

Preface

The title of this book requires some explanation. The term Eastern Europe has been in use in many ways since it emerged in the last century as the definition of a historical region, though it had of course been in use for a long time as a geographical definition. But in this book something else is involved.

The definition of this area among English-speaking historians is fluid, and several variants are employed. Eastern Europe—the term employed here—might mean Poland and the Balkans, sometimes Czechoslovakia, Central Europe meaning Austria and Hungary, and sometimes Czechoslovakia. The German name, “Ostmitteleuropa”, may mean both at the same time, but can also be interpreted as corresponding to Eastern and Central Europe, or East-Central Europe. Russia, or to be more exact, its European area, including its numerous nationalities, is usually omitted from these definitions.

But more than names are concerned. The facts which the Anglo-Saxon terms express go to show that here the historical development of certain regions with a large number of common or parallel features, and features that distinguish them from other regions, are involved. What we are dealing with here are historical and not geographi-

cal concepts. In the course of the centuries of European development the internal situation of these regions has changed; the Habsburg Empire was undoubtedly part of East-Central Europe, but the position of post-war Austria is certainly open to question.

Certainly, in considering the historical evolution of the countries defined by the two Anglo-Saxon terms, as well as European Russia, we meet a number of different features, and thinking in longer periods of time or engaging in the detailed examination of the social structure, we find many different characteristics, which may play a decisive role at certain historical periods. But if we look at these three regions from a still longer historical perspective, i.e. from the early Middle Ages to the present, we perceive the outlines of certain characteristics which are common to all three of them. These common characteristics stand out prominently on occasion; on others they are relegated to the background, depending on the course of history. But the problems which are here briefly examined, and the evolution of modern nations as a whole, places the emphasis on features common to all three. Even if developments in Russia, as will be made clear, differ very considerably from the others at certain points, the common ties uniting them must be considered stronger.

This is the predominant reason for this survey. It examines each of the small and larger nations and nationalities of Eastern Europe as a single unit of historical evolution, irrespective of the frontiers that existed at one time or another, and attempts to outline the history of these units according to a set of common criteria, from

the Czechs and Poles to the Russians and from the small Baltic nations in the north to the Greeks in the south. The author believes that such an examination in terms of common denominators, however cursory it may be, will prove of interest to the reader.

This work is a summary of the conclusions of a more exhaustive examination, and consequently references and documentary evidence have been omitted, in order to make the work more easily accessible to the general public. The bibliography at the end of the volume will act as a guide to further information, but does not, of course, cover the whole of the source material used by the author.