

Policy Analysis

FLAWED DEMOCRACIES

The Dubious Political Credentials of NATO's Proposed New Members

by Thomas M. Magstadt

Executive Summary

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, conceived as a military barrier to the spread of communism in Europe, was always portrayed as more than a traditional military alliance. From its inception, NATO cultivated the image of an alliance of democracies. Although reality did not always fit that image, the democratic ideal was always present.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO has redefined its purpose: it now purports to be first and foremost an association of constitutional democracies committed to the common defense of democracy itself. The wisdom of expanding the alliance, which is extremely dubious from the standpoint of U.S. strategic interests, seems dubious on political grounds as well. According to NATO's own declared standards, there needs to be certainty that prospective entrants have a genuine and unshakable commitment to democratic values, individual liberty, and the rule of law. That certainty is lacking with regard to all three candidate members.

The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland deserve high marks for the progress they have made toward liberal democracy, but the process of transition in all three countries is far from complete. Authoritarian elements from the communist era still control the administrative bureaucracy, including the military, the intelligence agencies, and the educational system. All three countries, even the much-praised Czech Republic, have alarmingly weak civil societies and less than robust democratic political cultures. Admitting fragile, unfinished democracies to NATO may undermine the prospects for long-term freedom and stability. NATO might also have to face the embarrassment (or worse) of dealing with a member that had regressed into authoritarianism.

Thomas M. Magstadt, an adjunct professor of political science at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, has spent the past four years in the Czech Republic and writes for the Prague Post.

Introduction

On the eve of the July 1997 NATO summit meeting at Madrid, where the decision to bring the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland into the alliance was formalized, Secretary General Javier Solana commented, "In many ways, we were condemned to act." Solana's explanation for that rather startling assertion was twofold. First, the failure to enlarge NATO, he said, would "freeze the old lines of division between East and West." Second, "Now that these countries have embraced democracy and all of its values, we have a moral obligation to open our doors to them."¹ His emphasis on "democracy and all of its values" accurately reflects NATO's new look.

That marks a significant change from the Cold War era. True, NATO always portrayed itself as an alliance of democracies, but the reality was that it frequently took in members with less than sterling democratic credentials--if their strategic value was deemed sufficient. Portugal, for example, was a dictatorship when it joined NATO as a founding member in 1949 and remained so until the mid-1970s. Greece and Turkey were hardly paragons of democracy at the time of their admission, and matters grew worse thereafter. A brutal military junta ruled Greece between 1967 and 1974, and the Turkish military ousted civilian governments on several occasions with no penalty imposed by NATO's democratic powers. The strategic importance of the two countries overrode any concerns about democracy that NATO leaders may have harbored. Even Spain might have become a founding member of the alliance if it had not been for dictator Francisco Franco's brazen tilt toward Hitler during World War II. The new emphasis on democracy suggests that the existing NATO powers will not be as willing to compromise their principles in the future.

Whether NATO or any other alliance is worthwhile to the United States ought to be judged by the alliance's relevance to vital American security interests. In other words, the political pedigree of Washington's partners should not be the determining factor. If, for example, an expanded NATO does not benefit the security of the American people, it matters little whether the other members are stable democracies. The advocates of NATO expansion, however, have placed great importance on the political factor, contending both that Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic deserve to become members of the alliance because of their transition

to democracy and that NATO membership will consolidate democracy in those countries and beyond. Even when expansion is judged on that basis, the inclusion of the three nations is inconsistent with NATO's own criteria.

This paper examines the democratic credentials of the three candidate members. It concentrates on the Czech Republic's transition and identifies the obstacles to a more complete democratic transformation. The focus on the Czech Republic is appropriate, since it is universally regarded as the most successful and advanced of the three candidates for NATO membership. If the Czech Republic is less than a complete success, the problems are almost certain to be worse in Poland and Hungary.

There are several questions about the reality (and limits) of democratic liberalism in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. First, do the prospective NATO members have the political institutions and basic political norms of democracy (e.g., free and fair elections) in place? Second, even if they do, what about the more subtle but nevertheless important features of a healthy democratic political culture (e.g., an administrative bureaucracy committed to democracy and a general population committed to the rule of law)? And finally, what about the basic features of a healthy civil society? Strong and accessible nongovernmental institutions and civic-conscious norms of behavior are crucial to every stable democracy. We cannot expect (nor would we want) a cop on every corner to make sure that theft, vandalism, extortion, and a whole range of dangers to the public safety are not pandemic.

Unfortunately, the evidence indicates that the candidate members of NATO are deficient on both the second and third counts. Despite outward signs of progress, all three--even the highly touted Czech Republic--still face a wide array of economic, social, and political obstacles to the consolidation of democracy. Perhaps the most nettlesome problem of all is how to change a deeply embedded set of attitudes, habits, and values--a political culture--that predisposes a majority of the population (including the young) to reject many of the assumptions that underlie a flourishing, law-based, liberal society. Those are problems that will not be solved by membership in a military alliance.

The Czech Republic: Velvet or Velcro?

The Czech Republic, until recently under the leadership of Prime Minister Václav Klaus, Eastern Europe's staunchest opponent of state regulation and market restrictions, has been widely hailed as a model for the other former communist states in the region.² Much of that reputation is deserved. Nevertheless, the Velvet Revolution has gradually given way to a velcro political culture--a problem that the Klaus government failed to address or even recognize publicly, despite repeated admonitions from President Václav Havel. That was symptomatic of a larger problem. Although Prime Minister Klaus initially sought to enlist public support for his economic program and his political party (by visiting virtually every village), his leadership style became inexorably more aloof, arrogant, and authoritarian. Indeed, as time went on, he frequently expressed contempt for public opinion and the importance of public dialogue on policy issues, an attitude that had troubling implications for a new and untested democratic system. More directly to the point, he stated that he saw no reason for dialogue on the question of Czech membership in NATO, which polls in mid-1997 showed that only 40 percent of the public clearly favored:

Ask prime minister Vaclav Klaus if the people of the Czech Republic need to know more about what it will mean for their country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and he instantly wants to end the conversation. "I'm not interested," he said, seconds into the interview, as he reached to stab a tape recorder silent. "I don't see any point. I'm absolutely sure they are sufficiently educated. . . . To me, education of people is not a real issue."³

Such manifestations of arrogance ultimately helped bring down the Klaus government in November 1997.⁴ There is also disturbing evidence that Klaus's disdain for public input was not unique.

The Czechs' fledgling democracy has been quite stable since its inception in 1992, but the country's democratic transformation is incomplete and the process has stalled. The Velvet Revolution of 1989 is now a receding memory. One searches in vain for velvet in this society ruled so recently by almighty communist apparatchiks, many of whom remain

entrenched in positions of economic and political power.

The tendency of old habits and values to stick to the social fabric of postcommunist societies is a common problem that afflicts even the most advanced transitional states in Eastern Europe. Without exception, the democratic revolution in those countries is unfinished. In the Czech Republic, despite its commitment to market reforms, key institutions and values that undergird a stable democracy remain disturbingly anemic. Those include (1) a robust middle class, (2) a broad range of community-based organizations and private associations capable of mediating between state and society, and (3) a new culture of citizenship suffused with such democratic values as honesty, civility, and respect for individual rights and property. If the Czech Republic--widely considered the most Westernized nation in Central and Eastern Europe--has not yet built a strong civic culture consistent with its democratic aspirations, it is highly unlikely that any of the other former communist states, including Poland and Hungary, have succeeded in doing so.

Signs of decay in public morality are visible on all sides in the Czech Republic. Petty crimes and disrespect for the law are blatant and common; even people who do obey the laws look away when others break them--often in broad daylight. The failure to accept responsibility for creating and perpetuating a decent civic order is one of the demons of the past that must be exorcised if Czech democracy is to thrive.

Civic rehabilitation depends, in the first instance, on whether the government can win popular trust. The public at present has little confidence, not only in politicians, but in the political process, the police, and the legal system. Former communists run government ministries, universities, banks, and industrial complexes. Well-publicized banking scandals, stock frauds, and rampant official corruption are symptoms of deeper problems.⁵

Havel's famous collection of essays, Living in Truth, written at a time when his reward for literary effort was more likely to be the prison in Plzen (Bory) than the palace in Prague, is still worth reading, but most Czechs are not interested in what President Havel thinks or says these days.⁶ (Often his speeches are not published even in the leading newspapers.) The problem for Czechs who long to

live in truth--and liberty--is that the hopes inspired by the Velvet Revolution have faded into political cynicism and corruption.

The problems facing the Czech Republic are not unique. Hungary and Poland exhibit many of the same "hangover" symptoms, a common legacy of communist rule. Foreign policy formulation in Washington and other Western capitals has focused almost exclusively on politics and economics, leaving the important dimensions of social and cultural change largely unexamined. As a result, the extent of liberalization in Eastern Europe has been greatly exaggerated. The West should adopt a wait-and-see attitude toward Eastern Europe, stressing the need for further development of the much-neglected civic and social foundations of democracy. In particular, the U.S. Senate ought to use its constitutional "advise and consent" power to apply the brakes to the NATO-expansion train before it is too late.

The Czech Transition: A Qualified Success

There is good reason why the Czech Republic is frequently cited as an exemplary case of free enterprise and parliamentary democracy in the new Eastern Europe. Indeed, the Czechs have succeeded in doing what even neighboring Poland and Hungary--also widely regarded as success stories--have failed to do: they have made a remarkably smooth economic transition from a command to a market-oriented economy and an equally smooth simultaneous transition from a one-party totalitarian dictatorship to a multiparty parliamentary democracy. That two-track transition has been achieved without the zig-zag course of economic policy so glaringly apparent in Russia or the political oscillations between governments run by anti-communists and ones run by former communists that have occurred in Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere.

The political record of the Czechs is all the more remarkable because it has been accomplished in spite of the breakup in 1992 of the former state of Czechoslovakia--a state that, like Yugoslavia, was created (and remained intact except for the period of Nazi occupation) after the end of World War I. (Unlike Yugoslavia, however, Czechoslovakia consisted of only two main ethnic groups whose languages and culture are so similar that in the minds of many impartial observers they are, in fact, one.) Today, there

is surprisingly little rancor between the Czech and Slovak populations in the Czech Republic or Slovakia. Indeed, there is palpably more tension between Slovakia and Hungary (stemming largely from discrimination against ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia) than between the two governments of the former Czechoslovakia.

As builders of a new liberal order, the Czechs are in a class by themselves. Under the leadership of Havel and Klaus, odd bedfellows by any reckoning, some 80 percent of the Czech economy was either wholly or partially privatized by 1995, for which Prague was rewarded in that same year by becoming the first postcommunist member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.⁷ Throughout that

Table 1
Economic Indicators

Country	GDP (\$ billions)	GDP per Capita (\$)	Population (millions)	GDP Growth (percentage)	Inflation (percentage)
Czech Rep.	57.4	5,570	10.3	5.5	8.2
Hungary	48.1	4,720	10.2	3.5	19.0
Poland	152.3	3,930	38.7	5.2	18.1
Slovakia	21.0	3,870	5.4	4.6	10.0

Source: "The World in Figures: Countries," in The World in 1997 (London: The Economist, 1996), p. 86. All figures are 1997 forecasts.

difficult period of steadily rising prices and diminishing state subsidies, the coalition government led by Klaus held together and maintained a steady economic course. Poland and Hungary have also undertaken bold free-market reforms and established multiparty parliamentary rule, but neither country has been able to achieve the level of governmental and political stability found in the Czech Republic. Slovakia's performance has been far less impressive by any measure.

Using dollar exchange rates, the Czech Republic's projected gross domestic product per capita in 1997 was the highest in Eastern Europe (see Table 1).⁸ Judged by other macroeconomic measures of vitality, notably inflation, the Czech economy looks equally healthy. In addition, unemploy-

ment is very low--around 3 percent in 1995, compared to 15 percent in neighboring Poland. Indeed, the Czech jobless rate is one of the lowest in Europe, east or west. That relatively rosy picture stands in sharp contrast to a floundering Bulgaria, for example, where GDP fell by an estimated 10 percent in 1996, the inflation rate has skyrocketed, and unemployment is expected to have reached 14 percent in 1997.⁹

The Czech Republic has also been a model of political stability. The government operates as a full-blown parliamentary democracy under a constitution patterned after those of Western countries. The Czech constitution created a dual executive in which an indirectly elected president plays an important role in the realm of foreign policy and performs symbolic and ceremonial functions, but the paramount powers of governance are exercised by a prime minister who must have majority support in the parliament.¹⁰ Free and unfettered elections have taken place on several occasions in the Czech Republic since 1989 without any hint of fraud or ballot-box irregularities. That is the side of Czech political society Westerners understand best and frequently (and justifiably) applaud.

But there is another side, less well understood in the West, that is troubling. We should not be surprised to discover that there are still holes in the foundation of the new democracies in Eastern Europe. In the Czech Republic, those holes are gaping but hidden from the eyes of outsiders by a rich and multilayered culture few cizinci (foreigners) ever penetrate.¹¹

The Elusive Middle Class

The importance of a broad middle class to the health and vitality of a democratic state has been recognized by political thinkers for a very long time. Aristotle, for example, argued that the best possible (as opposed to the best imaginable) form of government in most cases was a "polity," or constitutional system, that combined elements of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. Such a mixed regime, he believed, would give the middle class a key role in the government--that of mediating between the rich (whom they admire without resenting) and the poor (whom they pity without either fearing or embracing). That type of regime would be the best way of achieving equilibrium between the

class interests of the two extremes, especially where the middle class was large. The middle class, he reasoned, was not so affluent as to lack all sympathy for the poor nor so destitute as to seek to dispossess the rich. Moderate wealth would produce moderate political opinions.¹² The history of modern democracy cautions against any revision of that ancient insight. Indeed, the existence of a well-developed middle class is viewed by many political observers as one of the key correlates of democracy.¹³

Much has been written about the damage done by decades of communism to public morality, the human spirit, the economy, and the environment. Fixing the economy and the environment is a daunting task. Repairing the social, psychological, and moral damage is no easier. Of particular relevance to this study is the need to create the conditions for the reemergence of a legitimate entrepreneurial stratum, including managers and professionals committed to market principles (e.g., free and fair competition, deregulation, consumer protection, and customer satisfaction), that can serve as the nucleus for and champion of a new middle class.

Throughout Eastern Europe, one searches in vain for a strong middle class. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland--despite far-reaching economic reforms--are no exceptions. Nor is the absence of that class a surprise, given the long domination of the region by Marxist-Leninist political regimes. It is no secret that Marx viewed the middle class with disdain or hatred. Marx's heirs in Russia and Eastern Europe were equally hostile to the middle class, but unlike Marx they found themselves in a position to act on that bias. And act they did. Whatever nascent middle class existed in the countries where communism came to power was extinguished. Czechoslovakia, which established after World War I the only democracy the Slavic world had ever known, did have a thriving middle class before the German occupation in 1939, but the remnants of the Czech middle class that survived the Holocaust were obliterated after 1948. As a result, the growth of a middle class in the Czech Republic since 1989 has had to begin almost from square one.

During the communist era, there was an intermediate social stratum between the privileged oligarchy and the proletarianized mass. That stratum (usually called the intelligentsia) consisted of artists, writers, scientists, and academicians favored by the regime. Although its mem-

bers often enjoyed a higher standard of living than did ordinary workers or peasants, the intelligentsia did not champion liberal causes, did not cultivate an entrepreneurial culture, and did not constitute the nucleus of a broader middle class in Czechoslovakia or anywhere else within the Soviet bloc. As the possible nucleus of a middle class, the intelligentsia in the communist states had glaring defects. First, it was a powerless group with no rights; the privileges that its individual members were given could be arbitrarily withdrawn at any time. Second, the intelligentsia did not include a legitimate entrepreneurial element--normally the vanguard of an emerging middle class. Third, the intelligentsia in Soviet bloc countries lacked the peculiar mix of values and virtues normally exhibited by the middle class: initiative, pragmatism, self-reliance, optimism, inventiveness, a propensity for risk taking, civic-mindedness, a strong work ethic, and so on.

In The New Class, Milovan Djilas, onetime confidant of Yugoslavian dictator Josef Broz Tito, turned class analysis against the very Communists who claimed to own it, arguing forcefully that the communist rulers had created a new political class in place of the old aristocracies they had crushed.¹⁴ At the same time, those regimes homogenized and proletarianized the general population by equalizing wages and salaries, by constructing monomorphic mass housing complexes, and by abolishing virtually all forms of independent organization in society (small businesses, parochial schools, service clubs, and the like). Everybody worked for the state; nobody worked for a profit--at least not legally. There was little incentive to innovate, and the concept of customer service was virtually nonexistent. No enterprise, no matter how inefficient, ever failed; except for political dissidents, workers were rarely fired; virtually every necessity of life was subsidized. There was scant point in saving, no opportunity to invest, and precious little to buy. In short, the ideological and material conditions for sustaining or creating a middle class simply did not exist.

That gray picture is an accurate reflection of the past from which Eastern Europe is now struggling to escape. The Czechs may have a head start economically because Czechoslovakia under communism was the best of a bad lot. Although Czech pensioners remember queuing to get staples, Czechs were to some extent spared the meager subsistence lifestyle that communism brought to so much of Eastern Europe. Also, because the Czechs had had a democracy for two decades

between the first and second world wars and consider themselves culturally part of the West, they had an advantage over other Slavic countries (and non-Slavic Hungary and Romania) in throwing off the communist heritage.¹⁵

Finally, building blocks for a Czech middle class were not entirely absent at the time of the Velvet Revolution. For example, many Czechs were and are landowners. Working-class Czechs rent or own a flat in the town or city where they work, but many also own a modest cottage (often without running water or central heat) in the country. The typical chalupa (cottage) is intended for seasonal, weekend habitation. There is a mass exodus from the cramped sidliste (high-rise housing projects) to the bucolic countryside every Friday afternoon during all but the coldest winter months. That phenomenon is not new or remarkable per se: Czechs were living in much the same way under communism. But with the ideological taboos against "bourgeois materialism" now gone and independent building firms that specialize in single-family houses springing up, the fact that lot-sized land parcels are already broadly distributed in the Czech Republic creates the possibility for a new middle class based on private home ownership. Nevertheless, it remains just a possibility at present.

The Nature of Civic Order

In the Czech Republic, the very names of two of the parties in the governing coalition from 1992 to 1997--the Civic Democratic Party and the Civic Democratic Alliance--stress the importance of the "civic" element in democracy.¹⁶ Both are offshoots of the defunct Civic Forum, the vanguard of the Velvet Revolution. It was no accident that Havel, the leader of Civic Forum in 1989, placed civic regeneration at the heart of the revolution he inspired. Unfortunately, as president his inspiration ran its course at warp speed, and the politicians who have run the country exhibit no interest in improving the nation's civic health.¹⁷

It is axiomatic that democracy thrives on a competitive economy. A healthy free-market system imparts a general sense of well-being to the population by bringing a measure of prosperity within reach of all who are willing to work for it. It also fosters a desire for individual decision-making in the political as well as the economic arena. That is why economic success in many East Asian and Latin Ameri-

can countries has been followed by pressure for greater political pluralism.

Nonetheless, in the political climate fostered by the triumph of capitalism over communism there is a tendency to exaggerate the role of economics in underpinning democracy. Where democratic institutions have a long, unbroken history--as in the United States or Great Britain--the presence of a supportive civic (or political) culture is too often taken for granted. When that happens, the seminal importance of such a culture can easily be overlooked. And yet the absence of norms associated with a civic culture of the kind typically found in established constitutional democracies is the most glaring defect of democracy in the former communist states, including the Czech Republic.

Civic culture in a democratic setting has at its core a clear concept of citizenship--a commonly accepted definition of what it means to be a good citizen. In a healthy democracy, most people take the ideal of citizenship seriously even if they sometimes fail to live up to it. The idea itself is a simple one: a good citizen is honest and trustworthy, obeys the laws, respects the rights of others, and so on. What seems self-evident to most Americans, however, often sounds incredibly naive to people who have never lived in a real democracy--East Europeans, for example. Czechs did live in a democracy once before, but that experience was apparently too short and too long ago (1919-39) to have made a deep and enduring imprint. More disturbing, Czech society has not shaken off the more recent past or shed the habits engendered by 40 years of communist rule. Those habits, and the history that nurtured them, are anathema to democratic self-government.

Symptoms of Civic Disorder

Leaders in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary ought to be far more concerned about the unfinished work of building democracy at home than about trying to achieve aims and goals of dubious value abroad--for example, rushing into NATO. Although the Czechs are often seen (and often see themselves) as the pacesetter in Central Europe, any claim they may have to being either a transitional model for other East European states or a postcommunist nation deserving fast-track treatment by the European Union and other Western institutions will be squandered if the beliefs, habits, and

reflexes of the Czech citizenry cannot be reformed to mesh with the machinery of democracy and fit the contours of liberty. That reformation is the next test facing the Czech Republic, and by far the most critical one since the fall of communism.

Graft and corruption in high places became a serious stain on the record of the Czech government (long before Prime Minister Klaus was implicated in November 1997). No government can excuse itself from a share of the responsibility when society lacks the moral fiber and the structural integrity that are the hallmarks of a healthy civic order. It is particularly damning when a parade of society's most privileged and public figures sets the worst example. Organized crime is a blight not only in the Czech Republic but also in Hungary and Poland, where it is even more pervasive and corrosive. Crime is a huge problem in Hungary, where the general breakdown of law and order has led to a "street-level brand of terrorism" in "once-peaceful neighborhoods." Not only do mafia-type organizations "dabble in traditional rackets such as drugs, prostitution, gambling, and extortion, but they have also earned hundreds of millions of dollars from smuggling heating oil, stolen cars, and even nuclear materials."¹⁸

True, other democratic societies (even stable and secure ones) exhibit some of those undesirable traits. But nations in which democracy has been entrenched for decades are markedly less susceptible to destabilization because of such problems. Moreover, it is the severe and pervasive quality of negative behavioral patterns in the Czech Republic and the other candidates for NATO membership that is so troubling.

The Entrenched Communists

"The more things change, the more they stay the same," may be a French adage, but it fits the predicament facing Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians. Many citizens believe (not without good reason) that former Communists continue to control the levers of political, economic, and financial power--even in the Czech Republic where the electorate has never voted them back into power. Most Czechs also believe that opportunistic ex-Communists have prospered more than any other single group in Czech society, including members of organized crime syndicates, and (though it sounds far-

fetched) that the Velvet Revolution was the final communist conspiracy, a false revolution secretly backed by cynical power brokers who believed that communism had become an albatross around the neck of the very ruling class it had spawned. According to that conspiracy thesis, scuttling the old system opened the door to vast and previously unattainable personal riches for the apparatchiks.

That issue is extremely difficult to address, not least because of the thick fog surrounding the whole question of who was--and who was not--a committed Communist. Nowadays, few Czechs openly admit to having been party members. That lack of candor easily deepens already festering suspicions. For example, there is a persistent (and unsubstantiated) rumor in the Czech Republic that Klaus at one time belonged to the Communist Party. And as if the question of party membership is not dicey enough, there is always the question about why prominent people joined. Many "Communists" were not true believers; they simply signed up because failure to do so was not career enhancing. Of course, East Europeans everywhere, Czechs included, understand that such conduct occurred. But understanding is one thing; excusing, accepting, or forgiving is quite another.

The public perception that communist holdovers continue to run things no matter which party is officially in power would be a serious obstacle to the emergence of a healthy civic culture even if it were unfounded, which, unfortunately, it is not.¹⁹ Although a highly publicized lustration was undertaken to ferret out and remove from office former Communists in the Czech Republic, and later in Poland, those purges were neither wide nor deep. The lustrations primarily hit individuals implicated in the nefarious activities of the old secret police. In the Czech Republic--and in Poland, as well--such inquiries stopped far short of what many citizens would have preferred.

Thus, there has been little real catharsis and therefore little real closure in any of the three countries under consideration for NATO membership.²⁰ As a result, the wrongs done in the past by officials on all levels continue to haunt the governments and bureaucracies of those countries. In Poland and Hungary, the electoral success of "reconditioned communist-era parties" illustrates both the ambivalence of the public toward democracy and the continued access of communist holdovers to high office. The associated political instability and civic disorientation have been

conveniently ignored by the Clinton administration and other advocates of NATO expansion.

The Polish parliamentary elections in September 1997, in which voters delivered yet another shock, illustrate the point. Having earlier rejected onetime Solidarity hero Lech Walesa for ex-Communist Alexander Kwasniewski and voted out a centrist government in favor of one led by two ex-communist parties, the electorate did an about face and voted in a new conservative government "based on the [Solidarity] trade union that vanquished communism."²¹ The Economist wrote, "The single idea that ties it all together--and the main source of passion in a lacklustre election campaign--is resentment of an ex-communist elite that seemed to profit more than anyone else from Poland's revolution."²² The election in this view demonstrated the Poles' "appetite for justice." What is particularly interesting for the present discussion is The Economist's interpretation of what lay at the root of voter discontent:

Like the rulers of many ex-communist countries, Poland's bosses have a talent for confounding public and private interests, for muddling up favoritism with competition, for letting politics wander where it should not, above all for accumulating power. They have packed Poland's state-owned companies with nomenklatura cronies. State broadcasting is firmly under Warsaw politicians' thumbs. So is regional government: the 49 voivodships, the tier between local and central administration, are in [sic] the gift of central government. This system of cosy patronage is inefficient as well as unjust. The ex-communist establishment is creating what has been called a "network economy," not a competitive one.²³

Also, it is noteworthy that grandiose efforts by the ex-Communists to wash out the past by investigating party members accused of collaboration with the former Soviet Union obviously failed to impress Polish voters.²⁴ Given the high levels of cynicism found in all the formerly communist societies, such efforts may even have backfired.

The extent of communist holdovers in the bureaucracies of all three countries also poses a subtle but significant problem for the political health of the new democratic systems. That is especially true of personnel entrenched in

the military and the security services. Journalist Aviezer Tucker notes one of many disturbing manifestations in the Czech Republic.

The voting pattern in the military is completely different from that in the general population; in the 1996 elections, 38 percent voted for the Social Democrats, 18 percent for the Communist Party, 14 percent voted for Klaus's Civic Democratic Party, 14 percent voted for the neo-fascist "Republican" party, and 9 percent voted for the junior members of Klaus's coalition. Allowing for the votes of ordinary men, who are universally conscripted for one year of military service, it appears that more than one-third of Czech security services have extremist anti-democratic views.²⁵

Yet, as Tucker notes, replacing personnel in the police and military (and the judiciary and educational systems as well) "is not even under discussion."²⁶

Criminality and Political Corruption

Organized crime is a huge problem not only in Russia, where it has been in the international spotlight, but throughout the former Soviet bloc. Of course, that problem is not, in itself, proof of political immaturity, but it points to another, closely related problem: the public in those countries does not trust the police--one of the legacies of a past when the "knock on the door in the middle of the night" became a metaphor for the universal dread of arbitrary arrest and punishment. The mixing of law enforcement and politics, one of the hallmarks of Soviet-type regimes, had a devastating effect on respect for the police and the law wherever communism held sway. So far, that damage has not been adequately repaired in any of the East European countries, including the Czech Republic.

In Hungary, where "communism's demise and mass border openings unleashed a torrent of organized crime," the police response to the problem has been characterized by a leading Hungarian criminologist as "a macho communist-era holdover where the police 'are used as tools, not as brains.'"²⁷ Again, the perception of a communist-style police force operating in a supposedly democratic society is not wide of the mark: "The government, careful not to criticize the

powerful 31,000 member police force, has been reluctant to revamp its structure and leadership. Meanwhile, corruption is said to be rampant among younger officers, and human-rights observers accuse police of using excessive force on suspects to coerce confessions."²⁸

Certainly, public trust is not enhanced when top officials in the government lie and cheat or high-flying financiers abscond with depositors' money with little fear of apprehension or punishment. Adding to the miasma of mistrust, an epidemic of banking scandals and stock fraud has rocked the Czech Republic in the past year, leading The Economist, a publication not generally given to hyperbole, to lament in March 1997:

Every month, it seems, brings another stain on the Czech Republic's reputation as a financial centre. Last year, eight banks went down thanks to incompetence or fraud. Now investment funds are being tainted. In recent weeks more than 75,000 shareholders in two investment fund groups, Trend and CS Fondy, have been fleeced of assets worth nearly 2.3 billion koruna (\$79m).²⁹

What makes that phenomenon particularly relevant to the discussion of the depth of Czech democracy is that the cloud hanging over the coupon privatization drive, the banking system, and the stock market has also (inevitably) cast a dark shadow over the government.

In the past year foreign investors have pulled about \$500m out of the Czech stock market, thanks in part to lax regulation. This withdrawal is one reason why the market has fallen by 3.8% in dollar terms this year, while bourses in neighboring Hungary and Poland have been rising. Much more could follow, says Howard Golden, president of the New York-based Central European Privatization Fund, unless the government "fights the perception that the Prague stock exchange is just a vehicle for select insiders to enrich themselves at the expense of the ordinary shareholder."³⁰

Crony Capitalism

There is a far closer relationship between the banks and the government in the Czech Republic than in the United

States. Even though government has recently moved to divest itself of some its major bank holdings, the impression of collusion lingers, not without some justification. For example, a small bank called Plzenska (located in the town of Plzen) allowed the managers of CS Fondy to rob shareholders, but the money was transferred out of the country, which required approval by the Ministry of Finance. The ministry and the central bank promised an investigation of Plzenska's custodianship, but it was too much like putting the fox in charge of guarding the hen house. To cite one other example, assets totaling 270 million koruna were stolen from Trend--while it was being run by government-appointed administrators.³¹

Even the Czech privatization program--the spearhead and symbol of market reforms--has been badly tainted by official corruption. The man who headed the coupon privatization program, Miroslav Lizner, was caught with a valise full of dirty money at a restaurant in Prague. The fact that Lizner was indicted, convicted, and sent to jail would normally be a good sign that the justice system is working. But the damage done by such body blows to public confidence in a society already jaded by bitter experience is not easily undone.

The corrosive power of such negative examples in a society already all but immobilized by cynicism is hard to exaggerate, but Western political leaders tend to ignore the implications.³² Concern about that problem ought to be at the top of the agenda for every public official, educator, and business leader in the Czech Republic. Concerns about the trade balance, the budget deficit, or NATO membership seem almost trivial by comparison.

The Enemy Within

One rarely encounters anyone in the Czech Republic who does not lament the low level of honesty, decency, and responsible behavior in public life. Again, it is not that such low levels are absent from or unknown in other democratic countries, but they are noticeably more pervasive in the Czech Republic and the other former Soviet bloc states. They are also more corrosive and dangerous in settings where democratic norms and institutions are still new and fragile. Countries with long-standing democratic traditions can weather a certain amount of anti-social behavior (although

that capacity is not unlimited); embryonic democracies may not have a comparable degree of resilience.

Four decades of arbitrary rule have left most Czechs with virtually no sense of political efficacy. The natural tendency of people who feel powerless is to believe that the government, rather than the citizenry, bears sole responsibility for the condition of society--a belief that the unexemplary behavior of high- and low-ranking officials alike does little to refute. Is governmental malfeasance, however widespread, cause or effect? Is flagrantly irresponsible behavior by individuals in positions of trust the sickness or only a symptom? Both answers have some validity, since government misconduct and a weak political culture are two components of a mutually reinforcing process.

Revelations of crooked business dealings and dishonesty in government are only the tip of the iceberg. The stories that make the headlines do not cause civic disorder in Czech society so much as they reflect its ubiquity. No insider has any difficulty reeling off one example after another of dishonesty on the part of local officials or police indifference to petty law breaking. Nor would outsiders have difficulty identifying blatantly uncivil or anti-civic behavior unapologetically engaged in everyday by ordinary citizens.³³ Czechs who do not commit those offenses are so inured to them that they take little notice and do not appear to realize that such behavior is not normal in established democracies.

Everyday hazards involving the danger of personal injury for which there is generally little or no recourse in the Czech legal system abound. For example, workers often leave gaping holes in sidewalks and streets for days or even weeks; around the perimeter of ubiquitous construction sites (where children play) strands of rusty barbed wire are left hanging loosely at eye level along well-worn foot paths, iron pipes stick out of the ground, and the like. No signs warn of hazards, and company executives do not exhibit concern, much less responsibility. Again, the significant point is not merely that such irresponsible behavior is distressingly common, but that the victims usually have no legal recourse. That is yet another painful hangover from the communist era. To be sure, some moves have been made to establish a coherent, equitable legal system, but progress has been slow, and the Czech Republic is still a long way from the kind of society based on the rule of law that is

taken for granted in Western democratic countries.

It is no secret that stealing was a way of life under communism--not only in the Soviet Union but also in other East European countries.³⁴ When everything belonged to society (or more accurately, the state), everyone had an equal right to it. That, at least, was the crude logic that operated in the old command economies. The Czech countryside is dotted with little private cottages not a few of which were built on stolen time with stolen materials.

Again, it is distressing to observe how little has changed. Stealing and cheating are still widespread. Nobody dares to leave anything of value unguarded for a minute. Auto theft is a major problem that gets a lot of publicity, but all sorts of petty theft goes unreported. Czechs are quick to insist that the Romanies (Gypsies) are to blame. But Czech prejudice toward the Gypsy minority is widespread and often virulent.³⁵ And there are plenty of thieves--in the suites and on the streets--among the Czechs themselves.³⁶

And the attitude of Czech youth does not provide much cause for optimism. The apathy and indifference Czech university students demonstrate toward political and social issues is shocking, substantially exceeding that found in Western Europe or the United States. The moral dimension of public life arouses no interest. Few students will openly express an opinion on any question of public policy.

In private, they tend to paint the same picture: They were taught to memorize facts and formulas in school, not to think critically and certainly not to question anything the teacher said in class. Students typically state that they want a college education only to get a good job and make lots of money. By itself, such an attitude would not be surprising and indeed can be found throughout the West, but Czech students often combine that utilitarianism with an especially poisonous brand of cynicism.

In sum, symptoms of civic disorder--incivility, mistrust, cynicism, apathy, refusal to take personal responsibility, a feeling of powerlessness--are everywhere apparent in the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic is not alone in that regard: ample evidence of the same sort of malaise (indeed, worse in many cases) exists throughout the former Soviet bloc.³⁷ There is no panacea for a society suffering

from severe civic anemia, but any remedy depends on a correct diagnosis of the problem. Remedies cannot be imposed from the outside, but the West, led by the United States, can make it clear to political and commercial elites in Eastern Europe that they must either see the transition process through to completion or their societies will pay a price for stopping short of that goal.

Membership in a military alliance, however, will do little to promote democratic stability or the emergence of healthy civil societies. Indeed, it could produce the opposite result. The requirement that the militaries in the new members be brought up to NATO standards will cause a substantial diversion of financial resources from the private sector to the military. Involving the new members in NATO peacekeeping missions, as Hungary is deeply involved in the Bosnia operation, gives the military hierarchy undue influence and focuses the attention of the Central European countries on the wrong issues. Those nations need greater access to West European markets to accelerate the growth of their economies, and they need to concentrate on strengthening their domestic political and civic institutions. Giving priority to membership in a military alliance is a distraction at best and destructive at worst.

A Transition Checklist

Any change of direction in U.S. foreign policy along the lines suggested in this paper would, of course, benefit greatly from the support of America's NATO allies. The difficulties involved in coordinating foreign policy within NATO are obvious to all who have observed the changing landscape of international relations since the 1950s, when the United States was the undisputed leader of the free world. A policy based on a comprehensive analysis of the existing situation in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (as well as any other candidates for admission to NATO) must be clear about what criteria are being used to evaluate liberalization in those countries and what further changes are needed to satisfy those criteria. Three fundamental measures of socio-cultural transition to democracy deserve the closest possible scrutiny: the rule of law, a progressive educational system, and the growth of civic (nongovernmental) organizations. Together, those three measures comprise a useful checklist for policymakers.

The Rule of Law

Any stable democracy must be based on the rule of law. A dependable and impartial system of justice based on reasonable rules that are consistently enforced is an important agent of political socialization and civic education, and it is a crucial component of any democratic society that values liberty. A widely publicized poll taken by the Institute for the Study of Public Opinion (IVVM) in late May 1997 confirmed that a staggering majority of Czechs give the government low marks both for law enforcement and for development of the legal system.³⁸

Why? Laws--both big and small--are flouted all the time, often in the most flagrant fashion, with no consequences for the violators. Everybody knows it. People dump garbage or discarded car parts wherever they please. The incipient new class of service-sector entrepreneurs wants to work without contracts and strictly "off the books" to evade the tax laws. School directors refuse to admit Gypsy children, in violation of existing anti-discrimination laws. Fund managers abscond with shareholders' money. Banks allow crooks to move huge sums out of the country with a wink from the Ministry of Finance. And so on ad nauseam. To repeat, everybody knows it and everybody looks the other way, including officials at all levels. The solution is simple: enforce existing laws or, especially where the laws are unjust or unenforceable, change them. A situation in which an abundance of laws is on the books but violations are epidemic is the worst of all possible combinations.

Education

Throughout Eastern Europe, educational reform has still not caught up with democratic claims and aspirations. In the Czech Republic, for example, the IVVM poll mentioned earlier found that 72 percent of the population rated the government's handling of education policy "rather bad" or "very bad," and only 20 percent gave some measure of approval.³⁹ According to Stephen Heyneman, an education specialist at the World Bank, "When everyone was concentrating on economic reforms, they tended to be complacent about the education systems because they were seen as good. People only gradually realized that, although they may have been good for a planned economy, they weren't good for a market economy."⁴⁰ The school systems throughout Eastern Europe

were heavily influenced by the Soviet model. In practice, Heyneman notes that that meant "systems designed to promote an ideology and train children in jobs for life. So they over-emphasized narrow vocational teaching and over-regulated the curriculum and teaching methods." He concludes, "All this has to change. In a flexible job market, people have to have more flexible skills. And in a democracy, they have to be able to criticize what they are being taught."⁴¹

Detailed proposals for an overhaul of teaching methods, curricula, funding, and administration are beyond the scope of the present study, but it is pertinent to note that the old ways of operating are still the norm. That should not be surprising: in most cases, many of the same people who were in charge before 1989 are still in charge. (The same holds true for virtually all other Czech institutions, including the mass media, heavy industry, the trade unions, local government, and the state bureaucracy.) One should not expect entrenched communist-era bureaucrats to have all become converts to the values of a pluralistic democratic society.

Changes in higher education are needed as well. University students still attend classes tuition free. Despite huge funding problems at Czech universities, there has been, at best, a slow move by the government to introduce any sort of student tuition--a new law that would introduce tuition fees has been drafted but not yet adopted. In Hungary, students now pay \$15 a month.⁴²

People tend to appreciate the things they pay for and waste or abuse the things that are paid for by faceless third parties, especially the state. Thus, it is no surprise that Czech students, by and large, are not willing to devote a great deal of time or effort to learning. By American standards, Czech universities are shockingly lax and poorly administered. Many of the internal problems can be traced to the fact that Czech universities do not operate in a competitive environment. In short, the free ride continues to triumph over the free market.

The situation described above will not improve until schools and universities in the Czech Republic--and elsewhere in Eastern Europe--are compelled to compete for students. There are few private or parochial schools and no private universities in operation today. Education continues to be controlled by the state (which, it bears repeat-

ing, means that many of the same people who controlled the purse strings and policy, including curricula, during the communist era still do). The Czech Republic does have a voucher system in place and it even includes private schools--about 12 percent of Czech school children now attend private schools.⁴³ The range of choice is limited, however, because, so far, there are many state-run schools and only a few private ones. Even so, the Czechs have taken an important first step toward the goal of giving parents and pupils a real choice. The same choice needs to be made available to university students.

Any drive to democratize the political culture and bring a new civic spirit to the fore must involve the schools. The Fulbright Program has had a strong presence in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The Civic Education Project has also operated high-quality programs in the region for several years. Funded by billionaire financier George Soros, CEP provides grants to Western-educated (mostly American) teachers in the fields of law, history, and political science--disciplines that 40 years of communist rule left in a shambles.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, those endeavors, however well-intentioned, can only achieve the desired results with the wholehearted support of local faculty and administrators, who in many cases prospered under the old regime, are extremely conservative, and continue to be suspicious of outsiders.

Civic Organizations

Czech society still shows unmistakable signs of the monolithic design communism stamped on all the societies it held in thrall. There were no associations, clubs, or enterprises outside the framework of the party-state in Czechoslovakia for more than four decades. The void the Czech Republic inherited from the communist state that preceded it has not been filled. Hence, there is no homegrown Czech counterpart to the ubiquitous service clubs such as Kiwanis or Rotary found in the United States.

It is difficult to explain why such is the case, except that so many years of living in a society that made spying on one another and mutual mistrust its hallmarks have habituated people to avoiding relationships outside the immediate family or a tight circle of close friends. Time alone can change those habits, but the very existence of local associ-

ations and private clubs would, over time, stimulate change in the right direction.

Holding NATO to Its Democratic Standards

According to the NATO Handbook, the organization's latest rationale for its continued existence is to promote stability in Europe based on "common democratic values and respect for human rights and the rule of law."⁴⁵ President Clinton has taken pride in (and personal credit for) the recent change in NATO's mission. "From the start of my first administration," he told reporters in May 1997, "the United States has worked to adapt NATO to new missions in a new century, to open its doors to Europe's new democracies." The president went out of his way to praise Havel for writing "a very compelling article in one of our major newspapers," choosing to paraphrase Havel's words: "We are not going to define NATO in the 21st century in the same way we did in the 20th century. And we are trying to change the realities that caused so much grief in the last century."⁴⁶

Indeed, President Clinton has spoken repeatedly of his vision for a "Europe that is free and democratic," a "Europe that is undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in the history of the Continent."⁴⁷ In February 1997 he wrote in a letter to Congress, "Inclusion of new members into NATO's ranks is an indispensable element of a broader American strategy to create an undivided, democratic Europe for the 21st century. By extending the underpinnings of security beyond the arbitrary line of the Cold War NATO can strengthen democratic and free market reforms for all of Europe, just as it has done for Western Europe in the decades in 1949."⁴⁸ And when Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went to Prague in July 1997 to welcome the Czech Republic into NATO, she declared, "For 50 years, you looked to the free world for support. Now you are the free world; other nations will look to you for support."⁴⁹

The exact identity of those "other nations" remains to be seen. France had wanted to invite Romania and Slovenia to join NATO at the same time as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Other candidates frequently mentioned in this context are Slovakia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. As the expansion campaign gathers momentum, it will become increasingly difficult to turn away any applicant or supplicant that might knock on NATO's door. Indeed, President

Clinton has made it clear that his vision for NATO's future is broadly expansionist. Speaking at a ceremony in the Hague on the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan, the president declared, "The first new members will not be the last. NATO's doors must and will remain open to all those able to share the responsibilities of membership."⁵⁰

Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw want to join the exclusive clubs that have long tied the fates and fortunes of Berlin, Brussels, London, Paris, Rome, and the other West European capitals to each other and to Washington. Although the European Union decided in December 1997 to open talks with five aspiring former communist countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Estonia), it is generally agreed that those countries are not yet ready to join Western Europe for economic reasons. That they are not ready to join the West--including NATO--for political and social reasons has gone largely unnoticed.

The Perils of Premature Integration

An especially successful experiment in "integration" involving sovereign states has occurred in Western Europe during the last half of the 20th century. The seed of the European Union was a relatively modest project known as the European Coal and Steel Community, launched in 1953. Then came the Rome Treaty and the Common Market a few short years later. The rest is history, including the failure of a proposal to create joint armed forces in Western Europe in 1954. The point is this: the West Europeans started in the economic sphere, and only later moved on to the political and military spheres--in which progress or cooperation lags far behind right down to the present day. (Indeed, the European Union still has enormous difficulties coordinating foreign policy among its member-states and has, of course, never moved to merge national military forces into a single all-Union entity.)

The logic of bringing new and politically untested members into a military structure first thus flies in the face of both common sense and historical experience. If the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland are 5 to 10 years away from qualifying for membership in Western Europe's premier economic structure, why would they be ready for immediate admission into Europe's major political-military structure?

The Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary have come a

long way since 1989, but they still have a long way to go to become mature, stable democracies. Although this study has focused on the oft-neglected socio-cultural aspects of the transition process in the Czech Republic, the democratic transformation in all three countries remains incomplete in all spheres of public life--including the government and the economy. One should not be surprised at that fact; it would be remarkable if the ravages of nearly a half century of totalitarianism could be undone in less than a decade.

If there is any truth to the popular belief that the Czech Republic is ahead of the other former communist states in the transition race, then it is a mistake to allow any of those states into multilateral arrangements such as NATO forged by (and for) the Western democracies during the Cold War. (The need for NATO in the post-Cold War period is itself open to question, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.)⁵¹ There is no reason to rush to judgment. Naturally, the East European societies are impatient to be "certified" as democratic, and thus to qualify for the military and economic benefits perceived, rightly or wrongly, to accompany such certification. But their impatience, however understandable, should not blind the United States and the other NATO countries to the fact that embracing fragile, unfinished democratic states entails unnecessary risks and liabilities. Conversely, a go-slow approach leaves the door open to all future possibilities (including the phasing out of NATO) and maximizes Western influence (by withholding a major carrot). In the meantime, any government aspiring to become a full partner with the West should be put on notice that until the society over which it presides exhibits a healthy civic order, it has not earned the right to join the democratic club.

Just as observers from other countries who are often harsh critics of the United States nonetheless deserve to be taken seriously because they can see us in a more objective light than we can see ourselves, so Western critics of the transitional societies in Eastern Europe deserve to be taken seriously by its indigenous populations and their leaders. Unfortunately, that is not happening in the Czech Republic, where criticism from the West typically triggers instant rebukes or rebuttals, both publicly and privately, often in dismissive, condescending tones.

Understanding the Extent of the Communist Hangover

More than four decades of communism did not banish aristocracy from Eastern Europe; it simply introduced a new elite class. Communism is gone but not Communists, much less communist patterns of behavior by those in positions of power. Having deserted a sinking ship, many ex-Communists remain entrenched in positions of power, influence, and privilege. The aloofness and arrogance of governmental elites in those countries is itself a sign that the democratic spirit has not triumphed.

That has become especially apparent in the campaign for NATO expansion waged by the Central European governments. By and large, the governing elites seemed to believe that an open, public debate on the merits of joining the alliance was both unnecessary and undesirable. That attitude on the part of Klaus drew a rebuke from the editors of the Journal of Commerce, a publication normally friendly to pro-market political factions in Central Europe.

Czech Premier Vaclav Klaus doesn't want a national referendum on his country's entry into NATO, mainly, as he put it, because it would spark "unnecessary destabilizing debates" among the political factions. That way he decides which debate is warranted and which isn't.

On the same grounds, he refused to submit the 1993 split of Czechoslovakia to a referendum, even though polls were showing most Czechs and Slovaks were against it. It seems the more voices there are speaking against him, the less he likes the debate.⁵²

Although the Journal of Commerce conceded that not every decision in a democratic country must be subjected to a national referendum, it was Klaus's rationale that the editors found so disturbing. It was wrong, they emphasized, to reject calls for a referendum "on the grounds that it would lead to a public debate."⁵³ (An equally harsh view of Klaus's political style was expressed by John Stein of the Institute for East-West Studies, a think tank in Prague, who characterized Klaus as "a Bolshevik of the right.")⁵⁴

That is the pertinent point. In a healthy democracy, public debate should be encouraged, not regarded as an annoyance or a threat. Klaus's determination to exclude the Czech public from the decision about joining NATO was espe-

cially troubling, since there was no popular consensus on the issue. A public opinion survey taken in November 1997 showed that 43 percent of respondents favored the republic's membership in NATO, 29 percent were opposed, and the remainder were still undecided. Moreover, the gap between supporters and opponents had narrowed by several percentage points since a similar poll was conducted in July.⁵⁵

Another example of a cavalier attitude toward democratic principles occurred in Hungary, where the government-controlled news media embarked on a concerted (\$900,000) effort to propagandize a sometimes apathetic population about the benefits of Hungary's joining NATO. The propaganda blitz even reached the point of having characters in popular television soap operas wax rhapsodic about the virtues of NATO membership. The reaction of Tibor Csaszar, the Foreign Ministry official in charge of the NATO campaign, to criticism that such one-sided "educational efforts" were inherently unfair was most revealing. "In a democracy, parliament represents the people. If the government and the main political parties support the Euro-Atlantic integration process, then we simply do not have the right to give a major voice to the opposition."⁵⁶ There was no willingness to acknowledge that public opinion surveys had consistently shown the Hungarian population divided on the issue of NATO membership and that there ought to be an honest debate on the issue, if Hungary is truly a democracy. Even worse, Csaszar exhibited no awareness that there might be something wrong with the government of a democratic country's having a dominant position in the media, much less using that position to exclude views opposed to official policy. Such cynical intolerance does not speak well for the underlying health of Hungarian democracy.

The comments of Foreign Ministry State Secretary Ferenc Somogyi, Hungary's chief negotiator at the NATO accession talks in Brussels, in defense of the propaganda campaign were almost as chilling. "The major objective of our strategy is to let the public know as much as possible about NATO," Somogyi told reporters. "NATO is an issue where the facts speak for themselves."⁵⁷ There is a troubling echo here of communist-era thinking: the belief that there is only one legitimate viewpoint--the government's--and that the "masses" must be force-fed that viewpoint until they ultimately recognize the wisdom of the government's position. That attitude, along with Klaus's disdain for public input on a crucial policy issue, suggests that a temptation

to authoritarianism may not lie all that far beneath the skin of Central Europe's new democratic leaders.⁵⁸

The Specter of Illiberal Democracies in NATO

The seemingly oxymoronic practice of elitist democracy confirms a point emphasized by Fareed Zakaria, managing editor of Foreign Affairs, in a recent issue of that journal. Zakaria makes an important distinction between political democracy and constitutional liberalism. The central feature of the former is the regular conduct of free and fair elections, but the latter includes a "bundle of freedoms" including "the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property."⁵⁹ Although in the Western experience the two concepts have become virtual political Siamese twins, that is not necessarily true in the rest of the world. Indeed, many of the newly democratizing countries, from Russia to Argentina, have democratic political systems with pronounced authoritarian practices (e.g., frequent use of presidential decrees). Zakaria describes such systems as "illiberal democracies."

The Czech Republic and the other two candidates for NATO membership are certainly closer to the Western model than they are to the more blatant examples of illiberal democracy.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, some of the actions of the three governments raise questions about just how deeply rooted the values of constitutional liberalism really are. It is still much too early to render a definitive verdict on that matter. Proponents of NATO expansion are relying on faith rather than an abundance of evidence that the Central European countries are solidly and irrevocably part of the liberal democratic West.

Indeed, the already considerable gap between the elites and society in the Central European countries shows signs of widening. Cynicism and mistrust run so deep within post-communist political cultures in Eastern Europe that it is unrealistic to expect the problem to be overcome any time soon. A whole new generation of citizens prepared to participate constructively in the civic life of those societies is needed. Even the most heroic efforts by such leaders as Havel would prove inadequate to the task in the short run.

A major civic project of this kind will take time and

patience. Indeed, there is no quick fix for the cynicism, mistrust, and pervasive sense of powerlessness caused by decades of atrocious government. The West ought not to condemn or censure those societies. To do so would be to forget the hardships East Europeans endured under communism. But, given the fact that it will take not a few years but a few decades for the deep psychological and cultural wounds inflicted by Stalinist rule to heal, neither ought NATO to rush headlong into permanent arrangements that could well prove financially burdensome, politically counterproductive, and militarily dangerous.

The West can gently prod those countries further down the road to real democracy, which by definition must reach the grassroots of society, or it can play along with the self-serving myth that the "transition" (a buzzword that quickly outlived its usefulness) has been successfully completed. But buying into the myth increases the likelihood that embryonic democracy in Eastern Europe will abort just as it did during the decades between the world wars. Above all, advocates of NATO expansion should consider what it will mean for the West if not only three, but possibly a dozen or more, former communist states belong to NATO as such a scenario unfolds.

That is not a minor issue. There is no provision in the North Atlantic Treaty for expelling or even suspending a member that comes under the control of a dictatorship. NATO has rather hypocritically avoided the issue in the past, for example when Greece was ruled by a military junta from 1967 to 1974. But such lapses occurred during the Cold War when the mission of deterring Soviet aggression eclipsed every other consideration. It is not at all clear that the existing NATO members would be so tolerant in the future. The refusal of the European Union to consider Turkey for membership because of its shaky democratic credentials and unsavory civil liberties record suggests that the issue of political values is now much more prominent than it was during the Cold War. Even NATO partisans might, therefore, wish to pause and consider the potential disruption of the alliance that could result from the rise of an authoritarian regime in one of the new member states. Leaving aside the many disturbing strategic problems with NATO expansion, the political immaturity of the Central European countries is reason enough to reject the initiative.

Notes

1. Quoted in William Drozdiak, "NATO to Expand Borders, Purpose," Washington Post, July 7, 1997.
2. Cato Institute scholars have frequently expressed admiration for Klaus's achievements. See, for example, Roger Fontaine, "Red Phoenix Rising? Dealing with the Communist Resurgence in Eastern Europe," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 255, June 13, 1996, pp. 26-28. The Institute has also published a volume of Klaus's speeches. Vaclav Klaus, Renaissance: The Rebirth of Liberty in the Heart of Europe (Washington: Cato Institute, 1997).
3. Christine Spolar, "Aspiring to NATO: Ex-Communist States Steer Westward: Will Alliance Play in Posnan, Plzen?" Washington Post, June 18, 1997, p. A1. In a companion piece, "How Popular Is NATO," Washington Post, June 19, 1997, the results of opinion polls done by the Factum polling agency in all three countries were published, showing that public support for NATO entry was highest by far in Poland and lowest in the Czech Republic. In the latter, only 40 percent of those polled favored joining NATO, while 29 percent were opposed and 31 percent were undecided. The large "don't know" response may have resulted, at least in part, from the Klaus government's conscious decision not to make any effort to inform or educate the public.
4. See, for example, "House of Klaus on Fire," Prague Business Journal, December 8-14, 1997, p. 1.
5. The Czech currency crisis in the spring of 1997 underscored the economic challenges still facing the country and deprived the Klaus government of its primary source of popular support, its reputation for competency in managing the economy. Klaus's forced resignation on November 30, 1997, was prompted by a campaign fundraising scandal, but the prime minister's tarnished image as an economic manager who could work magic no doubt contributed to his fall.
6. Vaclav Havel, Living in Truth, ed. Jan Vladislav (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).
7. Ruth Walker, "Czechs Join Economic Club of the Industrial Nations," Christian Science Monitor, November 27, 1995, p. 9.

8. The other most common comparative measure of macroeconomic performance is purchasing power parity, which yields a rather different number. By that measure, for example, the estimated gross national product per capita for the Czech Republic in 1995 was over \$10,200, according to the Central Intelligence Agency. See "The Czech Republic," in The World Factbook (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1996), also available at www.odci.gov/cia/publications/nsolo/factbook/ez.htm.

9. "Emerging-Market Indicators," The Economist, April 12, 1997, p. 110.

10. For an analysis of the constitutional powers of the president and prime minister, respectively, see Jack Van Doren and Thomas Magstadt, "Czech Constitutional Democracy: Focus on the Czech Dual Executive Power and the Future Senate," Fordham International Law Review 20 (Summer 1997): 701-19; and Thomas Magstadt, Nations and Governments: Comparative Politics in Regional Perspective (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 27-28.

11. Czech society has opened up to the world but remains surprisingly opaque to non-Czechs. Oddly, in terms of accessibility to foreigners, it is more like Japan than like neighboring Germany or Austria. Czech opacity is a function of language, culture, and recent history. Foreign observers of Czech politics often fail to appreciate how difficult it is even in today's open society to distinguish between appearance and reality. Not surprisingly, the commentary and analysis produced by Western journalists posted to Prague is frequently derided in the Czech press, as well as by politicians and private citizens, as naive or simple-minded, which it often is.

12. See Aristotle, Politics, trans. and ed. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

13. For a general discussion of the economic and political correlates of democracy, see Thomas Magstadt and Peter Schotten, Understanding Politics: Ideas, Institutions, and Issues (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), pp. 230-33. See also Seymour Lipset, Political Man: The Social Bases of Democracy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983); Tatu Vanhanen, The Process of Democratization: A Comparative Study of 147 States, 1980-1988 (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1990); Samuel P. Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" Political Science Quarterly 99 (1984): 193-218; and

Carl Gershman, "Democracy as the Wave of the Future: A World Revolution," Current, May 1989, pp. 18-23.

14. Milovan Djilas, The New Class (New York: Praeger, 1957), pp. 37-40.

15. The Czechs are, at most, semi-Western. The justly famous "high culture" of Bohemia is Prague centered and self-consciously elitist. Once reserved for the Czech aristocracy and diplomatic community in the capital, the performing arts are now primarily a perquisite of the nouveaux riches--and foreigners. The Bohemia-Moravia of the towns and villages is not to be found in Stare Mesto (Old Town), Vaclavske Namesti (Wenceslas Square), or Mala Strana.

16. As this study goes to press, the political situation in the Czech Republic remains volatile. Following his scandal-induced resignation at the end of November 1997, Klaus refused to admit any personal wrongdoing or make any apology on behalf of the party he headed, and he refused to cooperate in efforts by President Havel to find a way out of the political impasse. Amid much confusion, Havel named Josef Tosovosky, the politically unaffiliated president of the Czech National Bank, as the new prime minister. Klaus persisted in his opposition to early elections, which placed him at loggerheads with Milos Zeman, leader of the Social Democrats, the largest party in the Czech parliament, who insisted on early elections as a condition of his party's cooperation with the new caretaker government. Not surprisingly, that political "crisis" (as the Czech news media called it) dominated the daily news in the last weeks of 1997. See, for example, "Vaclav Klaus má vyjednavat o vlade do které sám neche" (Vaclav Klaus Has to Negotiate over a Government He Does Not Want), Lidové noviny, December 5, 1997; see also Josef Broz, "Novou vladn sestavi Lux" (Lux to Put Together a New Government), Lidové noviny, December 8, 1997, p. 1.

17. Havel is virtually the only prominent Czech politician who has had anything interesting to say about this problem. Klaus has focused all his attention on the economy and can barely conceal his contempt for philosophical musings about civic virtue. Havel and Klaus obviously saw things through very different lens, but they avoided public displays of acrimony. However, Havel was unwilling or unable to provide more effective and more assertive moral leadership by using the "bully pulpit" of the presidency, at least prior to Klaus's resignation. Havel did play an important role in

stabilizing the political situation and finding at least a temporary alternative to Klaus at the end of 1997.

18. Michael J. Jordan, "Organized Crime Sets Up Shop at the Crossroads of Europe: Hungary Sees Spread of Violence, Some Blame the West," Christian Science Monitor, December 17, 1996, p. 7.

19. There are frequent newspaper articles in all the East European countries with a free press about the role of former Communists in the government, economy, and education. In the Czech media, that theme continues to be popular and journalists never miss an opportunity to do a story on it. Now that the Cold War is over, the issue receives less attention in the Western press, interestingly enough. Even so, it has not gone unreported. It is important to note that many citizens in all three countries are ambivalent about the Communists now and not a few are openly nostalgic, as elections in Poland and Hungary in the mid-1990s revealed. See, for example, Jane Perlez, "Young Poles View Walesa as Passe; Generation X Votes for Ex-Communist," New York Times, November 12, 1995, p. 10; see also Marshall Ingwerson and Peter Ford, "Ex-communists Retake the Helm; East Europeans, Once Swept Along by Anti-Communist Fervor, Now Vote Their Wallets," Christian Science Monitor, November 21, 1995, p. 1; David B. Ottaway, "Socialists Win in Hungary; Analysts Cite 'Nostalgia' for Communist Era," Washington Post, May 9, 1994, p. A1; and Jane Perlez, "Gyula Horn, Recycled Communist, Takes Power in Hungary," New York Times, June 5, 1994, p. 3.

20. In the Czech Republic, President Havel has vigorously opposed revenge and retribution, arguing that the only way to lay the past to rest is through compassion and forgiveness. But the moral rectitude of Havel's position, sadly, does not obviate the political fact that in the public mind justice has not been done: the perpetrators of past wrongs have not been punished, and because they are now widely believed to be flourishing under the new "capitalist" system, the wounds continue to fester. Indeed, virtually everybody can and will (in private) give specific examples of this phenomenon.

21. "Poland Turns Again," The Economist, September 27, 1997, pp. 19-20.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Gregory Piatt, "Poland's Ex-reds Use More Bleach to Wash Out Past," Christian Science Monitor, February 8, 1996, p. 6.

25. Aviezer Tucker, "Czech Reality," Liberty, November 1997, pp. 46-47. For discussions of the still murky civil-military relations in the Central European countries, see Jeffrey Simon, Central European Civil-Military Relations and NATO Expansion (Washington: National Defense University, 1995); and Anton A. Beiber, ed., Civil-Military Relations in Post-Communist States: Central and Eastern Europe in Transition (New York: Praeger, 1997).

26. Tucker, p. 48. The presence of holdover personnel in the intelligence agencies of the Central European countries worries even some supporters of NATO expansion. Jane Perlez, "Touchy Issue of Bigger NATO: Spy Agencies," New York Times, January 5, 1998, p. A3.

27. Jordan.

28. Ibid.

29. "Czech Investment Funds: Worrying Trend," The Economist, March 29, 1997, p. 82.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Cynicism is difficult to quantify, but its grip on Czech society is not questioned even by public officials with a vested interest in putting the best face on things. For example, the Czech deputy foreign minister, Karl Kovanda, speaking dismissively about the low level of public support for Czech entry into NATO had this to say: "This country is a country of cynics. They [Czechs] are cynical about the military and particularly about threats to the security." Quoted in Spolar, p. A1.

33. One daily observes and encounters an astonishing lack of civility on the streets, in the shops, on the buses, trams, and trolleys. Shop assistants do not assist. If a customer has a complaint, the customer is always wrong. Even the most obviously defective item will likely not be replaced; money surrendered is almost never refunded. "I do

not make the things people buy in this shop, I just sell them," is the typical response. From the highest officials to the lowest clerks, there is an unwillingness to accept responsibility for anything. Any suggestion that a clerk or the management made a mistake is more likely to be met by insult or invective than by an apology or an admission of error. Apparently, civil behavior is not yet profitable in Czech society.

34. See Hedrick Smith, The Russians (New York: Ballantine, 1984). This book remains a classic. It is a penetrating study of Soviet society by a Western journalist who brilliantly described its moral and political decay more than a decade before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and unsuccessfully tried to reverse the process.

35. On the prejudice of Czechs against Gypsies, see, for example, Christopher H. Smith, "Foreigners in Their Own Land," Christian Science Monitor, July 17, 1996, p. 20. The views Czechs express toward Gypsies are hardly less distorted than the views that racists in America express toward blacks. Discrimination against Gypsies in housing, employment, and education is illegal but tolerated. On the rise of hate crimes against Gypsies in Plzen, see "Rasismu a nasili v Plzni neustale pribyva" (Racism and Violence in Plzen Constantly Rising), Plzensky denik, June 14, 1997, p. 14. This article notes that since 1990 there have been more than 60 documented cases of racially motivated attacks against minorities (mostly Gypsies) and the "senseless death of two people." Many racial assaults, both verbal and physical, are never reported to the police. Whether such crimes are always properly investigated or even entered into the record by police when they are reported is doubtful, given the general climate of hostility toward Gypsies in the Czech Republic.

36. See, for example, "Tourist Blight," The Economist, September 6, 1997, p. 53. This article reports that "burly freelance money-changers" in Prague cheat unwitting tourists who spend about \$4 billion a year in the Czech Republic by selling them "worthless Yugoslav currency" at supposedly bargain-basement prices. Meanwhile, "the Czech police look on without batting an eyelid." It is no secret that the failure of police to enforce laws fairly and consistently--including laws aimed at protecting people from such predators--is a pervasive fact of life in the Czech Republic.

37. For example, see Fontaine, pp. 22-26, 28-35.

38. "How Government Solves Problems in Society," Lidové noviny, May 27, 1997, p. 2. In this poll, respondents rated the government's performance in all categories relevant to law and law enforcement as "rather bad" or "very bad" by the following percentages: financial criminality, 93 percent; organized crime, 79 percent; general crime, 83 percent; and development of the legal system, 65 percent.

39. Ibid.

40. Quoted in "The Weight of Learning," Business Central Europe, May 1997, p. 16.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 15.

43. Ibid., p. 14.

44. The writer was a Fulbright lecturer at Zapadoceska univerzita (the University of West Bohemia) in Plzen from 1994 to 1996. He owes a special thanks to past and present CEP lecturers, including Jack Van Doren, John Jennings, and Matt Sumro, for many stimulating conversations about the need for civic rehabilitation in the Czech Republic.

45. NATO Handbook at <http://xs4all.freenet.kiev.ua/NATO/docu/handbook/hb00100e.htm>. See third paragraph under "What Is NATO?"

46. Remarks to reporters on May 14, 1997, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 33, no. 20 (May 19, 1997): 709-10.

47. See, for example, President Clinton's 1997 state of the union message, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 33, no. 6 (February 10, 1997): 142; see also the president's remarks to reporters on March 18, 1997, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 33, no. 12 (March 24, 1997). The president used such phrases as "free and democratic" and "undivided and democratic" and "united, democratic, and free" like a mantra in his public pronouncements dealing with Europe, NATO, and, especially, the issue of NATO expansion in 1997.

48. Letter to congressional leaders transmitting a report on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, February 24, 1997, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 33, no. 9 (March 3, 1997): 236.

49. Quoted in Siegfried Mortkowitz, "Welcome to NATO--Albright," Prague Post, July 16-22, 1997, p. 1. Secretary of State Albright's remarks were echoed by Petr Necas, chairman of the Chamber of Deputies' Defense and Security Committee, who said, "It will be our duty and task as a candidate and future member of NATO to be a kind of interface between the alliance and countries of Central and Eastern Europe."

50. Remarks at a ceremony honoring the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan in the Hague on May 28, 1997, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 33, no. 22 (June 2, 1997): 791.

51. For discussions of that issue, see Ted Galen Carpenter, Beyond NATO: Staying Out of Europe's Wars (Washington: Cato Institute, 1994), pp. 109-49; Doug Bandow, "Europe's Unhealthy Security Dependence," in NATO Enlargement: Illusions and Reality, ed. Ted Galen Carpenter and Barbara Conry (Washington: Cato Institute, 1998), pp. 209-21; and Ronald Steel, "Beyond NATO," in NATO Enlargement, pp. 243-52.

52. "The Strains of Democracy," editorial, Journal of Commerce, November 17, 1997, p. 6A.

53. Ibid.

54. Quoted in Lee Hockstader, "Hopes for a Czech 'Miracle' Evaporate," International Herald-Tribune, December 8, 1997.

55. Reuters, "Poll: Czech Support for NATO Membership Dwindles," Central Europe Online, December 1, 1997, at <http://www.centraleurope.com/ceo/news/07.html>.

56. Quoted in Anatol Lieven, "Hungarian 'Soap' Tackles NATO," Financial Times, November 5, 1997, p. 3. Emphasis added.

57. Quoted in "NATO Is Sitcom Theme in Hungary's Referendum Campaign," Central Europe Online, at <http://www.centraleurope.com/ceo/news/03.html>.

58. For a discussion of the contrast between the democratic rhetoric of Central and East European political leaders and their sometimes authoritarian conduct, see Jane Perlez, "Democracy, Apparatchik Style," New York Times, January 11, 1998, p. E5.

59. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," Foreign Affairs 76, no. 6 (November-December 1997): 22.

60. Zakaria, in fact, concludes that they are part of the liberal democratic camp--a judgment that may be premature.