future to several issues. One is the role of King Sihanouk, restored to the throne in 1993. His continued good health and the extent to which he involves himself in Cambodia's internal politics are of some concern to the government; the King resides in Beijing in order to receive treatment for a cancerous condition that is now reported to be in remission. He is publicly regarded as a benign steward of the Cambodian people, but his statements and dispatches from Beijing have taken the form of meddling on more than one occasion.

Another issue is the effectiveness of the new constitutional government, which is a coalition of several parties. The country has two co-prime ministers, each from a different party. Faced with enormous obstacles, such as a weak infrastructure, educational system, and financial investment base, the government's fragmented structure and reputation for widespread corruption are not conducive to the solving of these problems.

Yet another issue is the power of the Khmer Rouge and the conduct of their Thai military supporters. The Khmer Rouge seized power in 1970 and embarked on a genocidal program meant to convert Cambodia into an agrarian utopia. Though removed from power in 1979 by Vietnam, Khmer Rouge elements still control large areas of Cambodia along the Thai border. Sporadic fighting between these elements and poorly trained government forces continues today. The Khmer Rouge leaders, assisted by some factions of the Thai military, also illegally export timber and minerals from areas under their control. This has not only led to large-scale environmental damage, but is also robbing Cambodia of its primary export resources.

In looking to the future, Shawcross calls for the new coalition government to apply more realistic corrective measures than those it has used to date. In particular, the government of Sihanouk's son and co-Prime Minister Hun Sen must reduce the oversized Cambodian military, combat corruption at all levels of the government, and secure financial assistance from public and private sources. These are very tall orders, especially when combined with Cambodia's internal problems.

The country's economic conditions are also extremely weak. Cambodia currently lacks skilled labor and infrastructure. The Khmer Rouge are selling off the country's natural resources at an alarming rate, and there is little incentive for foreign investment. However, the peace UNTAC created will not last long unless Cambodia's economic situation improves. Shawcross thus links Cambodia's future to assistance from the international community.

At the same time, Shawcross points out the positive indications from the 1991-1993 UNTAC effort. UNTAC provided peace and stability and generated a feeling of hope in the Cambodian people. That hope was reflected in the size of the vote which created the new government; despite threats of violence from the Khmer Rouge, the people turned out in droves. Shawcross also maintains that Cambodia enjoys a free press and a human rights situation that is a vast improvement over its past. This might not say much in a country that inspired *The Killing Fields*, but the establishment of basic personal safety is a huge step in the right direction for this troubled land.

Yet little has changed since Shawcross' publication in 1994. Finance Minister Sam Rainsy was expelled from the Cambodian Parliament in June 1995 for openly criticizing the corruption in the government and has since sworn to found an opposition party. As the architect of Cambodia's revenue collection system, Rainsy represented the voice of financial reason and a threat to corrupt local officials. Indications of this sort do not bode well for Shawcross' call for a serious government to address Cambodia's problems in a serious way.

