

The CRCE Newsletter

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Election Observation in the former USSR, - Is it worth it? - A CRCE Discussion

The purpose of the meeting, held in May, was to deliberate on the impact of election observation by the OSCE body in the former USSR, and arrive at an assessment of whether the process was worthwhile, in light of the inflexible authoritarian nature of many regimes in the region. The speakers were Martin Dewhurst, Iain Elliot and Elisabeth Robson. All possessed extensive knowledge of Russia and had observed electoral practices there either as part of the OSCE body or in Elisabeth's case, as an independent journalist. The overarching consensus was that while there were many shortcomings in OSCE procedures election observation was beneficial firstly in changing attitudes towards foreigners in areas where Soviet propaganda has instigated deeply ingrained suspicions of those from the West. Secondly, through illuminating the limitations in electoral practice the OSCE can indirectly exert pressure on the offending countries in the international arena. All speakers additionally emphasised that recently the OSCE had dramatically improved its practices and that the organisation was justified due to its other functions that include consolidating boundaries in Eastern Europe and ensuring cooperation between nations on ecological matters.

Thomas Grieder, Intern at the CRCE

Publications

Post-Communist Economies: the second issue of volume 17 is available and includes an article by Lázló Csaba on Regulation and Public Sector Development. Inspection copies are available on request, and more details about the Journal can be found on the website, www.tandf.co.uk/journals.

From Crisis to Growth by Vladimir Mau, the latest title from the CRCE, is available to newsletter readers at a special price of £20 (RRP: £24).

Portrait of a Political Policeman a Briefing by Ljubo Sirc (£5) provides excellent background to the news story, reproduced on the next page, of Mitja Ribicic.

Anniversaries -- Truth Is the Daughter of Time

' Time and Place - Reflections on VE-Day at the distance of 60 years '

Extracts from a Leader in The Times, 2 May 2005:

Distance can lend perspective. It can also leave us uncertain on what to focus. The commemoration of VE-Day this week will mark 60 years since the end of the Second World War in Europe.

The number who remember the day in which Churchill invited the British people to enjoy 'a brief period of rejoicing' is diminishing. This commemoration, like the D-Day celebrations last year, will be tinged with a special melancholy. This is the last major wartime anniversary many of Britain's 'greatest generation' will attend.

VE-Day itself was a bright moment between two bleaknesses. Although it marked the defeat of the Nazis, it was also itself overshadowed by the encroaching spread of Stalinism. The Russians made enormous sacrifices to be rid of Hitler. But theirs was a victory that was to mean subjection for the peoples of Eastern Europe.

Reflecting on that complex legacy, at this distance, should, however, allow us to see one thing more clearly. The freedom to live in a democracy is precious, and we owe an eternal debt to those who secured freedom for us.

Extract from a letter to The Daily Telegraph, 11th May 2005:

Sir - In this year of anniversaries, I hope there will be amends made to the forgotten victims of the peace in Europe ushered in 60 years ago: the multitudes repatriated forcibly by the Western allies to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia to face 'slavery, torture and death'. If they were not consigned to the gulags, they were executed summarily, as in the case of the non-Communist Yugoslavs, butchered amid scenes of almost unimaginable savagery.

True, some were war criminals and others had fought in German uniform, but most were refugees from Stalin's terror and Tito's partisans, or simply minorities in the wrong place at the wrong time. Worse, among those repatriated were people who fell outside the terms of the Yalta Treaty. If not delivered to their enemies by deception (as highlighted in the libel trial *Aldington v. Tolstoy*), they were handed over by force: defenceless men, women and children were bludgeoned with pick helms, threatened with flame throwers and driven at bayonet point onto lorries and trains by British troops commanded by British officers.

We have a government that is quick to apologise and atone for this country's past misdeeds. While it is unrealistic to expect that compensation will be paid, surely it will accept that an appropriate official apology is due.

It would mean a great deal to the surviving victims, their families and the families of those who were murdered or who died in captivity. [...]

Earl of Portsmouth,
Basingstoke, Hampshire

Lord Portsmouth supported Ian Mitchell in the writing of his excellent and informative book on the Tolstoy versus Aldington libel trial. Do read Mr Mitchell's book, *The Cost of a Reputation-The controversial account of Britain's most notorious war crime and its legal aftermath*. Published in paperback by Canongate in 1998.

BBC News World Edition for Wednesday, 25 May 2005 :

Man on Slovenia genocide charges

Slovenia has charged a former senior communist official with genocide, over the massacre of 234 people in the aftermath of World War II.

Mitja Ribicic, 86, was a chief in the security forces under Yugoslavia's post-war communist leader Tito.

Slovene television said newly unearthed documents suggested Mr Ribicic ordered the summary execution of suspected Nazi collaborators.

Mr Ribicic, under investigation since 1994, has always denied such charges.

'He is being investigated under the law dealing with genocide committed against political or social groups,' Pavel Jamnik, Slovenia's police chief dealing with war crimes, told the AFP news agency.

Revenge

After the war communist forces took revenge on those who had collaborated with German and Italian occupiers.

Editor's Note

The BBC Report above states that only collaborators were murdered by the Communists. Indeed some were collaborators, but by no means all as is made clear in Lord Portsmouth's letter.

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