

Postwar

A history of Europe since 1945

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Stunde Null. The dramatic first half of the 20th century has come to a halt, and the second act is about to begin. In retrospect it appears far less interesting than what preceded it. War and suffering is far more dramatic and amendable to a historic presentation than is peace and prosperity. But when it comes to a choice of living through, the latter is a far more attractive option.

The Second World War, or rather the second violent act of the European Civil War that is Eurocentrically referred to as the World War, brought unprecedented destruction, material as well as human. While traditionally wars had been aimed at fighting armies, the casualties suffered by the Second were predominantly civilian; as much of the wanton destruction was aimed at rupturing the seams of civilian society, be it through Allied firebombings or the exterminating ambitions of the invading Wehrmacht. The postwar scenes of ruined cities and homeless people left an indelible mark on the imagination and seemed to condemn the survivors to endless destitution. Indeed, the situation looked far bleaker than at the end of the First World War. Even among the countries of Western Europe, which had been spared the worst destruction, living standards seem to have been thrown back fifty years. Rationing was still in effect in Britain for the first postwar years, and the movies that were made at the time, show scenes that would not have been out of place in Edwardian times. To some of us this might seem idyllic. Nevertheless Europe, including also the Eastern part, was able to get on and rebuild much of what had been destroyed. In fact economic growth was quite spectacular in the first few years, and when in 1947, when fate seemed to be in the balance and the initial euphoria of peace had worn out and the immensity of recovery still to be achieved was becoming evident, matters seemed ominous¹. An infusion of money through the Marshall Plan swang the scales. One reason for this swift and remarkable recovery, at least in the West, where it was allowed to be sustained, was that the great material destruction notwithstanding, most of the industrial infrastructure had remained largely intact². Another reason, largely unsung, was the great migration from country to city³. In some industrially precocious countries like Britain, that had already taken place, and in most European countries it had already begun at the end

¹ Judt makes a point that this was indeed a crucial turning-point. Permanent destitution being an option as well as increased prosperity.

² Incidentally much of it had been laid in the thirties under the Nazi regime, contributing posthumously, so to speak, to the postwar 'Wirtschaftswunder' in what would later become West-Germany.

³ Some predictable consequences of it was housing-shortages, the erection of shoddy architecture (in the West and East alike), and in many cases, especially in Scandinavia, a destruction of town-centers in order to 'modernize'.

of the 19th century, yet at the end of the war, a, by latter standards, surprisingly large fraction of the population still lived on the land. This migration released a workforce that could now be employed profitably, without actually diminishing the agricultural output. Agriculture became so much more efficient; while formerly agriculture was a matter of subsistence, producing a marginal excess wealth, it now become a powerful machine, where each farmhand was able to feed a multitude. This migration, which we normally think of as having taken place of long before, actually continued until mid-century and radically changed the social fabric⁴.

One country that particularly favoured by the Postwar boom was Sweden⁵. Traditionally a rather poor country with a late industrialization, but with great natural resources, predominantly wood and iron-ore⁶ providing the basis for its industrial expansion, later to be channeled into a more high-technology directed. But the boom of the Postwar years, in Sweden or elsewhere, could not be sustained indefinitely. The steady supply of released labour had eventually to come an halt. In the 70's growth slackened, partially excarbarated by the oil-crises of 73, and Western economies, and thus also politics, had to be rethought. Market liberalism, discounted during the previous decades, started to rear its head. The end of the War saw a general appreciation of the strong state⁷, with its ambition of general well-fare and the major industries in public hands⁸. In Britain, Labour took power in the elections just after the war⁹, and Socialist parties were strong in Scandinavia, France and Italy, while in those two latter countries, Socialism took the more radical form of Communism, with inevitable Soviet ties. As a consequence political power was seized by the various Christian Democrats (meaning essentially sponsored by the Catholic Church, that was the dominating religion of Western Europe) with strong support by the Americans (who also had good ties with the more moderate Social Democrats, the New Deal still being in fresh memory.) Nevertheless support for the strong State was universal as was its expectations of taking good care of its citizens¹⁰. Another consequence of increased affluence was the rapid expansion of secondary and university education, which until the 50's had been but the priviligue of a small section of the population, either by wealth or academic merit¹¹ The increase of an educated, but above all affluent class of teenagers, produced a new cultural phenomena of consumerism and illusion known as the 60's.

⁴ This migration was in the decades to become a world-wide phenomena, and now only China and India are predominantly agricultural, but for how long?

⁵ In the later fifties cars became prominent, and I recall a spectacular improvement of road-quality in just a few years. In fact this being the most tangible phenomenon I can point at in my recollection of increasing wealth.

⁶ Judt quotes figures that in 1973 its production of iron-ore were equal to that of France, Britain and Germany combined, and about half of that of the States

⁷ Hobsbawm attributes it to the fear of the governments of a general Communist resurgence

⁸ However, there always were a distinction between politics and economics, not generally appreciated by over-sees commentators. Sweden, often abused by Americans as a Socialist country, actually had less of its industry in state hands than supposedly more Capitalist Britain

⁹ Thereby snubbing their war-time hero

¹⁰ As the often, political clout is ultimately gained by successfully adminstrating affluence

¹¹ One should not ignore the latter, as is too often the case in modern debate on education, seeing

With the end of the 70's there was the beginning of a political backlash, in Britain openly headed by Thatcher, and in France insidiously brought about by Mitterand. The latter was a curious animal indeed. He is reported to have said that he was born as a Christian and that he no doubt would die as one, but in the meantime... Exchange 'Christian' for 'Conservative' and you have in a nutshell a political characterization. Mitterands political career was if anything murky, starting out with his involvement in the Vichy Government¹², later refashioning himself as a Socialist, becoming indispensable to the two Socialist parties, and in 1981 winning the election of the French Presidency¹³ The actual politics of Mitterand would be far more pragmatic, expressing the sensibilities, not of a convinced Socialist, but the instincts of a master politicians, to whom, in the expression of Bismarck, politics is indeed the art of the possible. The legacy of the 80's would prove permanent, at least up to this very day. A wide economical deregulization, rampant privatization, and a globalized economy, leaving less and less political power to national governments. Capitalism triumphing against all odds and repeated dismissals as being moribound not to say dead. Concomitant with this development was a general converging of political parties¹⁴ once the traditional class-divisions of society had eroded away and private economical ambitions becoming uppermost. The forming of the European Union was the slow political manifestation of this trend.

The start of the European Union was inauspicious and can be traced back to the first tentative steps of reconciliation between France and Germany. The end of the First World War was one of bitterness and revenge and the imposition of impossible reparitions¹⁵, the Second World War was a far more harrowing experience for the major actors involved. French had suffered military humiliation on an unprecedented scale, and would politically suffer from it by being reduced from a Great Power, to no actual power at all, thus desperately eager to play at least some major role in a restricted European setting. Germany was pariah, and would welcome any kind of recognition, and above all there was the spectre of Stalinism and the Red Army, putting everything in perspective. And on a far more mundane level, the two countries were dependant upon each other economically, something that

schooling traditionally as the exclusive prerogative of the upper classes. Mass-education invariably involved a lowering of academic standards. And in fact, in some cases like in Britain, well-meaning reform of secondary schools, actually reversed things, making higher education more a matter of parental wealth than academic merit.

¹² The Swedish journalist Knut Stlberg reveals in one of his memoirs, how Mitterand was involved in a political scam in the 50's with direct criminal aspects, and would have in a less corrupt country been politically dead (and put in prison)

¹³ I was at a conference in Italy at the time, and recall the excitement with which this was greeted by my colleagues.

¹⁴ Ironically Thatcher was so successful, according to Judt, that she destroyed the Conservative Party, and refashioned Labour in her own image, under the helm of Blair

¹⁵ The harsh reparitions imposed on Germany were later renegotiated in the light of economic realities. Margret McMillan, in her book on 1919, claims that the reparitions imposed on Germany were proportionally less punishing than those Bismarck had extracted back in 1871 on the vanquished French. Until I see some more definite documentation I remain sceptical, yet it is an interesting suggestion.

must have been obvious during the war and collaboration under the Vichy Government¹⁶. And to be honest, the majority of Frenchmen had no real problems of living comfortably with their arch-enemy¹⁷ In down-to-earth terms, the steel industry of Lorraine needed the Coal of Germany. Including the Italians a first accord was negotiated by Adenauer, the French Schumann and an Italian counterpart De Gasperi from Trentino, all happily negotiating in their mother-tongue - German, the Coal and Steel Union, to which the Benelux countries would be attached forming the six (EEC), provoking the dual economic configuration of the seven (EFTA), consisting of the three Scandinavian countries, the two Alpine countries, Austria and Switzerland, as well as England, and Portugal, later to be extended by associate members. Those two economic blocks, dominated the economic scene during the 50's and 60's, with the original EEC sucking up members of the EFTA in the 70's, and with the inclusion of Britain, so long opposed by de Gaulle, achieving a pan-European identity. The purely Economic Union gradually assumed a more political character, which was certainly in the back of the heads of founding figures like J.Monnet and H.Spaak. But European integration was a slow and frustrated process, mostly present in the mind of Brussel bureaucrats, yet gaining its inexorable momentum, as first the Southern European countries were swept under its umbrella, and in the nineties the Northern. The third Millennium has seen a further extension, not in wealth, but in population, area and obligation, as most of the Eastern European countries finally got their coveted state of approval by being integrated. But there are limits to the expansion, at least if the basic identity will be kept. Russia is clearly too Asiatic, whatever that means, to be included in the charmed circle, and over the inclusion of Turkey, there has been agony and anguish for the better part of twenty years. If Europe has any meaning, many argue, it is defined by its Christian heritage, no matter how secularized. Turkey is, officially at least, a secular Muslim country, but atheism comes in different kinds, depending out of which religion against which it is a rejection. Old family quarrels continue long after the ostensible reasons have been rejected.

All of this sounds very boring, and it is. Surely the Postwar had some drama. Yes it did. The Cold War. In retrospect, and by generations born too late, the sense of drama appears very exaggerated, but not for us who lived through, because we were in deadly terror of the Bomb, whose mushroom cloud would cast a long shadow for most of the Postwar years.

The Cold War started before the end of the Hot War, although everyone denied its existence at the time. A common foe makes common friends, but usually for not too long. Once the foe is vanquished the rationale is gone. The incompatibility between a politically liberal and capitalistic Western world and an repressive Communist one is a foregone conclusion. But in many ways the mutual hostility and suspicion had far deeper roots, for

¹⁶ During which time the first embryological thoughts about a common market took form.

¹⁷ The so called French Resistance was a most marginal affair, its significance inflated after the war, due to the great number of Frenchmen claiming retroactive membership. This is confirmed by the fact that the Germans needed only a very marginal staff of a few thousands to administer the country, (the same being true for the Benelux countries) and unlike their involvement in Eastern Europe, had no need to keep large occupation forces. The actual and unsolicited assistance given by the Vichy Government in rounding up Jews for deportation, is a further, rather ominous, indication of mutual co-operation.

which the economical systems of the 20th century only provided convenient excuses. Russia is, as noted above, an Eastern, 'half-Asiatic' empire, cut off from the West until the early 18th century, and by most Westerners regarded as barbaric. The Russians expanded, the Swedes were the first Europeans to feel their weight, soon the Poles were the victims, and in the early 19th century after the Napoleon debacle of 1812, Russian troops were dining in Paris. By the end of the 19th century, the only European power that could hold up to the Russian might, was the newly unified German¹⁸. And they did during the First World War, and almost did in the Second. The German advance into Sovietunion was probably seen by satisfaction by many Westerners, and in particular among Germans, even by those who were opposed to Nazism¹⁹. There have been speculations to the effect that had the Germans prevailed, exterminations that would dwarf those of the Jews would have ensued. Speculations are speculations, yet one is justified in doubting internal restraints on the actions of the Nazis (something to keep in mind when making quantitative comparisons between Nazi and Stalinistic atrocities). Still for all the hybris, one senses a deep defeatism on the parts of the Germans. Russia was felt as infinite. No matter how successful, successes would only be initial, and an infinite rump would always remain²⁰. And indeed, out of its depths, it rallied, and the reasons for that take on almost mythic proportions in retelling, drawing from sources far deeper than those Communism alone would have a hope of mustering, by invoking concepts like patriotism and 'devotion to the soil'. The ensuing advance of the Red Army was seen, not only by the Germans, with alarm. And indeed, as postwar European history would show, Russia was a barbaric power, alien to European civilization²¹. What better illustration than the transformation of the classical city of Kningsberg, with its associations of Kant; into Kaliningrad, two cities sharing nothing but geographical co-ordinates.

Russophobia and anti-Semitism have never been compared to my knowledge, and Judt does not even stoop to make the demonic notion of russophobia explicit in his book. I claim

¹⁸ Prussia and Russia had traditionally been allies after the Napoleonic wars, but with all alliances of Realpolitik, it was one of convenience. Other combinations presented themselves, and the most fateful, in the words of Kennan (Whose book - the Fateful Alliance, charts the Franco-Russian diplomatic dalliance) was the one between Russia and France, that arguably can be thought of as a contributing factor to the First World War.

¹⁹ Those who plotted against Hitler did so in view of his recklessness. Their object was to save Germany and to negotiate an honorable peace. The military successes of the Wehrmacht was a source of pride rather than shame

²⁰ I recall the reminiscences of some German soldier some fifty years after Stalingrad on a TV-documentary. He told the camera, that having reached the Volga, and seeing the endless expanses of Russia stretching out away from him, he realized that their penetration had hardly begun.

²¹ The upper crustes of Russian society became quite sophisticated in the 18th and 19th century. (But the events of 1917 would mean an almost total retreat of Russia from the European scene.) But it was by many seen as just a glittering surface. Underneath the Russian, even the one who spoke French better than the French, was first and foremost a Slav. Reason might be Western, but the Soul was Russian. The Slavophilic ruminations of a Dostoevski reflects those sentiments well, to the mixture of a bemusement and consternation of the Western reader. Still those characterizations are not confined to the Russians, but smililar cases can be made for many other pervasive national identities

though that it certainly played an important role in German national consciousness, and as far as the general public, probably more than anti-semitism. This phobia of the Germans was then bequeathed to the western allies, and when much later, the Soviet empire collapsed, it was transferred onto the Muslim world. However, Russophobia and anti-semitism differ in many crucial respects. The former usually did not translate into a phobia of individuals, if for no other reason that there were no such options, but remained a phobia directed against a vague collective²² identified as the threatening enemy. Of course the vagueness of this identification depended on history. For those countries living at the edge of the bears den, it took on a particular sharply delineated character, for Americans it seemed more vicarious.

The Red Army occupied Eastern Europe, with, as it would soon turn out, the significant exception of Yugoslavia. It imposed itself on their shattered regimes and took over control. In some countries, like Rumania, Communism hardly existed, the Communist party maybe only counting a thousand members, in others like Czechoslovakia, it had a strong Democratic presence²³ The first years of Stalins take-over of Eastern Europe were the harshest. Judt, unlike somebody like Hobsbawm²⁴ does not pussyfoot the issues. The Soviet imposition on the Eastern European countries was brutal indeed, involving deportations, imprisonments and of course a significant number of deaths. While the Americans supplied a sizeable amount of economic support (initially an offer extended to all of Europe, but denied the Eastern part by order of Stalin) through the initiative of Marshall²⁵, the Soviets extracted a similar amount from its dependencies in war repartitions. As Judt observes, the Sovietunion acted as a colonial power²⁶ completely subjected the economies of its satellites to its own purposes, but with a significant twist. While traditionally the colonial power was the most advanced economically, using the colonies as suppliers of raw-material to be refined by the mother-country; in the Soviet colonial system, the mother-country was the one economically most backwards, supplying raw-materials for its colonies to refine and

²² I certainly was brought up by a fear of Russia fuelled by an identification with Swedish history as well as by Cold war hysteria. My aversion against Communism may have been almost totally inspired by seeing it, mistakingly as I would later learn, as a Russian product. Yet my personal antipathy against Russia did not in later years prevent me from being enamoured by its literary culture, on the contrary fear transmuted into sentimentalism, which no doubt have benefited those Russians I would later meet on a personal basis. It is of course commendable to censure any such xenophobic sentiments in a growing child, we should all be taught, as we actually were, that all humans are brethren and should love each other. But psychological realities are usually far more complex.

²³ Judt quotes figures of a turn-out of around 40% in general elections, far ahead of the Italian and French figures, which are the only one meriting comparison, everywhere else the Communist electoral support being marginal, much of its agendas and potential loyalty exempted by reformed Socialist movements.

²⁴ To whom the author acknowledges a large debt.

²⁵ The speech by the former general was given at Harvard in June 1947, and indeed exactly twenty-five years later, I was alerted by a friend of mine to join him running across to Memorial Hall, just outside our dorm, to catch a glimpse of Willy Brandt as he was about to attend a memorial celebration of that very speech.

²⁶ The Polish journalist Kapuscinsky goes one step further in his book *Empire*. Namely the Sovietunion colonized itself.

export back.

It is important to remember though that the first postwar decade was the worst for the Eastern European states. Stalinism was rampant, with show-trials of the model of the 30's, which admittedly only affected a thin elite of party-officials, some of them crooks with plenty of blood on their own hands, yet contributed to a paranoid mood of the entire society. However, most of the people imprisoned and killed, and we are talking about non-negligent fractions of the total populations, were suffering in obscurity. Once societies had been broken in, the need for terror (and besides Stalinism was supposedly dead and buried) was less urgent. What followed was a deep-freeze maintained by elaborate security apparatuses. The Gestapo force of Nazi-Germany was dwarfed by the Stasi force of the DDR²⁷.

It is meaningless to talk about the start of the Cold War, it having been incipient every since the eventual collapse of Germany became a foregone conclusion. Yet there are some definite markers. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948²⁸, is one that is often mentioned, as is the famous iron-curtain speech by Churchill in Missouri. Yet the impenetrable border between East and West only gradually came into existence, as in the confusion of the first postwar years there was no steep gradient of living-standards²⁹. The most dramatic crisis was the Berlin blockade, the outcome of which was the unification of the Western occupational zones into the Bundesrepublik Deutschland and its rearmament and inclusion into the Western alliance, with the logical countermove of the establishment of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik tied into the Warsawpact, the latter another counterreaction, this time to the NATO. The German division, along with the ambiguous and unresolved status of Berlin, was to become the fulcrum on which the Cold War balanced. The numerical superiority of the Red Army was obvious to anyone, especially the frightened West. The only thing that saved the Western Europeans from sharing the fate of their Eastern cousins, was the American Nuclear umbrella. As the Soviets soon attained Nuclear capabilities of their own, the situation froze into the so called balance of terror, with mutual destruction hanging as a Democletus sword attached with a very thin thread indeed. Politically it resulted in a stalemate, with the Americans and Soviets permanently tied to their respective parts of a divided Europe³⁰. For us who lived through the time, it was like living on top of a ticking time-bomb, making every foreign crisis a potential

²⁷ The inevitable conclusion must be that the ordinary German in those dark days, suffered far less supervision than his later descendants. In fact, as we are being told, he was kept quite happy, and besides war and adventure, make people identify with the State and its aims.

²⁸ Judt speculates that the adverse reaction to this, may have stopped Stalin from a similar move as to Finland

²⁹ I was told by an East-German colleague of mine, that as late as in the early fifties, he and his family had been allowed to visit Sweden as tourists able to make exchanges of foreign currencies. Although those visits surely were of a very restricted kind, at the time (1979) this was revealed to me, I found the sheer possibility simply incredible.

³⁰ Foreign policy is not a matter of chess, it is more appropriately a matter of Go. Especially so during the Cold War, where only a few marginal areas were under disputes, and so successfully handled. The Soviet withdrawal from Austria being a relatively major one, its withdrawal from Bornholm a minor one with any standards, and besides predating the onset of the Cold War proper. In practice it meant a division

doom³¹. But the mad strategy of mutual assured destruction worked. It did not cause doomsday, but political paralysis. All those crises that followed. The Hungarian Revolt, the Berlin-Wall, were just window-dressings, playing brinkmanship to the galleries³², but deep down everyone concerned was content with no intentions of making good on rhetorics. Ordinary people were aghast at the Soviet quenching of the Hungarians, but those in power accepted it readily. Just as the Berlin-Wall brought out an uproar, yet with the Western powers secretly happy as it sealed a problem to mutual satisfaction. It is tempting to speculate that without the Bomb, war would inevitably have broken out in Europe on a number of pretexts. And even if so called conventional war does not have the same global consequences as a thermo-nuclear exchange, it certainly can be horrible enough, and to its victims, of which there would have been plenty, the question of what kind of war would have been moot. So we all had a Cold War not really realising that the alternative would most likely not have been no War at all, but a Hot War.

Unlike Hot Wars, Cold Wars are rather abstract, in fact, coming down to it, they are nothing but figures of speech. So although the situation on the face of it was intolerable, and how nostalgic did not the times before the Bomb, that forbidden fruit of knowledge, appear to us; we nevertheless forgot about it in our daily lives, and with the forgetting came also the forgetting of the other side, the oppressed cousins of the East, which simply faded away from our perception of Europe.

Concomitant with this fear were appeasements³³. The unification of Germany as a neutral state was seen as a lost opportunity³⁴. But this was only a symptome of a general mood of Socialist sympathy³⁵ desperately trying to see the Sovietunion not as a threat but an opportunity. Especially the French, having lost political power, wanted to maintain a cultural and intellectual leading position, with people like Sartre and his companion, being icons of leftist thought³⁶. Stories about Soviet atrocities, although well-documented, were resented as mere anti-Soviet propaganda³⁷. The greatest intellectual adulation of Sovietunion, Judt points out, coincided with its worst repressive periods. And

into spheres of influence and a tacit agreement of non-intervention. This was a development predicted, as well as recommended, by Kennan, directly after the war.

³¹ I remember how I as a teen-ager always dreaded newscasts as harbingers of bad and dramatic news

³² Which I recall I vaguely sensed. Perhaps not so much out of percipience, as out of desperation

³³ After Munich, the word appeasement became tainted, hiding the fact that appeasements more often work than not, as the history of the Cold War give many examples of, at least for those willing to interpret matters non-categorically and sympathetically

³⁴ And for many decades Adenauer was castigated by the German leftists of having passed up the opportunity in favour of personal advancement and joining the NATO alliance. His opponent Karl Schumacher, with a far more heroic anti-Nazi track record, was for a neutral and unified Germany. This might possibly have defused some of the Cold War issues, but may have created other problems of its own. Schumacher, marked by his time in imprisonment, were soon to die untimely.

³⁵ And back at those days, even Conservative parties were in favour of a strong well-fare state. Market-liberalism had not yet become fashionable.

³⁶ Sartre once so esteemed, became a tragically as well as farcially outdated figure, when he in the 70's lectured to East European intellectuals on the blessings of Socialism.

³⁷ As Judt observes, it became only politically correct with the disclosures of Solshenitsyn in the early

it was not only due to total ignorance, because something was bound to filter through; in fact in many instances, as the author remarks, the very cruelty of a Stalin added to his appeal. The Western love-affair with Marxism came to a fore in the sixties and took rather hysterical forms in the seventies. But by that time the Sovietunion was too mundane, the real adulation was reserved for a country much further away, and hence more susceptible to such idealization. Academically the 60's was the decade of theories³⁸, theories that in the 70's degenerated into post-modernist cant. The French intellectual tradition also degenerated. Sartre was replaced by a generations of lofty philosophers, some of them so lofty so as to dispense with any pretense of rational thought or coherence whatsoever³⁹ It may be tempting to see this development as a result of mass-education, with a growth of those with intellectual pretensions without the concomitant capacity.

In the West a large part of the intellectuals had lost touch with reality, in the East the intellectuals had the obligation to be in touch with reality, because who else would. Thus there perspectives were very different, and in many cases quite demanding. As a reward they were felt to matter, their books reached an appreciative mass-audience. They had something to say. Consequently with the fall of the wall, they soon ended up as irrelevant as their Western counterparts. Many of them found that they could no longer write⁴⁰. But in 1968 this was far into the future.

1968 was not just student revolts in Paris⁴¹ it was also the year of the Prague spring.

70's. Not because those furnished irrefutable proofs, but because the intellectual climate was ready for it. Initially after the war, an anti-Communist stand was seen as a pro-fascist one (or at least an excessive pro-American one, something that was frowned upon), and many opponents to the Soviet power, found themselves in embarrassing company. Koestler tried to infuse some support, claiming that one could very well be right for the wrong reasons, and such compunctions about purity, was but an expression of a lack of confidence.

³⁸ Mathematics was not immune. On the face of it, this seems hardly worthy of notice, after all mathematics is if anything abstract theory. But just as there are different shades of black in hell, there are different levels of abstraction in mathematics. Grothendieck conquered Algebraic Geometry creating a formidable apparatus, the likes of which had never been seen in mathematics before or after. Grothendieck knew what he was doing, and soon in the early seventies got bored and essentially dropped out, a true living legend if ever there was one, bequeathing a legacy still providing a firm foundation, and to many of suitable temperament, a steady source of inspiration. Yet it is not so clear that many of his disciples really knew what it was all about. His mathematical preaching also spurned off, especially in France, a soulless formal approach to mathematics. One sometimes suspects that some of his most confused adherents, would have as naturally fitted at the feet of the extravagant philosophers France also produced at the time

³⁹ It is reported that one of those philosophers, one assumes an extreme case, had reached such a state of intellectual vapidty, that his Alsheimer condition became undiagnosable for many years, mesmerizing audiences with the rantings of an empty brain.

⁴⁰ Judt takes the example of Christa Wolf

⁴¹ With all the trappings, including street barricades, of classical revolutions, but with no program, no issues and at most some vague grievances. It was made much of at the time, and even more perhaps in nostalgic retrospection; but to more discerning observers it signified nothing but a cultural fad. I remember taking exception to the slogans of 'students and workers' which were so fashionable. I found them false, as no doubt did the majority of the students, not to mention the workers.

The German workers revolt of 1953 in Berlin was a faded memory of little significance, Hungary of 1956 was different but it was also a lesson⁴². The reformers of 1968 would get it right. And they did, presenting Communism with a human face, as that of Dubcek. But it was premature, and their reforms were riddled with contradictions. Too many things in politics, economics and ideology are too intertwined, to be separated neatly in different heaps. This was a lesson another reformer would learn to his peril some twenty years later. But in a sense that man was luckier, he was at the top of the pack. Dubcek was not, Breshnev was. What happened is what is usually referred to as history. It was a terrible disappointment⁴³.

The seventies was, as mentioned above, a time of recession in Western Europe. Eastern Europe had been in recession since the end of the War, their economies in permafrost⁴⁴. In East-West relations it was if not a period of thaw, at least of mutual resignation, sometimes referred to with the upbeat designation of 'entente'. Until the mid-sixties or so, there had still been the illusion, by no means confined to the east, that Communism would actually outpace Capitalism, and the Soviet-block would emerge the economic winner. And as we all know, the one to gain the soul of man is the one who can deliver the bread. By the seventies this illusion had shattered on both sides. The American had landed the first man on the Moon in 1969, while in 1959 the Soviets were the first to land a rocket on the Moon⁴⁵, and at that time seemed to have the definite edge. Now they were reduced to importing wheat from the West. Their own agriculture in shambles. A tiny portion of the land in private hands producing a hugely disproportionate amount of the produce⁴⁶. The Aral inland sea a environmental disaster caused by grandiose hairborn schemes. We were no longer talking about ideology, but of facts, hard falsifiable facts. And the Russians knew it. Breshnev kept himself happy with Western Toys⁴⁷. And what was the German Ost-Politik really all about? On one hand it was commendable, a confronting of realities on the ground so to speak, and also an unabashed admission of Germanys guilt. The image of Brandt kneeling down by the Warzaw ghetto elevated the politician to a statesman. It resulted in mutual diplomatic recognitions⁴⁸ and also a long overdue peace-treaty, or at

⁴² Nagy was toppled, seeking refuge in the Yugoslavian embassy, but eventually betrayed and executed. His successor - Kadar, a former friend turned defector, did introduce a very cautious liberalization which would eventually be instrumental in undercutting the system, the ultimate fruits thereof not harvested until after his death.

⁴³ I remember the acute sadness I felt at the time, almost brought to tears.

⁴⁴ Not being a native of an Eastern European country I have no first-hand experience of their sense of time. I recall visiting DDR in the early eighties, getting the feeling that the Second World War had just stopped the year before.

⁴⁵ And their feat of photographing the rear side of the Moon during the same year, even more spectacular. Now few people remember this

⁴⁶ A factor of ten. 3% in private hands provided a third of the total output.

⁴⁷ Judt relays a story about Breshnev proudly showing off his spoils to his mother, who warns him about the possibility of the Communists coming back to power

⁴⁸ For a long time BRD refused to have diplomatic relations with any country that recognised DDR, with the exception of Sovietunion. This highhanded attitude was bound to shatter in the long run, as it

least mutual recognition of an inescapable fact⁴⁹. At the time, there were resentments that the Soviet Bloc had gotten everything they wanted, in exchange for some vaguely phrased and non-committal documents on human rights, the so called Helsinki accords. As it would turn out, those documents strengthened the dissident movements, who were given something very definite to refer to⁵⁰. But much of Ostpolitik, a kind of appeasement, did degenerate to the BRD buying up small pieces of DDR, in the form of releasing emigrants⁵¹

In the last days of 1979 Soviet invaded Afghanistan, and the Cold War revived. Softspoken Carter⁵² was replaced by tough-talking Reagan. The Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as Star-Wars came about, so far only on paper, but that was bad enough⁵³. The world was evidently heading straight for disaster. A game of chicken no one was prepared to concede, and thus with catastrophic consequences. And then, as out of exhaustion the geriatric leaders coming down one by one⁵⁴. Breshnev, Andropov and so one whose name no one nowadays remembers, maybe he did not do so himself during his brief tenure. And so Gorbachov, the teenager in the Politburo⁵⁵.

It is an ongoing contention between historians whether events are brought about by individuals or whether the forces of history simply let them ride on their waves. Gorbachov is a case in point, providing evidence for both points of view. Clearly this was a decent man, who nevertheless had advanced in the system⁵⁶. He was committed to it, as he clearly owed everything to its benevolence; but he was also naive enough to see that it did not

kept Germany isolated. Besides by the 70's, only a fringe of the West-German public put unification high on the agenda, while in the 50's and early 60's such priorities had been quite common.

⁴⁹ I am actually not so sure whether the Second World War has formally been sealed by an official peace-treaty. The demands later for a unified Germany to recognise the borders with Poland as inviolate, seem to contradict this. Anyway as for all intents and purposes, the matter seems to have reached closure.

⁵⁰ At the time Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia was the best known. Never a mass-movement by any standards, in fact only involving a thin slice of the intelligensia, some of which would however be propelled to eminence later.

⁵¹ The same 'human-trafficking' went on with the Germans in Rumania, a community that had lived there for centuries, but were drastically reduced by Ceauscescus thirst for hard Western Currency.

⁵² Maybe the only decent man ever in the White House, and as a consequence a disaster. It might be true that a good politician needs to be something of a psychopath.

⁵³ It received devastating critique by the scientists, but vehemently defended by the old cold war hawk - the Hungarian Teller

⁵⁴ The tumbling down was prefigured by the death of Suslov, the master ideologist, in the spring of 1982. I recall that his demise was thought to signalling better times. The last of the old guard to go was actually Molotov in the fall of 1986, but by then no one was so much surprised by his death as the fact that he had been still alive up to then.

⁵⁵ I remember visiting Sofia in September 1984. Gorbachov had by that time come to prominence, his large portrait, along with those of Marx and Engels, hung from the facade in the center of the town. My Bulgarian friend hearing me retell this memory many years later, refuses to believe it. It could simply not have been possible. Could it be a false memory, and if not how will I be able to prove it? Portrait or no portrait, he was very much discussed during my visit, and in fact referred to as the 'teenager'

⁵⁶ In cases like this it helps to keep your integrity if you have a powerful mentor and protector. In the case of Gorbachov it was Andropov. It is tempting to speculate that due to this guardian angle,

work and wanting to do something about it. As he would learn to his peril, piecemeal reforms are not always possible, if something is thoroughly rotten, it has to go all. In the meantime he advocated 'glasnost' and 'perestroika'. The first was easy, but the second did not follow automatically from the first as had been intended. He became addicted to his own rhetorics and eventually imprisoned by it. It was all about the realization that the Cold War was after all a figure of speech, a matter in the head, a kind of misdirected thinking. His great achievement was to be able to persuade the West of his good intentions. And no doubt his intentions were good, if never thought out. There was the summit in Reykavik in 1986, where he shocked Reagan and his entourage. There followed triumphant trips to the West. He became its darling. Enthusiastic crowds chanting 'Gorby, Gorby'. Would he have sought elective office in any of a number of Western countries he would have had his pick. Every country being entitled to follow its road to Socialism. Could there be any more explicit denunciation of the Breshnev doctrine? His words were taken on face value. Where they not intended to? The regimes of Eastern Europe fell one by one, as being so many houses of cards. If there was no ultimate authority, no promise of the assistance of the Red Army as a last resort, what were there to prop things up? Hungary was the first to leak, it was in the summer of 1989. By sheer logic there followed an exodus of East-Germans. Sleeping beauties shielding their eyes from the glare of a consumer society only vicariously experienced on the TV-screen. The Berliner wall became obsolete, literally overnight. In the span of a few months the geography was totally changed, even Rumania had, essentially through a coup, dismissed their dictator, the only one to be killed⁵⁷. After the liberation of Eastern Europe, because a liberation it was by any stretch of imagination, the logical next step would be the Baltic states, and then Gorbachov was getting cold feet, trying too late to put them down. When Gorbachov returned, courtesy of Eltsin, after the farcial coup of 1991, he was a spent man, totally irrelevant, as irrelevant as the Soviet Union of which he had been the last President. We can really think of him cast ashore by the waves of history, discarded as an empty hull⁵⁸. Not a mover of history, only a hapless surfer on its waves. It cuts both ways. The collapse of the Soviet Union appears, at least in retrospect to have been a foregone conclusion. The timing and the actual way it came about could have been different, and here, it would be hard as well as ungenerous to deny Gorbachov proper credit. He might not have done anything really, but just by doing nothing, only letting things happen, inadvertently or by design, (History does not care, as neither concept makes any sense to it), you can be the mid-wife of great things.

So it all happened, so fast, so unexpected. Something I had despaired of ever experiencing in my life. The division of Europe into a West and a East, seemed a permanent

Gorbachov was raised in a protective environment; the career of a Eltsin, probably having been far tougher, and breeding a far tougher man.

⁵⁷ I recall confidently aguing just a few weeks before the overthrow of Ceaucescu, that Rumania would be exempt from the developments. Rumania was not really a communist country, it was an oriental country run by a despot, whose communist credentials were totally irrelevant. They may so have been, but that did not protect him.

⁵⁸ Had Gorbachov been shot during the coup, he would have lived on. Alive as he is, he is dead. Politically totally dead. His lasting legacy in the Soviet Union being the one who destroyed his own empire

fixture, an inevitable consequence of a balance of terror, frozen in eternity. Or at least until, horrible thought, some mishap would ensue, or intolerable tension would simply cause everything to snap. A mutual assured destruction being bound to happen before the beginning of the next Millenium, was a thought often casually expressed at cocktail parties by people really being worried by their future pensions, or the possibility of cancer. And when the rupture happened it could be followed in real time, unlike similar upheavals in the past. And I missed it all. Almost. I was commuting between Stockholm and Gothenburg during my first term as a professor. I stayed in a student room with no radio no TV. I had no daily paper, news were caught haphazardly on posted headlines. This is how I caught the news of the Berliner Wall, hurrying to a train. Most of it I read weeks after the fact in the New York Review. When now reading Judt, who was there when it all happened, I am jealous, regretful of lost opportunities. What prevented me from having done something similar? Travelled down where the action was. How much easier things are in retrospect, at the time the idea would have struck me as preposterous. There I was, absent father of three small kids, disgruntled wife, marriage on the rocks, miniscule apartment. The private world is bigger than the public. Or at least more immediate.

And was it such a wonderful thing after all? And what did the end of the Cold War really entail? The End of History? First and foremost it was a release from the terror of the Bomb. That terror of the Bomb was a thing in the head, because after all, after the break-up of the Sovietunion, one could argue persuasively that the risks of Nuclear disasters were actually larger than before. But no one really cared to be persuaded, the relief was just too sweet to be delivered from an axiety that had been paralysing, for some of us, essentially their whole lives. Secondly it was a reunification of Europe. I recall vividly an ephany on die Karlsbrücke in Prague in 1991. Looking up at the sky at a small plane and thinking that Czechoslovakia is now back in Europe. Eastern Europe, which for so long had been forgotten, was now being rediscovered. The people of Eastern Europe had not forgotten us, Judt writes, but we had forgotten them. I am not sure personally, but politically he has a point. During all the talks of the seventies about oppression and colonial powers and liberation, there was never any thought of Eastern Europe. At most there was some talk about overblown bureaucracy. The Prague Spring was a brief exception, but it was quickly forgotten, perhaps not by everyone. And those who spoke about the occupation of the Baltics, they were considered as extremists, people almost on the fringe, like dreamers of German unification. And thirdly it meant the liberation of my friends trapped in the East. Whose material privations I might have found idyllic and charming, but whose democratic privations I found humiliating and intolerable. Personally I had made a few forays into the East. The first being a trip to Moscow and Leningrad in 1968, where I had been struck by its poverty⁵⁹ and deeply touched by its implications. It was followed by another Mathematical Olympiade in Bucharest 1969. Rumania was then something of a Western darling. Ceaucescu had not participated in the clamp down in Prague the previous summer, in fact had he not also withdrawn from the Warzaw pact and diplomatically recognized Israel? Clearly our kind of guy. For almost twenty years his honeymoon with the West would last. He was showered with various honors, much

⁵⁹ Even worse than that of Italy, I remember reporting incredulously to my parents, still under the impression of an inhuman society, but a materially vigorous one

to the consternation of his flabbergasted subjects, fêted and humored. It was shameful, it was naive, but was it above all just cynical? At that time Western movies were shown in the country, we all thought it was liberalizing as it was allowing Western influences. Little we knew, although I recall once reading the fine print that Rumania was the most oppressive police states in all of Eastern Europe. At the time the information puzzled me, I did not know what to make of it. Ceaucescu was a good guy after all. Our kind of guy. My second encounter with Eastern Europe was DDR. This was ten years later, and I was more mature, and also thrown into a closer encounter with reality⁶⁰. It was within a few years followed by a second visit to DDR, a renewed visit to Bucharest in 1983, travelling by train through Hungary, and in 1984 a three week visit to Bulgaria. Especially the weeklong visit to Bucharest in 1983 was extremely depressing⁶¹. And that was it. Geography has changed. Those countries do not exist anymore.

And was it such a good thing after all? Habit is after all a very strong force in human affairs, just as inertia stabilizes the physical world. You might not like things, and you might prefer very different things, yet if it is part of your habit, it is nevertheless very dear to you. It is after all part of your identity, and what is after all the point of changing, if your identity changes as well? Does it even make sense? Time may in many ways have standing still in Eastern Europe, as I have been alluding to before, and this state of inertia had clearly strengthened the ties of habit. Thus the passing into supposed freedom carried a price, and a sense of loss. Kohl, who by the fall of the wall experienced his finest hour, moved decisively and systematically to a German Unification, against the feeble opposition of the British and above all that of the French. Not only was a unified Germany created, but one that belonged to the NATO. At the time I thought that this was impossible, only a unified neutral Germany would be feasible, German unification being a miracle by itself. Gorbachov woke up too late, imprisoned as he was by his own rhetorics, all what he could do was to win some last minute economical concessions from the West-Germans. And Kohl smiled. His wallet was padded after all. So the West-Germans, who had earlier been buying up small pieces and scraps of its Eastern cousin, now bought it up wholesale, paying off the Soviets as well. After all when everything is said and done, political as well as human relations, come down to economics. Or so they say? And so, back in 1991 I could observe the absurdity of Soviet troops driving back and forth on the roads in former DDR now part of NATO-land. Demoralized and dismissed troops, with no purpose, only waiting to be extricated back to a country that had no need for them, nor any resources to house them. So much for the invincible Red Army.

So was the freedom worth it? The personal freedom, the restoration of human rights, the freedom of speech and organization, the freedom to travel and the freedom from harassment of police surveillance, arbitrary arrest, corrupt trials, and other abuses of centralized power. Clearly it was worth it? Bad habit or not. But the economic freedom? And the wealth that was supposed to follow from it? Capitalism having won the war of ideology, was now reigning supreme, anything else was mere superstition. Thus free-falls and

⁶⁰ The seductive approaches of a married woman, turned out to involve a pleading for assisting in an attempt at escaping. Clearly I was being out of my depths, and I let the whole thing fizzle out.

⁶¹ Yet of course more than compensated by meeting for the first time a Bulgarian colleague, in the years to come my most knowledgeable guide.

shock-therapies. And rampant privatizations benefitting but a very narrow elite. Corruption and outright theft, because Capitalism without the underpinnings of a civil society is anarchy. The line between privatization and theft is thin indeed, as far as it exists at all. Public resources were simply squandered, and the beneficiaries were more often than not, the very same nomenklatura that had earlier been in charge. Habit is a strong force indeed, in particular the habit of power. The structure of democracy is not just a matter of fair elections, without a civil society, their outcomes are meaningless (yet one should not discount their symbolic importance). There is no such thing as a public will, except as an abstract figure of speech. Democracy is basically a method of resolving conflicts at all levels.

As you travel the Eastern Europe a decade or so after the liberation, you do not see vibrant economies or exultant populations. In Rumania depression is rampant, poverty shocking and openly flaunted. In comparison with the optimism of India or China, at least in their most vigorous parts thereof, the defects are glaring. One million people emigrated in the last few years from Rumania, a distraught colleague tells me. One million out of twenty, and most of them young, and the future of the country. In Bulgaria across the Danube, two million out of eight have so far emigrated. My Bulgarian colleague is less distraught, the matter is simply too far gone for that. And you can see it, as we hike in the mountains, entire small towns are depleted, almost no one lives there anymore, except the elderly and decrepit. This is 2002, maybe membership in the EU will help? The clearsighted shrug their shoulders. It will only buttress local corrupt elites, the former KGB. All what can be done is on an individual basis, making sure that the talented can leave. Admittedly Eastern Europe is not homogenous. Things in Poland look much better, after all throughout the Soviet Period, the Poles, constituting populationwise the most formidable of the Satellites, were left on comparatively slack leashes. The Catholic church was allowed latitude and hence became an alternative state. In Poland things, which would have landed you in jail in DDR or Bulgaria, could be openly discussed. Also the period of Solidarity was extended, the transition of the Poles were not sudden but gradual. It tended to weed out mere opportunists as those would eventually expose themselves as fortunes fluctated. I visited briefly in the fall of 1996. Walking around Warzaw was as 'comfortable' as in a Western city⁶². Of course the old time atmosphere is not eradicated, but it is not pervasive. The same can still be said of the former DDR, as I realized as recently as last summer on a bike-trip. No traces are left of the former impenetrable border, yet there is a subtle change as you pass through. It is in the nature of a smell, impossible to visualize and describe as well as hide. It will no doubt linger on for another generation, maybe longer, as deep cultural changes always tend to leave traces. The same can of course be said of Czechoslovakia, in many ways, at least for the Czech Republic, the most Western of the former Satellite countries. Prague is now a magnet for tourists, almost like a glitzy Disney theme park, with all the old Renaissance and Baroque architecture surviving unscathed and enhanced in the old city, and the 'Jugend' quarters of the outskirts. Eastern Europe provides many treasures for the sophisticated tourist with a nostalgic bent. One does not

⁶² Sadly I observed that private cars seems to have been the priority as to consumption. The automobile park was modern, much more so than in Sweden. The old 'Trabi' is a nostalgic museum-piece since many years.

need to seek out the most obvious. On the contrary, the backroads are the most rewarding.

But what is forgotten in the history of postwar Europe is that in the Czech Republic, as well as in Western Poland, the end of the war saw drastic ethnic cleansing. Millions of Germans were driven from their homes, where they had lived for centuries. By most standards an atrocity bound to leave deep scars of the social fabric. But of course by the standards set by the War, of peripheral concern. After all given the choice of losing your life or your home, most people would without hesitation chose the latter, although those to whom it happens, may at the time feel that the difference is moot⁶³. Such issues have now been completely forgotten in Postwar Europe, maybe they will one day resurface. It cannot simply have gone by without leaving a trace.

Ethnic cleansing is a word of recent vintage, a word most needed for some time it appears, as it is constantly being used retroactively. The occasion for its coinage is obvious. The Cold War never ended in a Nuclear disaster⁶⁴. Instead we got a little dirty war on the Balkan Peninsula, to the relief of almost everyone. The war was a puzzle to most people of the outside, but not to the residents themselves. A recapitulation of its tortured history would be out of place, let it be enough to recall that Yugoslavia, unlike the other Eastern European countries effected its own liberation from German troops. It granted Tito a lot of prestige, enabling him to stand firm against Stalin. Yugoslavia, along with that isolated anomaly of Albania⁶⁵ were never part of the Warsaw pact, and in fact never behind the Iron Curtain⁶⁶. This is a distinction most people did not make⁶⁷, but the Western powers certainly did, and Tito, although heading as internally harsh a regime as many of those of the Warsaw Pact, became a darling of the West, receiving a large section of American support. Relations between Yugoslavia and Soviet were very tense for the first years after the war, but normalized quickly, which may explain the lack of distinction I just referred to above. Internally the federation of states was a time-bomb, as many of the Yugoslavians were well aware of⁶⁸. And it all exploded in the early nineties and would dominate news for many years. We all learned the names of obscure towns, we were aghast

⁶³ And for most people, given the choice of losing their homes or of strangers losing their lives, will opt for the latter

⁶⁴ Although the dangers of this is not gone by the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, as noted above. On the contrary, the risks may be higher, but as they are hard to visualize, they play little role in public imagination.

⁶⁵ a tiny country, which by geographical accident happened to be situated in Europe, but had absolutely no interaction with it

⁶⁶ Although in the case of Albania it provided its own, but who cared?

⁶⁷ I recall (it must have been in 1977) an elderly American traveller in Viennas Südbahnhof, wanting to go across the border to Yugoslavia, just to enter a Communist country. To him the transition would be a big thing. The lady behind the counter shook her head. It will just look the same as on the Austrian side of the border. This was probably very true, and it struck me that Austria after all was a southern country, not a Northern one like one of its socially and politically related Scandinavian, more similar in parts to the Balkans than to Norway.

⁶⁸ I had quite a lot of contact with the members of the Yugoslavian team in Moscow 1968, and I was constantly being reminded of the precarious state of their country. I also recall an almost prophetic mage I had of some of them, driving around in a countryside in military trucks. In 1980 I watched the funeral

at the Serbs and routed for the Bosnians (even when they committed atrocities on their own, after all thugs who are on your side, we refer to as 'unsentimental'). But in spite of everything, compared to what had gone on in the War years, it seemed rather modest, and I must admit that I felt strangely indifferent to the whole mess⁶⁹. Every conflict has an explanation, at least in retrospect, the problem is that explanations can work as well both ways. There were conflicts of religion and culture, this is clear, but when it came to language, there were essentially none⁷⁰ except the conventions of using Latin or Cyrillics. For outsiders it all seemed like African tribal wars, which of course it was, but for those close, and that did not only involve the Yugoslavians, but related countries like Greece and Bulgaria, it was dead-earnest and the taking of sides was inevitable. It was a truly Balkan war, which under different circumstances might have engulfed the two neighbours mentioned above.

It ended after a decade, with a finale involving the only military operation that NATO ever was engaged in. An alliance conceived to fight the Third World-War finally reduced to fighting a Third-World War. Milosevic, was eventually brought to justice as a war-criminal⁷¹ and have ever since successfully defied the International Hague court with his antics. The farce has been going on for some years, and Milosevic is good for many more.

And so started, and so ended the only war on European soil since the end of the Second World War. So what is ahead. Peace and Prosperity? It makes for boring history, yet for a comfortable life. You have to make your choice. As to my own involvement as an eye-witness it is, as have been seen, very marginal. The eye-witness of the time maybe hamstrung by the fact that he does not see the whole picture and is deprived of the birds-eye view. On the other hand, as Hobsbawm remarks, the eye-witness is important, he can recall what normally is not documented, or tends to be obscured⁷² and guards against the cardinal sin of a historian, namely that of anachronism.

Most of history is only accessible through books, just a little segment of it, is part of your own. Of what part you have no choice, and ideally many of us, would have chosen other segments, more exciting ones⁷³. But we are stuck with what we are given. And in my case, and those of my contemporaries, this is our history.

Judt concludes his work with an epilogue on the growing awareness of the Holocaust. Contrary to some prevalent opinions, the Second World War was not a War to save the Jews, with the implicit implication that any country not on the side of the Allies was deeply morally flawed. For one thing, with the exception of Germany (and to some extent Britain and France bound by a commitment they probably would have liked not to have made), no

of Tito at the home of an Italian outside Pisa. He told me that now when Tito is dead the country will disintegrate within a few years.

⁶⁹ Except I recall one or two night-mares I had about the situation, waking up feeling gratified that I was not totally devoid of compassion after all.

⁷⁰ Excepting marginal parts of the conflict like Slovenia

⁷¹ Following an attempt of trying to fake a general election in Serbia 2000. My Bulgarian colleague was involved as an international observer and verifier, and expressed satisfaction of having, in his small way, contributed to justice and history, providing computer documentation of the voting.

⁷² As the anguish of the end of the world

⁷³ which also means more dangerous ones

countries entered the war unless they were attacked. War was about survival, any country that had the shadow of a chance to stay out of it, did so. And the questions of the Jews and extermination played no role at all. In fact rumours of the exterminations were played down, unless they would be conceived of as egregious anti-German propaganda. The true extent and implication of the Holocaust would take long to sink in. The immediate Postwar years had far more pressing demands. In the end it has, anachroistically been identified with the war. Judt wants to make the point that each country has to fully acknowledge their guilt and association with the crime, before those crimes can be put behind. Before things can be forgotten, the truth has to be established. The sad thing is that collaboration was rampant, almost no occupied country is without responsibility. Where there was no collaboration on this score (Judt mentions Denmark as maybe the only example) there were almost no Jewish victims. Some regimes like Vichy France collaborated, as mentioned above, with no prompting. He refers briefly to the Historikerstreit in Germany, with Nolte claiming that Nazism was a natural reaction against Bolshevism. For this he has been censured. Nazism was no ordinary crime, philosophers like Habermas claimed. It was unique and had no precedent. The problem is, that by such a purified stand, it escapes any historical study. It was perpetrated by humans after all, not by aliens from outer space. It must have roots, like everything else, and thus amendable to some kind of explanations, this not being morally the same as excuses. Important as those questions are philosophically and morally, still by any mean of the imagination they do not play any important role in everyday affairs and is, for better or worse no crucial part of Postwar European history.

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