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INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION IN EUROPE

Introduction

Imperial power is a great stabiliser, pouring the oil of autocracy onto troubled waters of nationalism and ethnic rivalry. The Western powers accepted and even sustained the Ottoman Empire through the 19th century for just this reason.

By the same token the collapse of empire creates problems of peace and order. The disintegration of Austria-Hungary was a major factor in precipitating the First World War as the great powers of the day jostled to fill the vacuum, and to frustrate their rivals in that purpose. The break-up of the Soviet Empire has already sent shock waves through Europe. Yugoslavia risks descending into outright civil war, and there must be real concern about likely developments within the former Soviet Union itself over the next few years. Yet I remain hugely optimistic for three reasons.

1: The Circumstances of the Transformation of the Soviet Union

This has not been a bloody revolt, with subject states turning upon the imperial oppressor. Rather, we have witnessed a peaceful transformation which was almost wholly uncontested. It is as though the emperor himself suddenly confessed that he had no clothes. The Russian Republic is as delighted at its liberation as any of its neighbours.

2: The Role of the European Community

Far from jockeying for influence, the members of the European Community are acting with unprecedented unity. The Community, for example, encouraged the unification of Germany which might have seemed a fearful prospect to an earlier generation. It is negotiating agreements with the emerging democracies as a basis not just for trade and cooperation, but

for political relations. The European Community is not a closed, exclusive club. It stands ready to take in new members when appropriate applicants are ready to meet the full obligations involved.

Above all the European Community offers a model of how proudly independent states, some of great antiquity and determined to maintain their sovereignty, have come together with former enemies and ancient rivals to do certain things in common. That is a model which may well have relevance to the countries of the former Soviet Union.

A Community, modelled on the EC, in the former USSR ?

In these first months of freedom it will be tempting for the various Republics to assert their total independence of one another. The independent Republics of the former Soviet Union must recognise the absurdity of total economic and political isolation in today's world. The history of Central and Eastern Europe over the past two years perhaps already demonstrates the danger of abandoning all established patterns of trade at a time of fundamental political change - throwing away the baby with the bathwater. Not all the economic and structural ties which bound the former Soviet Empire need to be abandoned : many of them, indeed, could form the basis of new relationships with this essential difference from the old - that they are not imposed from above and sustained by force, but freely chosen, and sustained by law.

Economic recovery will be incomparably harder if the Republics start putting up trade barriers against one other; if they seek advantage through competitive subsidy; or if they establish separate currencies and begin the destructive game of competitive devaluation. The case for strong economic and political links is overwhelming.

This, of course, was the logic which led to the formation of the European Community 35 years ago. But the EC could not, of course, be an identical structure. The sheer size of Russia would require that there should be strong institutional safeguards for the other Republics. They might not wish to cooperate in every area in which the European Community has chosen to pool its resources; while in some fields such as defence they would start out with a level of integration which the European Community has not yet achieved. Nevertheless, I believe that a Community of Independent Republics of the former USSR could be a viable and desirable development.

The EC's Common Foreign and Security Policy

Until a few years ago the EC was essentially an economic institution. No-one looked to it for a political, let alone a military, lead outside its borders. Today, that has changed. The Community is seeking to develop a common foreign and security policy. The effort to broker a peace settlement in Yugoslavia is by far the most ambitious undertaking of such a kind ever attempted by the Community.

You may say the Community is overreaching itself by seeking to cut a figure on the international stage without the degree of political and military integration, and the level of commitment, which might make such an effort credible.

I draw the opposite conclusion. The Community is of course not a superpower. But that does not invalidate its efforts to develop a common foreign and security policy. On the contrary, recent events have demonstrated both the need for such a policy, and the inadequacy of the levels of integration in foreign affairs which have been achieved thus far. The lesson is that we should go further in this direction, not that we have made a mistake in trying to start on the road.

I firmly support the maintenance of a strong NATO. We welcome the American commitment to Europe, and your military presence on our continent. But that should not inhibit our efforts to develop a very much closer European integration so long as it is solidly in the NATO context. Indeed the US surely looks to Europe to shoulder a greater responsibility for its own defence, and for the maintenance of regional order. The European Community is the natural focus for such an effort. Yugoslavia provides a textbook example of the sort of crisis in which, for one reason or another, the Americans may choose not to commit forces on the ground, yet where they might welcome the deployment of European forces.

3: The International Context

Communism has failed, and has been seen to fail, not just in the Soviet Union, but throughout the world. Even where it staggers on, as it does in China, it is no more than a pretext for dictatorship. As a consequence of this realization, the world is no longer divided into ideologically opposed camps, and the United Nations can begin to play the role for which it was intended. The UN was an important factor, for example, in the Gulf Crisis. And I hope it can develop the mechanisms and the means to play a more decisive role in other areas of conflict or potential conflict.

Economically, the international community has an opportunity to establish a more liberal trading system which will be greatly to the advantage of the emerging democracies. The Uruguay Round has dragged on too long, for it is crucial to us all. The world needs clearer rules for the conduct of international trade; consistent application and enforcement of those rules; and greater transparency in their operation. Agricultural policy is in need of substantial reform in many countries, including the European Community. We need to extend the scope and the reach of the GATT to create fairer conditions of competition between countries, as well as within them.