

## A Short Glance at East and West

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### Abstract

Built on field research as well as on readings, this article addresses a few historical and political issues concerning the Western world and its main foundation, which is the Catholic Church. Especial emphasis is also given to East Europe. Let us wake up once and for all! If the Church collapses, one of the first things to be extinguished will be freedom of speech, together with the very idea and practice of freedom in general.

**Keywords:** Western Culture; Catholic Church; United Nations; Freedom; East Europe

*The secret to happiness is freedom... And the secret to freedom is courage. (Thucydides)*

### Introduction

There are precedents. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), who coined the expression united nations, in 1942, was not the first to think that nations could unite around common noble values and ideals – in this case, the fight against the Axis powers and the reconstruction of a war-torn world. History is full of examples of this kind; the League of Nations (1920-1946) was the immediate precursor of the United Nations, founded in 1945. The Spanish Dominican Francisco de Vitoria (1480-1549) and the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) wrote influential works on the necessity of creating a supranational entity in order to arbitrate between

the peoples, on the basis of principles of freedom, justice, mutual respect and solidarity. Let us go back in History a bit more Figure 1. The earliest origins of the United Nations lie in our medieval cultural background, most specifically, in the Papacy. The mere fact of being the target of harsh criticism does great credit to the Church, once – since her foundation, two millennia ago –, she has been the main promoter of what we call today “freedom of speech”, “human rights”, “mutual respect” and all other positive values and social inventions that ended up to become landmarks of the Western civilization [1].



**Figure 1:** Designed and built in the 13th century, Siena's Italian cathedral is one of the most beautiful and famous churches in Christendom.

The foundations of the Church are largely the same as those of Western culture. In the name of a misguided view of liberty, the Church has been unceasingly defamed and slandered by its enemies, who come both from outside and inside (as it is the case of the progressive church, a real ideological cancer). Let us wake up! If the Church collapses, one of the first things to be extinguished will be freedom of speech, together with the very idea and practice of freedom in general. It is worth remembering the labour union Solidarność, founded in 1980 in the Polish city of Gdańsk, the first to be crushed by the Nazi-Communist coalition of 1939,

an event that unleashed the most destructive and cruel war the world has ever witnessed Figure 2. Solidarność's anti-communist campaign resulted in the liberation of half of Europe from the grip of communism. Supported by the United States and the Catholic Church, notably during the pontificate of John Paul II (1920-2005) – who was also a Polish –, its leader, Lech Wałęsa (1943), became the first post-communist president of Poland. Let us hope that the tragedy suffered by the Polish will serve as a warning to all freedom-loving people of this already tragic 21<sup>st</sup> century, against the dangers that come (not only) from the east.



**Figure 2:** Gdańsk (Photo taken by the Author in 2009).

## What about East Europe?

Incidentally, what do we mean by the expression “East Europe”, an area disputed with iron and fire for over 2,5 millennia? Views about its precise limits differ among geographers and the very Eastern European people (Hungarians, Polish, Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenians and many other “Eastern Europeans” see themselves as inhabitants as “Central Europeans”). Broadly speaking, however, we can consider East Europe as the territory lying between the Urals, the Black Sea and the Caucasus to the east, and the former Iron Curtain (from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic, including the Balkans with the exception of Greece) to the west. Astonishing landscapes, immense ethnic and cultural variety, unique artistic treasures and rich flora and fauna set the Eastern European stage Figure 3.

Straddling the border between Poland and Belarus, there is the Białowieża Forest, which is “one of the last and largest remaining parts of the immense primeval forest that once stretched across the European Plain” [2]. Its history is paved by ups and downs; Germanic, Slavic, Roman and Byzantine achievements intertwine with bitter conflicts of all kinds which still remain. It should be recalled that both World Wars started as East European “conflicts” (the first one in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo, the second one in the Polish city of Gdańsk) before becoming planetary tragedies. Given the fact that history tends to repeat itself, and considering our present-day world political landscape, either we are at the verge of the Third World War or the Third World War has already happened and we lost it; tertium non datur.

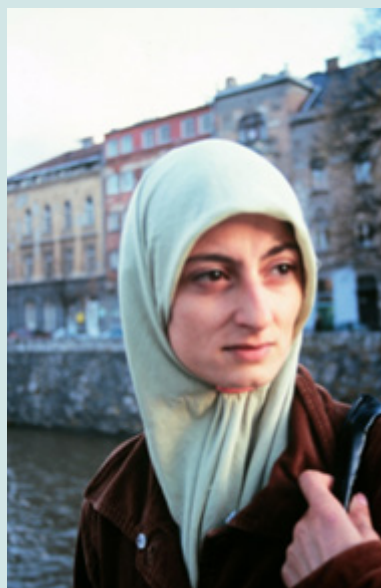


Figure 3: Sarajevo (Photo taken by the Author in 2009).

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