

SUMMARIES

THE (EUROPEAN) EAST IN GERMAN HISTORY

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A discussion, on the occasion of the opening of the „House of the German East“ in Munich, of the question of the significance — past, present and future — of the „East“ for Central and Western Europe. The chief focus is on the experience of the South Germans.

In the prehistoric and early historical ages, the „East“ connoted the advance and expansion of foreign peoples. Only the High Middle Ages transformed what had been expansion from East to West into a West-East movement, in which, however, the West's radius of scope was inhibited by Byzantine and then Islamic influences. While the Western Slav areas remained continuously in the orbit of Western and Central European culture, Russia's identification with Europe was put in doubt on numerous occasions.

The national awakening of the Western and Southern Slavs changed the meaning of the word „East“, the Slavic lands, including, Russia, becoming the embodiment of the European East. The victory of the „kleindeutsch“ idea moved the Hapsburg monarchy into a middle position. With the outbreak of the First World War, the „East“ acquired a new and greater topicality. The Russian Revolution split the East once more into an Eastern and an East-Central Europe. The new system of national states in the latter area heightened national tensions. In this European vacuum Hitler could appear to become a power factor.

The Second World War, on the other hand, not only permitted the Soviet Union to become a world power, but also caused all of Eastern Europe to fall into its sphere of power. This meant the advance of the „East“ deep into Central Europe, even penetrating beyond the eastern borders of the Carolingian empire. A third consequence of the Second World War was the elimination of Europe from the world political stage.

The unparalleled degree of European unity achieved under the impact of a threat from the East has now become a kind of sheet anchor. The „East“ is today in a special measure Germany's „destiny“. Not only is Germany divided between East and West, but millions of German expellees from the East live in the West, as do innumerable non-German emigres from the East whose interests remain eastward-oriented. But the time is not yet ripe for a genuine reconciliation between West and East. In the meantime, however, it is imperative to cultivate Eastern cultural traditions in the West. The East, likewise, can hardly escape the necessity of cultivating its contacts with the Western world.