



BOOK NOTES

AMERICA'S NEW ALLIES: Central-Eastern Europe and the Transatlantic Link

By Janusz Bugajski and Ilona Teleki ■ The CSIS Press ■ March 2006 ■ 132 pp.

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BACKGROUND

- **Having emerged from decades of communist rule, the Central-Eastern European (CEE)* states share important domestic and foreign policy priorities. Most view the United States as their principal ally and most important security partner.**
- **Public support for NATO membership is overwhelming in most CEE states**, especially in those with a history of Russian military intervention or a vision of permanent security through integration with the West.
- **In public referenda, the CEE countries overwhelmingly approved the EU accession treaties.** Before and after gaining entry into the EU, the CEE region has shown consistent political and public support for membership.
- **Although support for EU membership remains strong in the CEE region, many among the French, Dutch, and German electorates perceive CEE newcomers as contributors to the EU's problems.** The CEE states are widely depicted as threatening basic continental comforts, including protectionist welfare policies and shelter from global insecurities and economic competition.
- **In most of the CEE countries, the United States is seen as the leader of the democratic community—the country that has invested more than any other allied state in the region's transformation.** The commitment of the Bush administration to promoting democracy in other regions has heightened the prominence of the CEE states as pertinent examples of success.

CURRENT SITUATION

- **During the Iraq crisis, the CEE countries together with several Western European allies in effect created an alternative EU grouping to challenge the notion that the Paris-Berlin axis speaks for Europe.** Looking toward the United Kingdom as a role model, several CEE countries have sought to emulate London's position by avoiding stark choices between the United States and Europe.
- **CEE states generally concur with U.S. complaints that the European allies have failed to sufficiently restructure and reequip their military forces to confront the new transnational security threats.**
- **None of the CEE governments wants to see the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) develop into a European defense union within the EU that would somehow “balance” NATO.**
- **While the U.S.-EU relationship has lately been marked by disputes and conflicts**, the CEE countries have aimed to uphold a viable U.S.-European partnership by maintaining the U.S. presence in Europe and raising U.S. interests in CEE developments.

* CEE = Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

- **U.S. policymakers should be concerned that national memories of U.S. assistance in eradicating communism and building democracy are gradually receding in the CEE region.** Future relations are more likely to be based on pragmatic choices and individual state interests.
- **In terms of potential security threats, the CEE states continue to trust Washington as a security provider more than they do any European capital or the EU collectively.**
- **A primary goal of the CEE states will be as Atlantic bridge repairers and alliance facilitators.** For these new allies, being good Europeans means being good transatlanticists.
- **Two developments should be carefully monitored:** (1) the staunchly pro-EU position of the mainstream CEE center-left parties, and (2) the growing Euroskepticism, antifederalism, and even nationalism among some CEE center-right formations.
- **Any power that becomes as dominant and predominant as the United States automatically breeds a degree of resentment and opposition, even among traditional allies—and, of course, anti-Americanism has a long tradition in Western Europe.** A key issue will be the extent to which such attitudes begin to affect CEE views of the United States. To date, CEE analysts tend to look askance at French and German attacks on “anti-hegemonism” and calls for “European self-identification,” seeing them as barely camouflaged anti-Americanism.
- **Countries on both sides of the Atlantic should reexamine and recalibrate their policies to reaffirm, reform, and strengthen transatlantic relations in light of CEE countries’ entry into both NATO and the EU.**
- **The United States should not present CEE governments with either-or choices:** either the EU or NATO; either Europe or the United States. Regardless of their status within the EU, the CEE countries are intent on upholding their relations with the United States.
- **The U.S. administration must better communicate its stated commitment to expanding human rights and democracy;** this would help garner international support and reduce anti-American trends in public opinion.
- **Although the CEE region is not a major trading bloc and investment destination for the United States, neither is it marginal.** Without greater economic interchange in trade and investment, U.S. interests and influences are likely to shrink and transatlantic ties weaken. In the economic arena, CEE officials and experts stress that U.S. investors and exporters could benefit from the increased opportunities that an expanded EU market could provide if U.S. firms boost their investments in CEE states.
- **Cultural, social, academic, and educational contacts could also be enhanced if CEE states were included in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program.** Only a small slice of the CEE population is truly familiar with the United States; most citizens have had little exposure to the breadth of U.S. culture and social life.
- CEE capitals support a concerted U.S.-EU approach in dealing with neighboring countries and regions—**Belarus, the Black Sea region, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Western Balkans**—helping to transform them into stable democracies and credible aspirants to the EU and/or NATO. But, where the EU seems to be failing, Washington must take the lead and spearhead the eastern dimension.