

East European Reform and West European Integration

The political world has been changing radically since the Central European revolution of 1989. Instead of traditional bi-polar conflict, we now have the potential for multi-polar political conflict. Small wars have once again become a real possibility. Ethnic and social conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe are brewing into equally revolutionary and explosive mixtures. Despite these changes, however, Western Europe's political classes are still sitting impassively at yesterday's gambling tables, placing their bets as though oblivious of the fact that "Rouge" and "Noir" have become almost indistinguishable after the historic downpour. They mutter strange codes under their breath (CSCE, CFE, EC, WEU, NATO, etc.), but can we be sure that these letters still stand for the same concepts that they did three years ago?

The situation in Eastern Europe has already become far too complex to just carry on business as usual. "Don't mention my name," a close advisor of President Vaclav Havel once said to me, "but if we were already members of the EC, I would say 'Let the Slovaks go.' " The only trouble is that they (the EC) won't have us for a while." And the elegant, well-educated, appealingly honest, and radically neo-liberal Vaclav Klaus vehemently defended the British position: Poland, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia must be accepted as full members by the EC and all "socialist utopias" must be relinquished. By "socialist" he meant plans for monetary and political union. The "Brussels Bureaucracy" should be trimmed and the national parliaments should retain their powers as far as possible. As a German "modernist" I was put right in my place. While some of the Eastern Central European countries indisputably belong to "Europe," the Community's expansion to the East could at the same time make it impossible to finally overcome nationalist pride and create a European confederation. What should we do? European policy has come to a dangerous crossroad. The disintegration of the Eastern bloc, German unification, and the economic decline of the superpowers represent an existential challenge for the EC with its "two-track," divided approach to this mixture of dangers and opportunities. The attempt by many European political leaders to confront the radicalness of these alternatives with hollow opportunism and also with frantic management will be short-lived.