

# Comment

Amongst the posters outside the Catholic parish church in a small market town in Bavaria was pinned an advertisement for a day trip sponsored by one of the many social groups meeting in the town. The common interest was that they were all displaced persons, Sudeten Germans, expelled from Czechoslovakia as part of the price for Cold War stability. The story of the massive transfer of populations resulting from the post-War political settlements has yet to be written. The shifting of the German-Polish frontier two hundred miles to the west and the expansion of Russia at the expense of former German territory created a new political tapestry in Europe woven with many millions of threads of individual human misery. The recent pictures of suffering refugees, clutching a suitcase full of meagre belongings struggling along the road out of Bosnia to exile, are a re-run of those grim experiences of the 1940s. Many Sudeten Germans have similar tales to tell of winter journeys, robbery, suffering and death. Their stories could be matched by Poles and many others; all of them victims of tidy administrative solutions to complex demographic problems. 'Ethnic cleansing' is not a new phenomenon in Europe. It numbers amongst its victims Jews, exterminated in the name of cultural purity and others sacrificed for the sake of ethnic or national integrity.

The attempt to make ethnic boundaries march with political frontiers may be a clumsy diplomatic policy but it has enjoyed a remarkably long shelf-life. A precarious peace was secured in the eastern Mediterranean earlier in the century, after the wars between Turkey and Greece, by the massive exchange of populations between the two countries. Even today Bulgaria would be happy to get rid of its substantial Turkish minority, if it thought it could get away with it, whilst Romania is making it more difficult for its Hungarians to remain. The growth of right-wing parties within the European democracies also points to the attractions of the seductive idolatry of 'ethnic purity'. It is against this background that a more positive presentation of the philosophy of European unity is necessary.

The founding fathers of the European Community evolved their ideals as a direct response to the traumas of the Second World War. It was their hope that the phenomenon of the concentration camp could be eradicated from the European political landscape. Unfortunately, the crisis in the various component states of the former Yugoslavia has come at a time when European political institutions are especially weak. Now, what appeared like a major advance, the Maastricht treaty, seems about to fall plunging the European economy into further confusion.

The tide would appear to be running against further moves towards European union in many parts of the Continent. Presently, anti-Maastricht opinion in France is running at 46%. A rejection of the treaty would have grave consequences not only for the French government, but also for the economies of several member states, in particular the United Kingdom and Italy. The almost pathetic failure of Lord Carrington's efforts on behalf of the EC in the Balkans has underlined the general lack of unanimity amongst the member states. At the same time, it points to their central concern: the ailing economy of the community and the threat of massive depression followed by general political turmoil in the more politically fragile member states. The Serbs are pressing on with their expansionist policy because they know that the European community has no intention of becoming embroiled in military activity in the Balkans, unless the force of public opinion in favour is irresistible. Until then, European governments will argue in traditional terms against offering anything other than humanitarian aid. Practically speaking a Bosnian state has been written off. Refugee camps are much less expensive than armies in the field.

The word *Balkan* is Turkish for mountain chain; the territory is hostile to large scale assault. The western military machine, so successful in the open spaces of the deserts of the Middle East, would not function to best advantage in the mountains and valleys of the Balkan peninsula. Strategic opinion proposes that any intervention would be costly in terms of men and materials. Overwhelming superiority in material and equipment bring no advantage in this terrain, European armies are not designed for such a conflict. For forty years NATO strategy has been based round the principle of large tank battles fought on north German plains, guerilla warfare does not feature very high. Governments, still shelling out large sums to support involvement in the Falklands and Northern Ireland, as well as contemplating further intervention in Iraq to help out Mr Bush are, understandably, happy to heed the caution of the strategists.

Strategic realism is backed up by economic reality. The British economy is in deep trouble. Germany, which calls the economic tune in Europe, is in recession and is already labouring to hold the economies of the recently liberated eastern European countries together. It cannot take any more strain. Foreign investors, alarmed by the growth of regional opinion and the success of the *Lega Nord*, have already begun to withdraw their capital from Italy. Part of the bill for all of this will be paid by the Bosnian Muslims, but some of the remainder will fall to the European Community with consequences yet unknown. The tide of European unity looks like breaking on the Balkan shore.

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