Toward a 'European' Europe?

by JOHN P. McCARTHY

In the 1960's there has been serious talk of a European Third Force. Heretofore the expected agents of the depolarization of the world had been the newly independent nations of the Southern Hemisphere. Then experts (many very belatedly) became aware of the intensifying Sino-Soviet split. Now there is the discussion, at least, of a European assertion of independence from the United States. Is this a reality or is it purely a figment of the imagination of an egocentric General anxious to perform a tout de force in his last years? If it is a reality, then what are its implications for what we call Western Civilization?

In his Decline and Rise of Europe, John Lukacs argues that an independent Europe is a reality and that it represents an intensification of the values of Western civilization because Europe is resolving and surmounting many of the intellectual, social, and political crises and contradictions which have beset the West for the past five hundred years. According to Lukacs, the essential ingredient for this European Third Force has been the development of a European consciousness, that is Europeans thinking of themselves as Europeans, not just as citizens of particular nations in that geographic entity known as Europe but as members of a distinct culture known as European.

Furthermore, this man-in-the-street consciousness is more than the technical and artificial unity advanced by the social technocrats of the institutions of European unity: the EEC, the Steel and Coal Community, and, even, NATO. These admittedly good and necessary things no more stir European consciousness than Mayor Wagner's annual proclamations of New York having a summer festival stir New Yorkers. This consciousness does not contradict national cultures. Indeed, the successful political unification of Europe, Lukacs asserts, must be a federal system respectful of organic and historic differences and traditions, that is the Europe des patries of which De Gaulle speaks. Lukacs quotes André Gide to the effect that:

The true European spirit is opposed to the intoxication of nationalism; it is also opposed to that kind of depersonalization which is promoted by a superficial internationalism.

Nationalism is an important element in the development of the European consciousness. Admittedly this consciousness existed prior to the era of nationalism that commenced with the French Revolution and romanticism. However, this "Republic of Europe" was a concept of only the ruling aristocratic circles. It consisted mainly of the rules of a European state system (frequently contradictory of nationality) that the philosophes had fashioned as a remedy for the religious strife of the 16th and 17th centuries. Its cosmopolitanism appealed to the spokesmen of the Enlightenment, like Voltaire, who could remain indifferent to the partition of Poland and unopposed to the Enlightened Despots. The average man, however, was unconscious of any European or national culture, especially since the concept of Christendom had dissolved.

Nationalism, a socially organic force and inspired by historically conscious romanticists, made the dissolution of the state system inevitable. Originally this cultural nationalism was liberal, calling for self-determination, constitutionalism, liberty, and eventually a federation of free nations.

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A nationality was a group sharing a common culture. Unfortunately, this spirit of nationalism was corrupted and used as a weapon by states, often against nationalities. Then the ideas of racial nationalism, that is, the imposed unity of racially related but culturally disparate groups, arose and ultimately degenerated into racial supremacist doctrines. Such was the evolution that occurred in Germany from the revolution of 1849 through Bismarck to Nazism.  

Europe became dependent on such outsiders as the Russian, the American, and the British for her liberation from Nazism, and their policies at the time of the liberation are responsible for the present partition of Europe. With regard to the Russians (and this is what many readers will find objectionable) Lukacs disregards ideology as an important factor in determining policy. Their goals in Eastern Europe, he asserts, were no different from Tsarist goals. Furthermore, they had no specific ambitions in Western Europe, although they would have taken advantage of the very great post-war potential of domestic Communist revolutions. Indeed, even in Eastern Europe they were hesitant about the immediate imposition of the formal satellite regimes pending the clarification of Western policy.

Churchill, whom Lukacs greatly admires, was willing to recognize as inevitable Russian hegemony in the more Eastern parts of Europe, but thought that quick Western military moves in the closing months of the war could save considerable areas from the Red Armies. However, the Americans, combining a naive towards the Russians with a subsequent preoccupation solely with Western Europe, were opposed.

This purely defensive or containment policy in Europe makes America very culpable, in Lukacs’ eyes, for the European partition. Decisive action was not taken when possible in the closing stages of the War, and later preoccupation with the Nato defensive exigencies prevented the flexibility which might have resulted in a disengagement settlement at ripe periods in the late 1950s.

Despite her partition, Europe has emerged from the physical desolation that prevailed at the war’s end, which Lukacs tellingly describes. In contrast to the belief of most at the time, Western Europe has revived and attained economic and political self-sufficiency. This has been the result of several factors, perhaps foremost of which is the threat of a military takeover by the Russians who were feared more as non-Europeans than as Communists. Second was the massive and generous American assistance, which was accompanied by a certain “Americanization” of European culture, especially in popular tastes and a general feeling of pro-Americanism. However, Lukacs considers the former as superficial and not prevalent in the culture formation circles and the latter as not inconsistent with an independent European consciousness.

Lastly, there has been the political reconstruction and, to a degree, political unification of Europe under the guidance of such statesmen as Adenauer, De Gasperi, Schuman, Monnet, and Spaak. Like Ronald Steel in End of the Alliance (New York: Viking, 1964) Lukacs sees De Gaulle’s assertion of European independence as the logical culmination of this reconstruction.

Naturally Lukacs is definitely in the minority of American commentators in not viewing a “Grand Design” or “Atlantic Civilization” as the natural consequence of these developments. The Atlantic Civilization ideal is shared by both the right, who are concerned with Western unity against the Communist East, and the left, who are delighted with the social and political democratization of Europe and are anxious for American imitation of the European social welfare state. In Europe, the right is probably more pro-American (especially now that the issue of colonialism has become academic) and the left anti-American, a reversal of nineteenth-century attitudes.

Naturally, Lukacs does not suggest that the Atlantic ties, especially the military ones, are ready to be dissolved. To return to the central theme: what is the distinct European culture of which Lukacs speaks? Basically, it is apparent in “the relationship of the European mind to the rest of the world...”

1. Lukacs sharply points out that the ideological nationalism of Nazism was anti-nationalist, anti-patriotic, and anti-traditional. It was an artificial doctrine imposed on several cultures, and the Nazi sympathizers in other nations (especially in Eastern Europe), despite their nationalist labels were anti-patriotic, pro-German, and ultimately anti-European.
Europe, he believes, has entered into a post-
ideological period and is passing beyond:
the scientific phase of history, of the
Modern Age which the peoples of Asia
and Africa are now beginning to enter,
and in the middle of which the giant of
North America still finds itself entangled.

The European mind is finding the Baconian
view of the universe, the empiricist credo
that "knowledge is power," increasingly
irrelevant. The West "can no longer pro-
cede from the assumption that man's prin-
cipal business is the knowledge of his
environment." Instead, the reality of this
century suggests "that man's principal busi-
ness is his knowledge of man."

This is not anti-science sentimentalism,
but a recognition on a deeper level of what
the most important physical discoveries of
this century have revealed:

that an exclusively "objective" or a per-
fected "scientific" study of nature is im-
possible, because it is no longer possible
to exclude the human condition and the
human purpose of the scientific—of any
scientific—observation . . . The purpose
of human knowledge is new, clear, un-
understanding rather than certainty; and this
understanding must inevitably include some
kind of an understanding of ourselves.

Europe is emerging from the warfare
between science and religion, as even
a Christian-theist dialogue is becoming
possible in view of a common existential
recognition of man's problems and nature.
Furthermore, the notions of free will and
original sin, concepts alien to the Asian
mind and disavowed in the 19th-century
West:

are now recognized (if perhaps not in the
same rhetorical forms) by Europeans as
inescapable realities of the human condi-
tion, indeed, as part and parcel of the
European patrimony.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most
controversial aspects of this book, as in
Lukacs' A History of the Cold War, is the
dismissal of the importance of ideology as a
major Russian motive. However, that ques-
tion is to a degree irrelevant in this work
since it is not a chronological or analytical
history of East-West relations so much as
an analysis of an intra-Western phe-
omenon: the development of European con-
sciousness.

This type of work must necessarily employ
certain generalizations as well as labelings
to clarify and illustrate abstract concepts,
but such can be dangerous and does occa-
sion certain objections; for instance, there
is the description of an American periodical
as "McCarthyste, pro-German and some-
times mildly pro-Fascist."

The author may perhaps be too sanguine
in his suggestion that Europe has sur-
mounted the scientific age. If so, it is won-
derful. Also, might not the United States
catch up, especially, as Christopher
Dawson has often noted, with the increas-
ing intellectual importance of American
Roman Catholics?

The book would have been more satis-
ifying had it gone more into specific political,
diplomatic, and military consequences of
Europe's independence and its future rela-
tions with the Afro-Asian world. It is,
though, a thought-provoking and stimulat-
ing work, not susceptible to simple labeling,
and definitely iconoclastic in its treatment
of many of the prevalent idioms and gener-
alities about modern history and world affairs
formulated by "official" commentators and
research groups.

A CONSIDERABLY different book, both
in its approach and its conclusions is
the collection of papers read at a conference
in Wiesbaden under the partial sponsorship
of the Foundation for Foreign Affairs
of Chicago. Edited by David S. Collier
and Kurt Claser, Western Integration and the
Future of Eastern Europe deals specifically
with the coordination of Western policy,
and institutions as well as the attitude the
West should take toward the abnormal
situation in Eastern Europe.

The papers vary amongst themselves both
as to opinion and substance. Generally,
they tend to have the majority view of North
Atlantic unity in contrast to that of Lukacs.
For instance, there is that of Philip E.
Mosely, who is concerned with the greater
integration of military decision-making and
a greater European contribution to the alli-
ance, particularly to resolve American mon-
sory imbalances. Alfred Moyer, an execu-
tive official of the EEC Commission, is
troubled by the threat of "a political hegemony
which seeks to use economic integration
as an instrument of political domination" (obviously referring to France).
He believes that the members of the Common Market are being asked to abandon their democratic structure "for the trappings of sovereignty in the Europe of the Fatherlands."

The essay by C. E. Carrington, formerly of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, could be used as excellent evidence in presenting the case that Britain is possibly non-European. It is critical of any British willingness to join an inward regional economic association like the Common Market if it would be at the expense of her Commonwealth ties. He reports the widespread British belief that Macmillan's quest for EEC membership was based on political or strategic rather than economic motives. Carrington doubts the prudence of this. He admits that NATO is a necessary strategic device for Britain at present. However, should the danger seem to block disappear, he believes, "our political involvement in Europe would lose much of its purpose." The partition of Europe is seen "as a local problem to be solved, finally, by those nations which have to live with it." Britain's NATO membership is purely for defensive purposes, and Britain views the Cold War more in political than ideological terms. She has had a traditional attitude to resist Russian expansion in certain areas "regarded as the British sphere of influence. Were it not for the Warsaw Pact Britain would "be prepared for terms of complete friendship with those European countries "which are now described as satellite nations of Soviet Russia." This is similar to Chamberlain's remark about the horror of having to prepare for war "because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing"; an attitude, John Lukacs suggests:

that seemed to prove to Europeans over and over again that the Channel was wider than the Atlantic.

Baron von Guttenberg, a member of the German Parliament, eloquentlyattributes the cause of the Cold War to the expansionist policy of Communism, a thing which still persists despite "impatient and wishful thinking within our own camp". Wenzel Jaksch, a Socialist member of the German Parliament, suggests an economic offensive policy by the Common Market countries as a means of enhancing the dissolution of the Soviet Eastern European system. The attempts by satellite governments to assert economic independence from Russia could be encouraged by Western assistance and trade, provided there be comparable political concessions ranging from amnesty for political prisoners to freedom for opposition parties.

Colonel F. O. Mikesch persuasively defends the force de frappe and argues the costly MLF would fail to give Europe any ultimate say in the use of atomic weapons. He laments the Western subordination of policy determination to technology. He suggests that policy flexibility would be increased by European possession of atomic weapons as well as by an expansion of conventional forces of the type that exist in Switzerland and Sweden. In a philosophical-historical essay, Louis-Henry Parsis, in a vein similar to Lukacs, discusses the evolution of European consciousness as well as its possible disruption by both the USSR and the USA.

Stefan T. Possony, firmly committed to the Atlantic Alliance, discusses at length the rules or principles which should govern the interdependence of its members, urging the development of supra-national attitudes and permanent mechanisms of interdependence. Much of the earlier part of the essay is too technical, but the latter part where he pleads for a unity of objectives for NATO, the foremost of which should be the ultimate end of Communism, is exciting. He does not urge a military offensive, but insists on sufficient NATO strength to defend the evolutionary liberalizing trends in Eastern Europe against a Communist or Russian fostered "counter-revolution."

There are several more essays on the same themes: Western unity, firm opposition to Communism, American attitudes, and Eastern Europe's future. The book is somewhat uneven in quality, but on the whole the contributions are imaginative and thoughtful. The major tone of the book is the belief that man's destiny can be effected by himself and that there are definite political moves that can be taken to advance human liberty. This is in striking contrast to the curious attitude of many so-called "Liberals," who are fatalistic about Eastern Europe; who, indeed, use "realpolitik" or "Metternichian" arguments to rationalize the subjugation of half of Europe.