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The Balkans and the European Civilization

(Summary)

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet empire seemingly put aside the last obstacles to General de Gaulle's dream about a united Europe from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains. However, unlike Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovenia, countries like Rumania, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria found it difficult to get rid of the communist legacy. Moreover, the wars and aggressions of National Communist Serbia in the 1990s gave new strength to the notion about the Balkans as the powder keg of Europe. Western authorities like Samuel Huntington hastened to proclaim that the Balkans, Greece included, belong to the Orthodox civilization and the West should leave that region to become an integral part of the Russian sphere. As a matter of fact, though, Balkan orthodoxy is substantially different from, its Russian counterpart. Under Ottoman rule the Patriarch of Constantinople became the supreme representative of the Orthodox community. Thus the Orthodox church in the Balkans was granted a degree of autonomy it had never enjoyed either under the Byzantine emperors and Bulgarian tsars or, still less, under the Russian autocrats. The Balkans belong to Europe and western civilization more or less to the same extent as the Iberian Peninsula or Sicily. Western European prejudices towards the Balkans are quite similar to the feelings the North Europeans have about the southern part of the continent. There is no doubt, however, that the European Union itself is interested in extending towards the Southeast. Otherwise the Balkans may become a constant source of refugees,

driven out of the region by misery and by an ever more aggressive postcommunist Mafia.