

## Wider Europe

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Summary: Before 1989, the practical definition of success for countries under the Soviet yoke was straightforward: an end to communism and foreign domination. After 1989, success became securing the political freedom and prosperity that they had missed during their exile from European civilization. The greatest lesson from their past is that government must serve the people.

The countries of Central Europe must now lead the memorialization of the crimes of the communist era, remedy the European Union's democratic deficit, and reduce Eurovision and contemporary Hollywood to forgotten footnotes in western creative history. They must establish a culture of philanthropy and giving at every level of society and ensure that responses to the financial crisis do not render free enterprise impossible. This redefinition of success-as-leadership will be harder to realize than earlier successes, but they must persist, for their own future and that of their western cousins.

## A new view of success for Central Europe

by Joseph R. Wood<sup>1</sup>

President Obama recently paused to mark the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Normandy landings that began the final liberation of Western Europe from fascism. Elsewhere in Europe, two other anniversaries are notable this year: that of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that sought to divide Europe between two essentially similar forms of totalitarianism, and that of the fall of the Berlin Wall that ended that division. The West deserves credit for resisting, with blood and treasure, the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian powers. But while pressure from the "free world" contributed to the collapse of Soviet communism, the real credit for the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe, some 45 years after D-Day, goes to the people there. They never forgot that there was a truth that opposed the lie they were forced to live.

Before 1989, the practical definition of success for the countries under the Soviet yoke was straightforward: an end to communism and foreign domination. After 1989, success became securing the political freedom and prosperity that they had missed during their exile from European civilization. This meant a program of rapid reform to enable them to join the institutions that had succeeded in western Europe, the European Union, and NATO.

Now, the people of the region find that institutional acceptance is not a final stage of success. They confront a fear-

some financial crisis that threatens their newfound prosperity. They face threats ranging from energy dependence, to Russian growling about missile defense and NATO, to organized crime. They must fashion new criteria for success to avoid falling back from their earlier advances. While challenging times can compel countries to retreat and retrench, Central and Eastern Europe should instead plunge into new leadership roles.

In doing so, they should be guided by their experience. The greatest lesson from their past is that governments must serve people, rather than the reverse. States must provide the opportunity for individual persons to thrive. Respect for the integrity and life of the individual, with his or her responsibilities toward family and community, is the condition for the authentic success of any civilization. These countries should steer by that light to lead Europe in renewing the best of western civilization.

### Concretely, these nations should:

- *Lead the memorialization of the crimes of the communist era.* This already-begun project should seek a future where these crimes are understood, remembered, and taken as sources of caution rather than division. The effort must encompass Western Europe, where reluctance to acknowledge the left's role in sustaining these crimes has often minimized their

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horror (some European parliamentarians watered down an April resolution on this question). The project must not deteriorate into “competing victimhood” with the Holocaust, with its unprecedented methods and purpose, but should ensure that the full history of totalitarianism in its right and left forms is remembered.

- *Lead the way to remedy the European Union’s democratic deficit.* As relatively small newcomers, these nations play a modest role in Brussels. But collectively, they can push reforms to make the EU more accountable to individual citizens. The recent low turnout in European Parliamentary elections highlighted the need for Europe’s institutions to be made more relevant to its citizens. More relevance will entail more responsiveness.

- *Lead a cultural renaissance that reduces Eurovision and contemporary Hollywood to forgotten footnotes in western creative history.* Begin with education: replace stultified universities with genuine places of learning where the free exchange of ideas prevails, traditional standards of quality scholarship are respected and demanded, and truth and beauty are sought.

- *Establish a culture of philanthropy and giving at every level of society.* With appropriate tax incentives, prestige, and room to operate, private foundations and organizations can provide creative, intellectual, and charitable stimulus that is beyond the capacity of government. The new EU members should foster civil society in all sectors, from politics (where civil society has a good start) to personal welfare to the arts. Churches can play a major role in this effort and, by doing so, renew their own purpose and mission, especially if their traditional ties to state structures are loosened.

- *Ensure that responses to the financial crisis do not render free enterprise impossible.* These countries can recall that centrally planned economies produced little prosperity but ample degradation. Radical recentralization of economic power would be catastrophic for the region’s gains.

This redefinition of success-as-leadership will be harder to realize than earlier successes, given the sorry state of governance in some of these countries. They will have to grow beyond self-absorbed grievance politics. No doubt, the newer EU members will be told to shut up and remember their place. They must persist, for their own future and that of their western cousins.

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Joseph R. Wood joined the German Marshall Fund in November 2008 as Senior Resident Fellow. His work covers Europe, Eurasia, and transatlantic relations. From 2005 until coming to GMF, he was Deputy Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs at the White House, with responsibility for all policy involving Europe, Eurasia, and Africa. He is a retired Air Force colonel, and his career included operational and command fighter assignments in Korea and Europe; faculty duty in the Department of Political Science at the Air Force Academy where he taught U.S. foreign and defense policy; service at the Pentagon as speech writer for the Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force; two years as Special Advisor for Europe in the Office of the Vice President; and temporary assignments in the Joint Staff, the U.S. Mission to the Conventional Forces in Europe Talks in Vienna, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and NATO SHAPE Headquarters in Mons, Belgium. After retiring from the Air Force, he was appointed a member of the career Senior Executive Service at NASA Headquarters. He later worked as a Senior Defense Research Analyst at the RAND Corporation’s Washington office.

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