

# Communism's crossroads

**E**ast Germany's aged communist leaders are gnashing their dentures, and with good reason. Ten thousand East German yuppies — the cream of communist society — decamped this week and drove their hard-to-get cars from Hungary to freedom in West Germany.

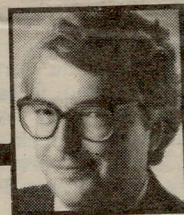
This moving and dramatic event has subtle undertones that are causing serious stress in the nervous nations of East Europe. It also comes right after the largely ignored flight of 310,000 persecuted Moslems from Bulgaria to Turkey.

First, Hungary's stunning decision to allow the German refugees to flee west was clearly part of the ongoing struggle in Moscow between Mikhail Gorbachev's men and party hard-liners. Gorbachev is closely identified with the present reformist leadership in Budapest. As in Poland, the Gorbachev faction appears to be favoring the emergence of a semi-democratic system in Hungary that will soon lead to a coalition between communists and non-communists.

Kremlin hard-liners, however, are bitterly opposed to liberalization in East Europe. They support the Stalinist leadership in East Germany, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. This point was sharply underlined Tuesday when the hard man of Kremlin hard-liners, Yegor Ligachev, flew to East Berlin to lend his support to the East German leaders and to blast the Hungarians. Ligachev's emergency visit was obviously designed as a rebuke to Gorbachev's policies — and as part of the proxy battle in East Europe being fought by Kremlin conservatives and reformers.

Second, Hungary's repudiation of its agreement with the Warsaw Pact not to allow refugees to flee west is part of Budapest's current romance with capitalist Europe. The Hungarians do more trade with Western Europe than any Warsaw Pact nation. One may be certain that Hungary will be generously rewarded by the wealthy West Germans for allowing the East German refugees to escape — both immediately and with future trade and investment. Which, in turn, deeply wor-

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ries Kremlin hard-liners who fear Hungary could quickly slip into West Germany's economic orbit. Hungarians, who have always liked the Germans, would be quite happy there.

Third, it's clear the writing is on the wall for the arthritic regimes of East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Both are hanging on, hoping Gorbachev will fall and be replaced by Stalinists. If this does not happen, their future looks bleak.

East Germany's leader is gravely ill with cancer. The Czech party leaders are old and palsied. Both unpopular regimes are facing growing discontent from their citizens who are being inflamed by events in Poland and Hungary. If reformists take over, both nations could also begin to edge into the West's economic orbit.

And so to the most important point. Watching the East German refugees arrive to a joyous welcome in West Germany, I could almost hear the strains of *Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles* playing in the background. Deep Teutonic passions have been stirred. Suddenly, a reunified Fatherland is in sight. If the Wall ever comes down, East Germany will soon be absorbed into West Germany, either informally or formally.

The idea of a unified Germany gives a lot of Europeans and the Americans the willies. But it is also a concept whose time is coming, and rightfully so. If this happens, much of East Europe will become the economic hinterland for a robust, dynamic Germany. Even that arch-isolationist, Albania, is beginning to open its doors to German trade and technology. Only the Bulgarians and the eccentric Romanians would probably remain firmly in Moscow's sphere of economic influence.

Of course, the big "if" in all this is what will happen in Moscow. As this column has been reporting for some time, violent tensions are building in the USSR. Gorbachev's hold on power may be slipping. Stalinists are now massing for an assault to unseat him.

At the same time, dangerous unrest is surging among ordinary Soviet citizens as crime and shortages of almost everything grow. This week, Boris Yeltsin, leader of the unofficial Soviet opposition, said that unless shortages were resolved, the Soviet Union would face revolution in a year. My sources in Moscow paint a grimmer picture: An explosion could come almost any time as Russia's "have-nots" rise up against party "haves." The most likely outcome of such an explosion, they say, would be a new Stalinist leadership and massive repression.

Europeans are entering nervous, nail-biting times. It's not yet time to break out the wine and start dancing in the streets. Better to fasten seat belts and start praying very hard.



— Tachydromos, Athens