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END NOTE

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By Taras Kuzio

In the Summer 1993 edition of "Foreign Affairs," Harvard University Professor Samuel Huntington outlined his "clash of civilizations" theory which would appear three years later as a book of the same title. Huntington's thesis was severely criticized by many of his fellow academics because it sought to define a new "other" against which the U.S. could establish a new moral crusade.

Huntington's thesis was also, understandably, not readily accepted by 12 of the Soviet successor states who belong to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Huntington defined as one of his civilization fault lines the "Slavic Orthodox" world whose border is roughly equivalent to that of the CIS. Belarus and Ukraine are two CIS exceptions with the fault line allegedly dividing the "more Catholic western Ukraine from Orthodox eastern Ukraine" and presumably western parts of Belarus bordering Poland from the other parts of Belarus bordering Russia and Ukraine.

Huntington's thesis is not always applicable. Western Belarus, for example, has never played the same "Westernizing" role as western Ukraine because of its long period under tsarist rule. Western Ukraine is composed of seven oblasts and is usually described, as in Huntington's thesis, as "Catholic." Yet, only the three Galician oblasts of the seven western Ukrainian oblasts have Catholic majorities while four of them (including Transcarpathia) have Orthodox majorities. Huntington's thesis also does not explain why Orthodox states such as Greece is a member or Bulgaria and Romania are set to join NATO this month and the EU in 2007.

Huntington believes that civilization identities are primordial and therefore fixed in stone. Again, this is questionable. National identities are always in a state of flux and open to competing interpretations and competition from other identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Despite these caveats Huntington's thesis does provide us with some analytical tools with which to understand two factors that

are dividing the 27 postcommunist states. Interestingly, the EU excludes the Slavic Orthodox CIS in the same manner as it has excluded Muslim Turkey. It is striking that no CIS state or Turkey will be among the 10 postcommunist and two Mediterranean states set to join the EU between 2004-07. The EU signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with CIS states, not Association Agreements, which it signed with the Central-East European and Baltic states.

Ukraine has long complained that the EU treats Ukraine as intricately linked to Russia. Some EU officials rule out Ukraine's membership in the EU for now because of their fear that this would isolate Russia (the same argument was used to bring Ukraine into the Council of Europe at the same time as Russia even though Russia was then in the midst of a violent conflict in Chechnya). Other high-ranking EU officials have rejected out of hand Ukraine's membership in the EU, as some have of Turkey.

If "Europe" is defined as the geographic scope of the EU, then Ukraine and the CIS are not considered by Brussels as belonging to "Europe." This situation is made more confusing by public attitudes in European CIS states such as Ukraine. The noncommunist elites are either unreservedly, or at least in terms of rhetoric, pro-European, whereas the same cannot be said about a large proportion of the population.

Since the late 1990s, there has been progress in the first group, the Central-East European and Baltic states, in the three key areas of democratization, the rule of law, and battling corruption. The role of the West in assisting democratization has proven crucial in Europe as it was in Latin America. The possibility of EU membership pulling reformers ahead has influenced former laggards, such as Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. By contrast in the CIS, the unavailability of EU membership reduces the potential influence of the West in encouraging democratization. In the second group of states in the CIS, there has been regression in all the three critical areas of democratization, the rule of law, and combating corruption.

Until the late 1990s, some CIS states such as Russia and Ukraine were grouped within a middle group of states, together with the laggards in Central Europe, such as Slovakia and Bulgaria. Since the late 1990s, this middle group of postcommunist states has gradually divided into two. The Central European states have progressed in democratic and economic reforms. Meanwhile, CIS states in the middle group have regressed towards a third group of states composed of Central Asia and Caucasian states as their ratings have worsened. According to Freedom House's annual "Nations in Transit" survey of the 27 postcommunist states, Bulgaria is a "consolidated democracy" and has a market economy. Freedom House classifies Romania together with Ukraine as "transitional" democracies and market economies. In the 1998-2002 period, Bulgaria improved its ratings on democratization, the rule of law, and economic reform. Romania improved its democratization rating, but then worsened regarding rule of law and economic reform.

In the last two years, according to Freedom House, Ukraine has worsened its democratization and rule of law ratings but marginally improved its economic-reform score. This improvement in

its economic-reform rating was entirely due to the Viktor Yushchenko government of December 1999-April 2001. Democratization in Bulgaria and Romania therefore progressed during 1998-2002 during the same period it stagnated in Ukraine.

Thus, countries once similar to Central Europe's laggards such as Ukraine, have regressed further since the late 1990s. Authoritarianism has retrenched throughout the CIS. In some cases, such as in Russia and Ukraine, political authoritarianism has been combined with economic liberalism. Super-presidentialism is the norm in the CIS (except in Ukraine and Moldova) whereas regimes with strong parliaments are the norm in Central-Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.

Why, then, are the 27 postcommunist states dividing into two groups, one progressing and set to join NATO and the EU, the other sliding backward to a Soviet past?. There is no question but that democratization is under threat and EU membership and therefore "rejoining Europe" is not entertained by Brussels as a future option for the CIS.

Huntingdon believes the reasons for this divide lies in civilization identities which have different perspectives on relations between the individual citizen and the state, "as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy," as he writes. Explanations proffered by other Western scholars include the role of the Orthodox Church in preaching passivity and submission to the worldly government which contributed to a political culture of atomization and cynicism. Unlike the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Church in Russia and the CIS therefore never became a counterweight to an oppressive state.

Another explanation put forward is precommunist history and the length of time spent under communism. These factors, in turn, influenced the manner in which a communist regime would collapse. No significant break with communism took place in the CIS (except in western Ukraine). In Russia, 43 percent of those polled would actively cooperate or support the Bolsheviks (see above), and the number of Stalin's supporters has risen to 22 percent. Likewise in Ukraine, nearly half of the population see the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution on 7 November in a positive light, with only 7.3 percent seeing it in negative terms.

Outside the CIS, the collapse of communism was often the result of "collective, nonviolent civic action," Freedom House's "Nations in Transit" study concluded. A major factor that spurred this activity was "strength of the national idea." In the CIS, both of these factors only operated in western Ukraine.

In Ukraine a political crisis has been brought on by a stalemate between two different visions which is only partially explained by Huntingdon's "clash of civilizations." Ukraine is home to the only large, pro-Western reform movement in the CIS which seeks to implement domestic policies that would decisively break with the Soviet past and facilitate Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. This vision competes with former Soviet Ukrainian elites, turned oligarchic centrists, who espouse the rhetoric of Euro-Atlantic integration while continuing to pursue traditional

CIS-style authoritarian and corrupt policies.

Belarus would seem to confirm Huntington's thesis that the Slavic Orthodox civilization is separate from North American and European civilization. It is the only CIS state whose leader wishes to terminate his country's independence through union with Russia. The lack of a dissident movement in the Soviet era to provide counter-elites, plus a long period under tsarist and Soviet rule coupled with a weak national identity have all served to undermine the country's democratic transition.

Transition in the CIS is undoubtedly more complicated than in the rest of the postcommunist world. Prior to the "Third Wave" of democratization, the Latin countries of Southwestern Europe and Latin America were also assumed to be unable to build "Anglo-Saxon" liberal democracies and market economies. This thesis has proved to be false. Similarly, as with the Latin world prior to the 1990s, it would be therefore premature to write the region off as unfit for liberal democracy, as Huntington's thesis would do.

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