Europe

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To cite this article: Erik Jones (2020) Europe, Survival, 62:3, 245-252, DOI: 10.1080/00396338.2020.1763627

To link to this article:  https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1763627

Published online: 14 May 2020.
What she finds is a microcosm of misdirection, corruption and backroom dealing. At times she tries to imbue this welter of activity with a sense of overarching purpose. What comes across through her narrative, however, is a toxic mixture of opportunism, self-interest and ruthlessness. Time and again, politicians who have access to information use it to their personal economic advantage; time and again their victims choose to stay hidden rather than attract unwanted attention.

The result is devastating for both the neighbourhood and the people who inhabit it. Tragically, many of those inhabitants have no recourse: Grama says that in the eyes of the system they have no history, nor any right to their own heritage. She is surely correct from the perspective of grand narrative. But these people and this part of Bucharest do have a history, and that history is worth exploring. Grama does a brilliant job bringing their story to our attention and explaining why we should care about it. Her book deserves to be widely read.

**Extreme Reactions: Radical Right Mobilization in Eastern Europe**

For a short time after the fall of communism, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe outside the former Yugoslavia did not experience a rise of right-wing extremism. Before long, however, political parties that leaned to the left on economic and redistributive issues but to the right on matters related to culture and identity began to make themselves known. The question is why. The people of these countries were never thrilled about foreigners (although it would be unfair to describe them as outright xenophobic). They also did not experience a dramatic change in economic circumstances, except perhaps for the better (at least for some). Meanwhile, the European Union offered the promise of acceptance either as a member or as a neighbour – providing that countries embraced democratic liberalism. The growth of radical right-wing parties in this context is therefore hard to understand, particularly given their eclectic brand of welfare chauvinism.

Lenka Bustikova offers an interesting insight on the political dynamics that set radical politics in Central and Eastern Europe alight. She argues that the element missing from conventional explanations for right-wing extremism is the rise of minority ethnic groups that have long been present in the region but are only now insisting on their social, political and economic rights. Wherever parties supporting these groups rise in prominence or political power, and wherever the demands of these minorities find their way onto the policy agenda, the growth of right-wing extremism will not be far behind. Members of dominant
ethnic groups do not like their dominance threatened, and will mobilise to preserve and perhaps even reinforce their status in response. Bustikova offers a wealth of empirical data to support this contention, both across the region and particularly in Slovakia and Ukraine. The result is a compelling argument that threats to status should be taken seriously in any explanation of political extremism in Eastern Europe.

Bustikova provides an impressive piece of empirical research wrapped in a careful and convincing analysis. It is understandable that she would need to limit her focus to collect this kind of detailed information. Nevertheless, the book is more important for the questions it raises than for the argument it makes. Yes, it is plausible that right-wing extremist groups rally support from a dominant group whose status is threatened by minorities inside the country. But what does that tell us about causality or about the importance of political parties? If we push her argument more forcefully, the application moves quickly beyond Central and Eastern Europe.

The causal point is worth stressing. Bustikova pushes back against arguments that right-wing extremism comes from xenophobia or economic hardship. Her claim is that these things are constants, and yet support for radical parties tends to vary. That is true, but it is like saying that oxygen is a constant even if fire is not. Put another way, you would not succeed in winning over the supporters of radical right-wing parties by ignoring their economic grievances no matter what your position on minority rights. That is a lesson that some of the more moderate members of the US Democratic Party have failed to grasp, particularly when making concessions on legislation to protect the LGBT community.

The point about political parties is important as well. Bustikova focuses on coalition dynamics because the countries she studies have proportional electoral systems. If she looked at first-past-the-post countries like Great Britain and the United States, she would have to focus on a different unit of analysis. The movement politics underpinning the anti-EU Leave campaign in the UK or the drive to ‘Make America Great Again’ in the US are good illustrations. One could go back to earlier episodes as well. Bustikova is correct in her analysis, but she could be more daring in expanding her findings to other countries.

Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe

No conversation about minority rights in Central and Eastern Europe would be complete without consideration of the influence of Woodrow Wilson. Wilson cemented the principles of self-determination and autonomous development