

# Europe in Transition

## Lesson 4: NATIONALISM, CONFLICT, AND IMMIGRATION

The emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and the growth of the European Union (EU) paint a relatively optimistic picture of continental peace and prosperity. Yet, tensions between different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups continue to lead to violence. Hot spots include the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Spain. One must also consider the situation surrounding the Roma (commonly known as the “Gypsies”) and tensions between Europeans and immigrant groups.

### NATIONALISM IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

(insert after paragraph 1 on page 180)

In 2000, Slobodan Milosevic refused to accept defeat after losing the Yugoslav presidential elections. Hundreds of thousands of protestors in Belgrade then demanded his resignation. On October 6, after the mob stormed the parliament building, Milosevic at last stepped down. Vojislav Kostunica, a moderate leader, replaced him. Kostunica strengthened Yugoslavia’s ties with Europe and the United States.

In 2001, Milosevic was arrested and extradited to the International Court at The Hague. He was put on trial for genocide in Bosnia, and for crimes against humanity in Croatia and Kosovo, during the Balkan wars. Milosevic’s extradition paved the way for Serbia to receive much-needed monetary aid. His trial moved at an extraordinarily slow pace until his death in jail in 2006.

Today, the six countries that once formed Yugoslavia (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Slovenia) have made significant progress in healing the wounds of the 1990s. In 2003, the presidents of Croatia and Serbia made formal apologies for the atrocities their people committed against one another during the war. Serbs and Croats may now cross into one another’s countries without visas. In 2004, NATO forces in Bosnia were replaced by a much smaller European Union–led peacekeeping force. Also in 2004, Slovenia, the most prosperous of the new states, joined the EU. In 2005, Croatia started its own membership negotiations with the EU.

Still, many ethnic and nationalist tensions persist, war criminals remain at large, and incidents of violence, such as the March 2003 assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, continue. Also, on February 17, 2008, the UN-administered Serbian province of Kosovo unilaterally declared independence, prompting violent protests across Serbia and by the Serb minority in Kosovo. Serbia says the declaration is illegal, and, with the help of Russia, vows to block Kosovo from obtaining membership in the United Nations. Other countries, including the United States and the major European Union states, such as Great Britain, Germany, and France, have recognized Kosovo’s independence. Kosovars, 90 percent of whom are ethnic Albanians, say they will accept nothing less than full independence.

## **NORTHERN IRELAND**

(insert after the last paragraph on page 182)

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. It is roughly 51 percent Protestant and 41 percent Catholic.<sup>1</sup> Conflict between Catholics and Protestants has existed for centuries. However, the struggle today is less about religion than it is about national identity. The Protestants, or “Unionists,” generally identify themselves as British. They believe that Northern Ireland rightfully belongs in the United Kingdom. Many Catholics, or “Nationalists,” identify themselves as Irish. They believe that Northern Ireland should be part of the Republic of Ireland.

After decades of recrimination and violence (see *Europe in Transition*), a major breakthrough occurred in April 1993. Unionist leader John Hume and nationalist leader Gerry Adams began secret talks. By 1994, the radical Irish Republican Army (IRA) announced that it would end its military activities. The Protestant paramilitaries followed suit. Despite some setbacks, a peace settlement was signed on Good Friday, April 10, 1998. The people of Northern Ireland overwhelmingly ratified the Good Friday Agreement on May 22, 1998. The agreement also received resounding support in a referendum in the Republic of Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement established an elected power-sharing assembly and executive committee to govern Northern Ireland. Britain transferred power to the Northern Ireland government in 1999. However, recurring violence and deadlock over IRA disarmament led the British to suspend the region’s assembly on four different occasions, the last time in October 2002.

In July 2005, the IRA said it was giving up violence and agreed to give up its weapons, a step that was completed in September. This move raised hope that the peace process would move forward. In 2006, the British and Irish governments, along with nationalist and unionist leaders, negotiated the St. Andrews Agreement, a road map towards power-sharing and the restoration of self-rule in Northern Ireland. The Agreement paved the way for elections for Northern Ireland’s National Assembly, held on March 7, 2007. The unionist DUP won 30 percent of the vote, followed by nationalist Sinn Fein with 26 percent.<sup>2</sup> The election ended five years of direct rule from London. On May 8, 2007, both sides formed a power-sharing government, with Ian Paisley of the DUP becoming first minister and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein deputy first minister. As a result of this reconciliation, the British substantially reduced their military presence in Northern Ireland, passing responsibility for security to the region’s police.

## **CYPRUS: A DIVIDED ISLAND**

(insert after “Implications of the Cyprus Conflict” on page 184)

Cyprus is a small island situated in the eastern Mediterranean. It lies at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Cyprus’s strategic location has made it the target of outside forces struggling for control. But despite centuries of shifting control, Cyprus continues to have two main ethnic groups. Greeks make up 77 percent of the population, while Turks make up 18 percent of the population.<sup>3</sup> Today, Turks and Greeks remain divided along what is known as the “Green Line,” which is patrolled by the United Nations Force in Cyprus (see *Europe in Transition*).

In early 2002, Rauf Denktash, president of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (TRNC), and Glafcos Clerides, president of the Republic of Cyprus, agreed to regular meetings. These meetings were an attempt to resolve their differences. In 2003, the Turkish side of the island took the step of allowing its citizens to cross the border into Greek Cyprus for daylong visits. These visits were later extended to three days. In response, new President Tassos Papadopoulos of the Republic of Cyprus announced that Turkish Cypriots would be allowed to trade in the south. Turkish Cypriots would also have access to southern health care facilities.

In April 2004, a UN-sponsored reunification plan failed when 75 percent of the Greek Cypriots rejected the proposal. Sixty-five percent of Turkish Cypriots voted for the plan.<sup>4</sup> The Greek Cypriots disliked the idea that not all Greek Cypriot refugees would be allowed to reclaim their property in the north, much of which they had lost during fighting in the 1970s. They also did not accept Turkish troops being allowed to stay on the island indefinitely. The plan’s failure meant that the political and ethnic division between the island’s two populations remained unresolved when the Greek portion of the island joined the EU in May 2004. The European Commission was not pleased by the outcome of the vote. It announced a proposal to end the economic isolation of the Turkish community on Cyprus. It earmarked millions of dollars in economic aid and encouraged Turkish Cypriot trade with EU member states. However, release of the money was blocked by Cyprus, which was now a member of the EU.

In the April 2005 elections, Mehmet Ali Talat won the presidential election in northern Cyprus on a platform endorsing the island’s reunification. In July, Turkey promised to open its customs union to the ten new member states of the EU, including the Republic of Cyprus. However, Turkey was quick to point out that this step did not imply official recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, and so far it has blocked Greek Cypriot ships and planes from entering its ports and airports. In February 2006, a compromise was reached on the stalled economic aid to northern Cyprus, and in July, UN-sponsored negotiations on the future of the island were revived. Hopes of ending the 34-year-old division of the island were rekindled by the outcome of the February 2008 presidential elections in Cyprus. In contrast to his predecessor, President-elect Demetris Christofias has put the reunification issue on the top of his agenda.

## **BASQUE NATIONALISM IN SPAIN**

(insert before “The Situation of the Roma in Europe” on page 185)

In Spain, some members of the Basque ethnic group have been carrying out terrorist activities against the Spanish government for nearly forty years. They are driven by the desire to form an independent state. The Basques are found primarily in north-central Spain. Some Basques also live in southern France.

In recent years, violence sponsored by a paramilitary Basque nationalist organization, ETA, has triggered counter-protests from many members of the Basque community. Indeed, the vast majority of Basques do not support ETA’s violent tactics. Many hoped a breakthrough had come in March 2006, when ETA announced a permanent cease-fire and called for negotiations. While cease-fires had been called in the past, none had been described as permanent. As a result, the government said it would begin talks with the separatist group. However, in December, ETA carried out a bomb attack at the Madrid airport, which killed two people. The Spanish government suspended all moves toward dialogue, and in June 2007, ETA once again called off

the cease-fire and resumed its campaign of violence. In August 2007, a car bomb explosion in the Basque town of Durango wounded two policemen, and in April 2008, a bomb planted outside an office of the ruling Spanish Socialist party in the Basque city of Bilbao exploded, injuring seven police officers.

## **THE SITUATION OF THE ROMA IN EUROPE**

(insert after paragraph 1 on page 187)

The Roma, often referred to as “Gypsies,” are Europe’s largest minority group. There are an estimated 10 million Roma living on the continent.<sup>5</sup> Roma are a traditionally nomadic people who are believed to have originated in India. They are thought to have entered Europe through Greece in the fourteenth century.

The Roma’s nomadic lifestyle led them to spread throughout the continent. Today, Roma can be found in nearly every country in Europe, but especially in central, eastern, and southern Europe. They live mostly in settled communities. However, they retain a reputation for being wanderers. Nearly all Roma speak the language of the country in which they have settled. Some also speak dialects of Romani, their ancestral language.

The Roma have been targets of persecution for centuries. They have been enslaved, expelled, and targeted by anti-Roma laws. During World War II, the Nazis rounded up and murdered as many as 500,000 Roma because they saw them as an “inferior” race.<sup>6</sup> In Central and Eastern Europe, they often receive blame for the ills of post-communist economies. Attacks on Roma are numerous, but they often gain little public attention. In some cases, violence against Roma is overlooked, or even carried out, by members of local police forces.

A 2006 UN report identified Southeastern European countries as needing immediate action to improve the condition of their Roma minorities. The report found that, on average, 44 percent of Roma lived in poverty, with 15 percent living in extreme poverty of less than \$2 a day. Half of the Roma in these countries were unemployed, and two out of five did not attend primary school.<sup>7</sup>

In response to widespread persecution, a number of efforts have been made to bring greater attention to the Roma’s plight. In 1971, the first World Romani Congress met in London. It sought to develop national pride and integration. Six such congresses have followed. These meetings have focused on the standardization of the Romani language, reparations for Roma victims of the Nazi Holocaust, improvements in civil rights, the preservation of Romani culture, and international recognition of the Roma as a non-territorial nation.

For its part, the EU has made proper treatment of the Roma an important requirement for joining the Union. During their application process, applicants from Central and Eastern Europe were required to file annual reports with the European Commission on the status of their country’s Roma population. However, now that they have become new members, the EU has few direct enforcement powers when it comes to protection of minorities. Nevertheless, the new EU members participated in a multilateral program that made 2005–2015 the “Decade of Roma Inclusion.” This program shows some long-term commitment to addressing discrimination against Roma.

## IMMIGRATION

(insert before “Conclusions” on page 189)

Europe’s intricate cultural patchwork has been made even more complex by immigration. Immigration into the wealthier countries of Western Europe by people from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe is primarily driven by a search for a better life. This influx of newcomers has often sparked controversy and conflict.

While Europeans are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge it, the continent is in need of immigrants. Europe’s population is aging, and European countries have some of the lowest birth rates in the world.<sup>8</sup> It has been projected that by 2050 the number of working-age people in Europe will have decreased by 52 million; as a result, millions of new workers will be needed to support the aging population.<sup>9</sup> While immigration opponents point out that unemployment is a persistent problem throughout much of Europe, others note that various low-status jobs remain unfilled, with many Europeans unwilling to take them.

Despite the need for immigrants, anti-immigration political parties have developed in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and elsewhere. Citizens opposed to immigration frequently argue that foreigners not only take jobs, but also receive free public services. Furthermore, some Europeans oppose immigrants because they bring new cultural practices to European countries. While the European Union has taken some steps to develop a common system for immigration, much work remains.

Despite anti-immigration efforts, illegal immigrants continue to try to make their way into Europe. Many pay human traffickers to transport them to the European Union. Human traffickers are often part of organized crime rings. They charge exorbitant fees, forcing many would-be immigrants to invest their life savings for the chance to make it to Europe. Often the journeys into the EU are very difficult.

Immigrants who reach Europe face countless difficulties. Whether entering by legal or illegal means, many encounter racism, cultural misunderstandings, and pressure to abandon their traditions. In Germany, for example, conservative politicians often speak of the need for immigrants to embrace the prevailing “Leitkultur,” the ill-defined core of German culture. In France and elsewhere, the issue of whether or not Muslim girls should be allowed to wear religious dress in public schools has sparked heated debate.

The impact of immigration is important for countries receiving large numbers of newcomers. However, countries whose citizens emigrate, or move abroad, also face important consequences. Since the end of the Cold War, many Central and Eastern European states have experienced a population decline. Many emigrants are young, well-educated professionals. Their flight constitutes a “brain drain” for Central and Eastern Europe. The absence of their talent and training creates further difficulties for countries shifting to democratic, free-market systems.

*For more recent information, please visit the timelines at [www.southerncenter.org](http://www.southerncenter.org).*

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<sup>1</sup> Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007, s.v. “Northern Ireland.”

<sup>2</sup> Eamon Quinn, “Hard-Line Parties gain in Northern Ireland Vote,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Cyprus,” *The World Factbook 2007*,  
<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> (accessed January 28, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007, s.v. “Cyprus.”

<sup>5</sup> Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007, s.v. “Roma.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “At Risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe,” (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Bratislava 2006),  
<http://europeandcis.undp.org/public/show/A3C29ADB-F203-1EE9-BB0A277C80C5F9F2> (accessed February 8, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank, “World Development Indicators 2007,” Table 2.1 Population Dynamics (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2007)

<sup>9</sup> Eurostat, “Population Projections 2004-2050: EU25 Population Rises Until 2025, Then Falls,” News release, April 8, 2005

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/05/48&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr> (accessed March 13, 2007).