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**"A National Compensation for Backwardness"**

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Conference Room, North Campus Facility  
UCLA

## A National Compensation for Backwardness

Central Europe, and especially its eastern periphery, crossed the threshold of Modern History with massive delay. In this peripheral region the peoples, metaphorically speaking, "slept through" those centuries of early Modern History during which the peoples of western civilization diligently worked away on the unified state. They were forming in this age, without being clearly conscious of it, their national identity. The principal difference between the western and eastern types of nation was not merely or chiefly manifested in that the former were significantly more homogeneous, or that their state was of a purely national character. It was, first and foremost manifest in the fact that during the emergence of the capitalist market economy and private property, simultaneously with modernization, a middle class society also developed. Liberal political organization and national culture-- with the solidarity of a national community and its awareness of identity were joined in these processes.

In the central region and eastern periphery of our continent, however, external influences and internal social dynamics gave rise to the national idea earlier than to the national society. The leading national stratum emerged earlier than self-organizing civil society and an adequate pluralist political structure. Thus, between the West and the eastern peripheries it was not just a matter of delay and backwardness in terms of time, but also one of a different order, rhythm and algorithm of development.

So that while in the center the national ideal developed together with modernization and in harmony with it, on the eastern periphery the nascent nationalism had either to accept or avert capitalist modernization, which from a number of viewpoints signified following in the footsteps, indeed adaptation of the western models. Accordingly, we may distinguish between pro-modernists and anti-modernists nationalism. Let us immediately add to this that, in fear of the enormous difficulties and dangers of modernization even the pro-modernist trends were burdened with reservations, just as the

anti-modernist ones also accepted a good part of the anti-feudal reforms.

It will be known that in the third quarter of the 19th century even the liberal representatives of otherwise pro-modernization Italian and Hungarian nationalism were worried that the traditional elements of society and sacred institutions might be destroyed by the chilly breeze of western-type modernization, and raised doubts as to wherefore the resources and liberal institutions on which commercialization in the West had hinged would be coming from. Even the leading liberal strata in countries like Hungary or Poland, failed to develop a system of bourgeoisie ethics and forms of attitude. Thus because of these deficiencies of these values the whole embourgeoisment became incomplete. It came to be that the pro-modernist nationalism of the vast majority of the Hungarian nobility ground to a halt in the last quarter of the 19th century, switching to reverse gear at the turn of the century. Anti-modernization (agrarian) new-conservatism and a similarly new type of conservative nationalism gained prominence.

From the very beginning, a great many irrational ideas were revived in anti-modernist nationalism. A case in point was the folk myth of German Romanticism, which rendered the Volksgeist, the spirituality of the organic community of people--(subsequently of the race)--as the constituent element of romantic nationalism. Another example is populism (and one of its classical forms, Russian narodnikism, traditional popular religiosity, which wanted to counter-balance the iron laws of capitalism with Christian anti-capitalism. Some scholars even discern shreds of the chiliastic (millenary) idea from religion-charged nationalism. At all events it seems certain that both the millennial and the populist movements pitted the ideals of collectivity and egalitarianism against the individualism of the capitalist free market and its differentiating impact. However humane the values of these ideas may be, in given periods of history, like during the capitalist "take off", the technical revolution in the wake of the Second World War, or during the present re-privatizing "perestroika" period, they indubitably hinder--or have actually frustrated--successful modernization.

This brief description reveals that relating the character of nationalism to modernization on the whole overlaps the distinction between the widely used French political and the German linguistic nation. Nevertheless I consider it more precise than the traditional political versus linguistic (ethnic) definition, partly because political and linguistic distinction are more conceptual, for in reality both are some kind of combination of inter-penetrating criteria. Above all, because the actual basic process is a more historical basis of reference than the ideologically postulated political organizing principle. At the same time it may be also obvious that nationalism is a peculiar compound of rationally interpretable interests and values, and of irrational emotions, that always has several "free valencies": it can easily fuse with any kind of social or political ideological current.

The extent to which the conception of the typology of the nation concept as either a body politic of choice or as an organic linguistic-ethnic community is unsatisfactory, is demonstrated--as said above--by the frequent mixing up of the two. Admittedly, the French type is a product of the Enlightenment, while the German was the precious offspring of Romanticism. Still, one can wonder whether or not the Enlightenment and Romanticism can be separated in society's spontaneous value choices? Does not the spirit of Romanticism already emanate from Rousseau, and even more so from Robespierre or from Schiller? The early-19th century thinkers and progressive politicians were nurtured on both ideas--allow me to mention the paradigmatic figure of Count Istvan Szechenyi, the scholar, the entrepreneur, the reform politician. The Enlightenment and Romanticism imbued each other all the more because they had a meeting point, and that meeting point was the ruling idea of the century: Liberty.

The nationalism of the small peoples of Central Eastern Europe professed to both as being its parents, albeit the paternal legacy dominated in some, the maternal in others. Although the Hungarians regarded themselves as primarily constituting a body politic ("a unitary political nation"), they rose against Vienna's absolutist government as a linguistic-cultural community--often along Herderian lines of

Regarding the origin of the nation, ancientness on the claimed territory, as well as its range and mission in Europe--they produced historical hypotheses, which they shortly raised to the rank of scholarship, even though they were but historical fictions, born in the world of legitimizing myths. Some of them, for instance the Scythian origin of the Poles and the South Slavs, the Magyars' ties with the Huns, found their way back to their homeland, to fascinating legends, in a few decades. Others, however, mainly the Romanians' Dacian origins and the Slovaks' Greater Moravian heritage proved to be extremely virulent even outside the historians' incubator, and remain disruptive elements in the reconciliation among the nations in the region.

Myths and theories would not in themselves have such a profound and long-lasting impact. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, they are also socially deeply-grounded: they originate from the region's special multinational and ethno-social structure. Although above I have stressed that from a national viewpoint none of the countries of Europe are homogeneous, now I have to point out that the central region is heterogeneous from all points of view: not simply multinational, but of mixed nationality. An area inhabited by a majority is broken by minority islets, and within these live even smaller minorities. In the eastern half of Europe not only the one-time supranational empires were multinational, but also their successor states. The former Habsburg Monarchy, or, say, certain parts of the disintegrated Soviet Union are, and always have been, as ethnically colorful as a flushing meadow.

Ethnic pluralism is complicated further by the religious divide. The great majority of the region's countries were also characterized by religious diversity. In the old Hungary seven religions, in Greater Romania a similar number, in Czechoslovakia and Poland four denominations lived side by side, mostly in unpeaceful coexistence. A great many nationalities belonged to each religion (eight to the Roman Catholics), which rendered the unity of the universal churches ambiguous. This also disturbed both the relationship between the churches and sharpening national conflicts, and the churches and modernization.

The pro-modernist secular policy of the more embourgeoised denominations were opposed by the anti-modernist conservatism of the populist religions.

To shed full light on the complexity of the region's nationalism, at this point we have to point out differences in the social structures of the individual nations. The more developed were located in the western part of the region; the bourgeoisie already dominated their structure. The structure of Polish, Hungarian and Croatian society was burdened with the political dominance of a nobility inherited from the Middle Ages, while the societies of the Slovaks, Ruthenes and Romanians were mutilated: the nobility had been missing from this region almost entirely, and their bourgeoisie were extremely weak. Their nationalism were therefore strongly imbued with anti-feudalistic defiance towards the so-called "aristocratic" nations. Although these national movements in the 19th century were organized mostly under the banner of equality and liberty, they were nevertheless not necessarily pro-modernist movements. A peculiar phenomenon emerged in these parts even at the time of the 1848 revolutions, and then at the turn of the century: the anti-feudal nationalism of the people (mainly peasants) influenced by the ecclesiastical and secular intelligentsia was imbued with hostility towards the Hungarian landlords, as well as the Hungarian, German and, especially, the Jewish burghers. The enemy image, which at that time was shaded with rather marked colors, was dominated first by ethnic and subsequently by racial nationalism, and the dark undertones of anti-semitism. A similarly distorted enemy image struck root in the Hungarian nationalism of the turn of the century.

Indubitably, the late-19th century witness a decline in the marriage of Hungarian nationalism and liberalism. Indeed, the alliance fell apart, and chauvinism, forging ahead, found a partner in conservatism. Pressure on the minorities, especially their political organizations and cultural life intensified. It is in the spirit of sadness and self-criticism that we have to say that between 1880 and 1913 the number of Slovak primary schools dropped from 1,716 to 365, that of the Romanians from

2,756 to 2,170, that of the Germans from 867 to 449, and all Slovak high schools ceased to exist, and that the leading minority politicians and their press were often harassed. The most serious accusation levied at Hungarian nationalism to date is, however, "forced Magyarization". Horror stories of Magyarization by the fire and the sword spread all over Europe, mainly through effective propaganda work by professor Ernest Denis and publicist Robert Seton-Watson. Let us therefore squarely face the problem of Magyar assimilation.

We have precise data of the natural and real growth of Hungary's population according to nationalities as of 1880. During the period leading up to the world war, the Hungarian population, beyond natural reproduction, grew by approximately 1.1 million. With retrospective calculations we have come to the conclusion that during the preceding half a century, the Magyars' assimilation gains must have roughly been the same. About half of this 2.2-2.4 million, 1.1 million, were Germans, some 700,000 were Jewish, 300,000-400,000 were Slovaks. All of our sources bear out that the Magyarization of the Germans and the Jews was overwhelmingly voluntary, a transformation of the former Hungarus citizen loyalty into a Magyar national identity. The gradual Magyarization of the Slovaks who moved to Budapest and vicinity and to the Great Hungarian Plain was also mostly a spontaneous process, and due partly to the influence of the environment and partly to mixed marriages which were common. However, a Magyarizing educational policy did play a role in it.

On the whole we may state that Magyarization inflicted less on the popular strata of the minorities than on their middle class and intelligentsia, who were integrated into Hungarian society. Magyarization was manifested more as a social pressure--primarily on the part of the gentry middle class. The stereotype image in western public opinion of forced Magyarization regarded it as a renewed barbarism. I think it is a very one-sided carbon copy of counter-nationalism's enemy image. After the world of the fascist death camps and of the Bolshevik GULAG, forced Magyarization may be compared to the



Jews of Auschwitz vilifying Lueger as the worst of all anti-semites.

That contemporary Czech, Slovak, Romanian and south Slav political propaganda has never praised the legal guarantees extended by Hungarian liberalism nor the existing scope for the movement. Rather the opposite, they stressed intolerance and individual cases of aggression instead. It was a natural consequence of the nature of political struggle. The enemy had to be demonized in the artillery combat of a "holy war". Distortions of this kind will have to be reduced to their real value by posterity, even in acknowledging that the everyday struggle of the oppressed against Hungarian domination for survival, for national culture and for self-determination, was a just war of independence. There is no need however from the part of historians to take for granted or generalize the other common stereotype that the national struggle of the minorities aimed automatically at the equality of nations and democracy.

Let us first consider the fact that nationality and democracy are two different dimensions of social organization, different forms of community identity. Democracy is one kind of regulatory system for the political management of society. On the other hand the nation, by contrast, is an historically evolved community based on emotion and will. It determines its members' behavior and culture, their relationship to their own and to other nations. Nationality and democracy may therefore be linked together, but are identities that do not presuppose or substitute each other. Let us take a look, secondly, at the social and political conditions of Hungary's minorities at the turn of the century.

In 1910, the ratio of the Magyars in the agrarian population was 55 %, that of Germans 50 %, that of Croats and Slovaks exactly 70 %, of Romanians 86 %, that of the Ruthenes 89 %, the figures for the industrial and trade population being (in the same order) 31 and 37 % for the Magyars and Germans, 21, 20, 8, 4.8 % for the Croats, Slovaks, Romanians and Ruthenes. More uneven still is the ratio of the middle class in the individual ethnic societies. In the case of the German minority the figure is 18 %, 12 % for the Magyars, 8 % for the Croats, 7 % for the Slovaks, 3.3 for the Romanians and 1.7 for the

Ruthenes. The ratio of professionals (in the same order): German 5, Magyar 7.5 (!), Croat 2, Slovak 1.2, Romanian 0.8, Ruthene 0,3 %. Especially conspicuous was the dominance of the Magyars and the Germans among the entrepreneurs, high-ranking civil servants and in the liberal professions. These typically middle class elements were either missing, or were extremely weak in the societies of ethnic minorities.

The main trends of the political movements of the minorities more or less corresponded to the social structure. Within the loose Slovak National Party, leadership was assumed by the Catholic People's Party (A. Hlinka's Party), which was imbued not only with religious, but also with populist ideas. The liberal faction (V. Srobar, P. Blaho, M. Hodža) also attained influence; they too drew on the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie for their base. Within the Romanian National Party, too, middle class elements forged ahead, but decisive influence over the peasant masses remained in the hands of the Orthodox Church. The radical party (J. Tomic) strengthened in the face of the ossified Serbian liberals; this party had a strong social welfare and an even stronger nationalist programme. The majority of the aforementioned parties was conservative and anti-modernization. Even the liberalism of the Left was restricted mainly to expanding nationalities rights--attaining general franchise--but looked to Francis Ferdinand, to a strong central power for transformation within the Monarchy.

Even prior to the war, Croatia rendered noteworthy lessons concerning the nature of nationalism. Although Croatia had put itself on the list of the oppressed, within its own significant autonomy it oppressed its own nationalities similarly as the Magyars did. In the inter-war period, Hungarian nationalism then developed into an anti-liberal totalitarian direction. As far as the former oppressed nations are concerned they inherited not only the imperium and the power from their former oppressors, but also their expertise and practice of rule. The Slavophile Seton-Watson had noted as early as 1911: "The theories of the Croat party of Right are merely those of the Magyar Party of Independence,

translated into Croatian terms; the same juggling with high-sounding constitutional phrases, the same narrow racial intolerance, characterize the adherents of Kossuth and of Frank. A state which took such theories for its foundation would be as little deserving of sympathy, and as unstable, as a state based upon the rival Pan-Serb theory of which Belgrade politicians dream.

In the Pan-Croat and Pan-Serbian movements lie hidden the seeds of subsequent conflicts, just as much as the Daco-Romanian theory also unveiled the oppressive and intolerant nature of the Romanian nationalism that was shortly to accede to power. The democracy of Eastern European nationalism derived not from their nature, but from their situation and role. The change of position and system, the change of roles in the wake of the Versailles reorganization was established in the inter-war period and stabilized in the postwar age. During the two periods, two brutal totalitarian systems reigned in East Central Europe: German fascism and Russian bolshevism. Although racism raged in the former, and the latter never ceased to glorify international brotherhood in word and song. They were essentially eerily similar: the imperialist rule social and national enslavement of the satellites.

The intellectual opposition to totalitarian systems was filled in recent decades by the faith in reason. They believed that common sufferings and shared historical experiences make people conscious of their common interests. The friendship between the emigree resistance groups, the widespread sympathy for the Czech Charter and the Polish Solidarity movement, the successes of Hungarian reform communists seemed to substantiate this rational prophecy, especially in 1989, which we, the natives, called *annus mirabilis*. Then came 1990-1991, bloody conflicts in Transylvania, war in Yugoslavia, disputes in the Czecho-Slovak federal state, and everywhere: nationalism flared up. The miracles were replaced by disappointments. Why?--we asked, why this ill-famed nationalist renaissance? Where has the spirit of friendship and reconciliation vanished to?

The ideas of solidarity and of joining forces was represented only by the democratic Left opposition,

a relatively small group of intellectuals, whose ideas did not penetrate the middle strata and the masses. These democratic intellectuals, the belated heirs of the Enlightenment, have always believed in Reason, if not in its omnipotence. Given the sea of troubles and sufferings in our times they firmly believed the heavy hand of reason would help them to overcome wild and irrational instincts. But the objective conditions for a democratic integration were neither ripe in the past, nor in the present and were not taken into serious consideration.

T.G. Ash wrote aptly that Central Europe was still merely an idea. It did not yet exist. The debate must move beyond rhetoric and sentimental statements, and must reach the terrain of reality, where it must undergo a stringent, emotion-free investigation of the preconditions. However, such studies have not been compiled. It is obvious, even in the initial stage of situation analysis that the basic conditions for Central European integration do not yet exist to this day.

Lacking are the economic prerequisites. We can even say that today the conditions are even worse than they had been one hundred years ago under the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. For there, on the common market of the Monarchy, the free mobility of production factors functioned effectively, the regulating principle of comparative cost advantages was asserted, which at that time led to the complementary specification of the different branches of production. Small-state egoism (Kleinstaaterei) following the disintegration of the Monarchy led the irrational economic policy of national autarchy to triumph. The forced communist integration, the COMECON, even within the individual member countries, rendered dysfunctional the planned economy.

No less lacking were, and still are, the social conditions for Central European integration of any kind. The basis for lasting and stable coexistence is a strong civil society, the backbone of which is a bourgeois (and not gentry!) middle class. The cornerstone of which is the autonomous individual. All these have always been in short supply in Central Europe, albeit I might risk saying that the social

conditions for integration were more favorable at the beginning of the century than today. We have to clearly see, however, what is clearly discernable today: anti-communism is not synonymous with democracy. A strong democracy does not immediately spring up over the rubble of the toppled communist systems.

Besides this "social deficiency", another prerequisite, a common, or at least similar, consciousness and identity, were totally lacking. The principal reason for this lies hidden in the often mentioned peculiarities, steadfastness, intransigence and religious character of the Central and Eastern European nationalism. Here I would like to draw attention to three phenomena, still rather virulent today.

1. Today we are amazed about what we did not foresee and did not understand, a couple of years ago, namely why in particular nationalism was restored with such lightning speed and virulence. It is obvious that in the wake of the political demise of fraudulent Bolshevik "internationalism" the desire, indeed need for national rehabilitation surfaced with an elemental force. Nationalism, as a self-defence reflex, also sprung up immediately, for a power vacuum opened in the region, through which aggressive reflexes and anxiety reflexes immediately appeared on the scene.

2. Since the nationalist revival was accompanied by the restoration of religious life and church organizations, it also became active as a political ordering principle. In certain countries this signified the "naturalization" of western Christian Democracy, while in others it renewed the religious concept of romantic nationalism. This was accompanied, as an associate or ally, by a likewise renewed populism, mainly in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and to a lesser extent in Hungary and in the land of the Czech lands. Behind the revival of populism lie the anti-liberalism of the populist intelligentsia, the middle strata threatened existential way of life, and their traditionally anti-modernist behavior. Today's populists are at once anti-socialists and anti-liberals: neither the Soviet East, nor the capitalist West is to their liking. What they advocate is renewal of the "third road" recently tinged by national colors and forging

a false religious piety. Elements of racism and messianism are visible and an integral part of this populist nationalism. In their rhetoric of the press and their speeches reminds one so strongly of the pre-war propaganda, filled with intolerance against all kinds of criticism. All that is critical is stigmatized as not just an error but as an "evil", condemned as non Magyar, non Romanian, etc... Common to these developments is the counter-revisionism of history. In many respects we are at the beginning of our march back to the inter-war nationalism.

3. In every country of the region an investigation has begun to search for the responsibility of the "crimes" of the communist era. There are two characteristic aspects to this: the "self-exculpation syndrome" and the repainting of the enemy-image. From the Slovaks and the Magyars to the Romanians, indeed to the Russians, all the peoples are attesting their innocence, showing up the bleeding stigmas of their nationalist avant-garde. They are arguing for their innocence in the triggering off of the Second World War, and even if they did take part, they were defending Europe against Bolshevism. Leading politicians declare that they were the defenders of European Christian civilization, not aggressors.

The deportation and extermination of the Jews does not burden our conscience, but that of the Germans--if there had been any gas chambers at all! We were innocent regarding the horrific deeds of the communists, we did not collaborate, or if we did, then we did so under constraint, in order to preserve the existence of national values. Of late we have heard in Hungary that the battle of Don cannot be regarded as a shameful defeat but should be seen as an example of military heroism and courage.

Exculpation naturally means rejecting responsibility and imposing it on external forces. Thus responsibility is attributed to the superiority of the enemy or on anonymous ill fate, or, alternately, on internal forces, the minorities, the Jews. In Hungary the reality of this outlook was analyzed in a sociological survey conducted in 1983 and repeated in 1989. The great majority of those questioned ascribed national failures and defeats to overbearing external forces, to backwardness (which again can

be blamed on external forces). In some cases and to a lesser extent they\_ avert responsibility to internal factors, the feuding of the Hungarian nobility, the intra-strife typical of their bickering. For instance, one-third of the respondents put the blame for the Second World War on the Treaty of Trianon, two-thirds on the Germans and the country's leaders. Only 7% and 5 % respectively blamed the right-wing middle class and the passive people. On the occasion of the repeated survey in 1989, the majority of the responses again blamed external forces, with one-third going to the Hungarian ruling classes, and a mere 2% on the people.

This averting of responsibility is an important momentum of the revamping of the enemy-image. With the break-up of the Soviet Union the Russian enemy-image is fading. In contrast, the traditional animosity towards the neighboring peoples is picking up momentum, almost like a conditional reflex. Here again, I refer to the unfortunate Transylvanian situation, the Serbo-Croatian civil war, the Czecho-Slovak, Polish-Ukrainian and Lituianian antagonisms. Not surprisingly, anti-Semitism has surfaced everywhere, even in places where there are hardly any Jews left, the least as parasite big capitalists. But, indeed, this is not necessary. The Jew, as arch-enemy, has become a metaphysical being: they who are not palatable to the populist nationalists are Jews. If they happen to be Hungarian, Polish or Romanian to boot, then one or other of their ancestors had been Jews, or if even this were not the case, then they were "Jewified" in the unhealthy urban environment. The "Jewish-way of mind" continues to persist steadfastly as the phantom picture of the indispensable enemy. It remains an effective and ever-ready catalyst of Central Eastern European nationalism.

The transition from communism to a democratic market economy is taking place in Central and Eastern Europe amid enormous difficulties. All the more so because for the most part this region has never seen genuine democracy, or the evolution of a free market economy. The transition is burdened in particular by the resurrection of nationalism, which is an obstacle to the transition, to modernization,

to reconciliation among peoples. It stands in the way of establishing the conditions for a future integration of the region. Nationalism will perhaps only hinder, but it could prevent it the transition. Maybe it itself will be tamed, or perhaps it will undermine the peace and the reconstruction of the entire region.

What gives ground for a cautious optimism is the openness of a great majority of the population, its sympathy for a market economy, and, mainly, a radical transformation of the international environment. There is no fascist Germany, there is no Bolshevik Soviet Union, and perhaps the example of the western community will be more appealing than illusions of nation-state grandeur in this destroyed and much-tortured region.

Peter Hanak