

When suggestions are made for a “new Marshall Plan” for the Eurasian republics it is worth remembering that post-war western Europe and Japan retained the basic pre-requisites for development. Equally important to the success of that historic venture, however, was an unequivocal acceptance — in the countries formally under Occupation — of the political and economic control by outsiders, mainly American, who exerted authority during the crucial initial period of mobilization and institution-building. A kind of germinal “democracy under trusteeship” was more easily able, during the crucial early years, to contain expectations than internationally unfettered democracies would have been.

There are, of course, great differences between the situation of the occupied countries of the former Axis, and the republics newly-freed from Soviet occupation. Even so, citizens and governors of these republics are sometimes wistfully inclined to invite foreign intervention and direction on a scale reminiscent of the post-war Occupations, and might willingly cede some of their new-found sovereignty to acceptable international bodies which could help them to construct viable societies.

Against this background, the dangerous slide of the former Soviet republics and most other COMECON members continues, with better, but still very difficult, prospects for the central European states. Political struggles and instability are impeding international flows of even the modest technical and other assistance pledged, and make large-scale private investment unlikely for some time to come. New economic structures are slow, difficult and painful to put in place, while the old ones have been rapidly hollowed out to the point of collapse. The most significant form of economic and social input from the outside world seems to be the periodic sermons on fundamentalist economic religion from the bloodless preachers of the International Monetary Fund, combined with tough talk about honouring past debts.

In parallel, the world has witnessed an obscene degree of bureaucratic delay and international and institutional rivalry which is the antithesis of coordination, and undermines the value of the limited assistance which does flow. Perhaps the most serious underlying problem is the debilitating trans-Atlantic tug-of-war, with western Europeans seemingly unwilling to accept a major American role in the post-Cold War Europe, but unable to rise to the challenges without it, and the United States itself torn between impulses of activism and isolationism.