

AUTONOMY

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Western Powers missed a wonderful opportunity to reshape the face of Europe. We remember all too well the Congress of Vienna after the fall of Napoleon, and the unbelievably shortsighted peace treaties after the First and Second World Wars.

After these events the leaders of the states convened to reshape the borders of Europe. The Vienna Congress was very effective. Just or not, the borders drawn by the dancing diplomats lasted a century and Europe prospered. The other two did not fare so well. The first one inflicted unhealing wounds, the second put some salt into them.

In 1990 there was an opportunity the West failed to grasp. After the fall of the Soviet Union, they should have convened an other "Vienna Congress" and redrawn the borders along ethnic and cultural lines. Where it was not possible, they should have obliged the states with sizable minorities to grant them autonomy along the lines of the South-Tyrol pattern.

Of course, there are obstacles: the Polish German, the Russian-German borders. It would be hard to push back Poland some 150 kilometers to the East. East Prussia is the foothold the Russians would not part with easily.

The rest of the problems, the Romanian, Serbian, and Slovakian would have been easier to solve. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia fell apart spontaneously, even Romania may be facing the same fate.

Some of the democratic states realized, that there is a price to pay for peaceful progress, and were willing to make amends. The Scots, Irish, Wells, South Tyrol, Swedes of Finland, Gagauzes of Moldavia (who have heard of them before?), Catalans, Basques, all had their autonomies. The Corsicans, Bretons and other minorities of the once "nation state" France are close to some sort of autonomy. The idea of self-government of the homogenous communities have no alternatives, but bloodshed. Even the French have realized it.

But what about the Hungarians? Presumably the West keeps the successive Hungarian governments on notice to "behave themselves". They are dangling the lure of a borderless European Union in front of them, neglecting to

tell them, that Slovakia, Romania and Serbia. where close to 3 million Hungarians live oppressed, flatly refuse granting territorial autonomy to them.

What happens in the meantime to our brethren? They will be forced to emigrate, or dissolve in the Rumanian, Serb and Slovak sea around them. We don' like this prospect. The West can not put up the real solution to this festering sore too long. The status quo can not be kept up any longer. The Balkan problem have to be solved soon, and without Hungary it can not be done. The successor states eventually will have to face up to the facts.

If the leading Western Powers were willing to grant autonomy to their minorities, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia can not buck the trend. They have a very limited choice: either adopt a friendly attitude toward Hungary and the minorities, or face much harder demands in the not to distant future.

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