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### Eternal Russian Empire

*"That which we call an empire by any other name would smell as foul."*

Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), enthusiastically egged on by the EU and the US, is quite a development, without precedent in my lifetime as far as I can remember. It's one thing for whole countries to break away or be released to set themselves up as independent entities, but quite another when a province does so.

- In the 1950s and 60s, numerous African and some Asian states became new countries when they were agreeably decolonised by their European imperial masters.
- A further fifteen new states emerged after the wretched

Soviet Union imploded in 1989/90.

- The Yugoslav artifice created by the Versailles Treaty of 1919 blew apart into six more countries during the 1990s, and now a seventh.

But these, save Kosovo, were already distinct countries in their own right; it was just that they were treated as the playthings of other regimes. Ian Smith's UDI for Rhodesia in 1967 also applied to a whole country (under an imperialist's thumb) rather than a bit of one.

There have not been many attempts, successful or otherwise, by provinces to break away. In 1971, Bangladesh split from Pakistan after a short war. But when oil-rich Biafra had tried this in 1967-70, some two million Nigerians died before it was subdued.

Serbia is enraged at losing a chunk of its territory as a result of Kosovo's UDI. Serbs regard Kosovo as the original Serbian heartland and the home of the Serbian Orthodox Church, where Slavic Serbs first ruled in the 12th century, which is why they still call it "*Old Serbia*". But the Ottoman Empire defeated them there in 1389 and swallowed up

Kosovo. After that, and following further military defeats and massacres, Serbs began fleeing northward, which made way for Albanians (of Greek ethnic origin) to start immigrating in large numbers from the east. The Ottomans, meanwhile, instituted a dhimmi regime on Christians and Jews, stripping them of property ownership and other rights and requiring jizya taxes. This helps explain why the Albanians gradually converted to Islam, unlike the Serb minority who stayed behind, most of whom remained Orthodox Christians.

However, with the Ottoman empire weakening in the early 20th century, Serbs re-invaded Kosovo, defeated the Albanians there, re-settled in significant numbers and though still a minority regained sovereignty in 1912.

So you can understand the mutual hostility between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians, periodically stoked over the years by war-making and atrocities on both sides. Russia has always backed the Serbs because of their common Slavic ethnicity and shared Orthodox religion. Indeed, the First World War broke out precisely because Russia supported Serbia when it resisted humiliating demands of the Austro-Hungarian empire after Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serb nationalist.

So today Serbian fury is fully shared by Russia. But not just because they regard each other as blood brothers but because a breakaway Kosovo represents a sinister precedent. For Russia's deep fear is for its own unity.

Throughout the Cold War, the word "*imperialism*" was a pejorative adjective applied exclusively to Western nations - British imperialism, French imperialism and especially American imperialism. A prime exponent of the expression was the Soviet Union, but it was joined by most left-wing intellectuals in the west. Those who lean more to the right (eg, me) never stopped and questioned this. Yet throughout the period there was only one major empire in the world and it certainly wasn't America. It was the Soviet Union, which should have been called the Soviet Empire, for that undoubtedly was what it was. Only Ronald Reagan actually used the word, when he called it - to universal horror - the "*Evil Empire*". But those fifteen countries that broke free in 1989/90 were the vassal states that prove its imperial identity.

So today, Russia no longer calls itself a "*union*" or an "*empire*". It now prefers to be known as a "*federation*", though one which still, laughably, talks of American imperialism, while deploring the fall of the Soviet Union as a "*geopolitical catastrophe*".

But take a closer look at that “*federation*”. It has 22 constituent republics, from Adyghaya to Udmurt, each with its own flag, anthem, history, traditions and often language, each apparently a “*voluntary*” member. And each is headed by a chief executive or governor appointed by ... the Kremlin. In case it comes up in a pub quiz, here they are.

Adyghaya	Altai	Bashkortostan
Bolkaria	Buryatia	Chechnya
Chuvash	Daghestan	Ingushia
Kabardino-Balkar	Kalmykia-Khalm Tangch	Karachaevo Cherkess
Karelia	Khakassia	Komi
Mary-El	Mordovia	Northern Ossetia
Sakha	Tartarstan	Tiva
Udmurt		

Most are members of the “*federation*” because they were swallowed up by Russia in its ever-expanding and colonising empire of the 16th century (Czar Ivan the Terrible) and onwards, either through military conquest or focused marriages or both. Indeed, Russia was proud to call itself the Russian Empire until the Communists overthrew the Czar in 1917. The Reds loved the concept but hated the name, so they called their inherited empire a “*union*” and

in due course added those fifteen more subjugated countries. The latest Russian leadership also love the empire concept but prefer the name “*federation*” as it sounds, well, friendlier.

The name may be friendly but it smells as foul as the empire it actually represents.

One thing is clear: the people of those 22 countries have never been consulted about their absorption by Russia, then or now, and it's no surprise to learn that secessionist movements are rife. Chechnya is but the most extreme example of this.

By any normal understanding of the word, that makes today's Russia not a federation but a traditional, old-fashioned empire. It has never stopped being an empire, and is as illegitimate as any empire ever has been. In similar vein, it is in the process of “*electing*” a pseudo-Czar to replace the current Czar, Vladimir Putin, who will assume the prime-ministership pretending to take orders from, rather than give orders to, the new pseudo-Czar Dmitry Medvedev. And the election is being blatantly rigged, even though all the polls indicated that Mr Medvedev would win by a landslide anyway, even if it were free and fair. Old imperial habits die hard, it seems.

Russia knows full well that those 22 republics are looking with great interest at Kosovo and wondering if their own turn for freedom and independence might one day come.

For if a province can break away from a country, to the general applause of the world, why not a country from an empire?

Russia's rejection of Kosovo's UDI is about much more than Slavic and religious solidarity with Serbs.

Once an empire, always an empire. An eternal empire.

### Princess Obama, Girlie-man

Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton had a curious spat last week after the Drudge Report published a photo of Mr Obama in traditional Somali tribal robes during a visit to Kenya in 2006. I heard the story on the radio when I was abroad, so naturally assumed he was togged out in a huge white turban much as a head-injury victim wears minus the bloodstains, and a great white billowing nightdress. You see Somalis dressed like this at all the best parties throughout Africa and the Middle East.

Anyone in such garb you must always presume to be a, er, Muslim and treat accordingly (don't offer him a beer or sausage, and women shouldn't shake his hand). And I guessed that this was the reason Mr Obama was enraged when the photo of him emerged, and that he

accused Ms Clinton of dirty tricks for allegedly releasing it (which she does not deny). His campaign manager David Plouffe called it “*most shameful, offensive fear-mongering*” and a “*smear*”, though without making clear whether these robust adjectives applied to the photo itself or the fact that someone made it available to the public domain.

For the one thing that Barack Hussein Obama does not want to appear to be is a Muslim, even though he was born to a Muslim father, and as such is - according to Islam - automatically a life-long Muslim for whom apostasy is punishable by death. To be suspected of being a Muslim (thus generating even more mistrust on national security), or closet-Muslim, would deal a mortal blow to his presidential aspirations in this post-911 world, not to mention to his physical life.

Meanwhile, Melanie Philips, has periodically been sneering at the Democratic primaries, and in particular the cult-following that has grown up around Mr Obama, whom she dubs Princess Obama, in memory of the Diana obsession. I feel that is rather cruel.

But then I eventually managed to catch up with the controversial photo.

In 14 years in the Africa and the Middle East, I have *never* ever seen a Somali in a get-up like this, or indeed any African. What on earth is it?

Ms Philips is right. He is a right Princess Obama. No wonder he hates the idea of people seeing him look this way. It's not a



Muslim issue at all. It's a girlie-man thing, to use Arnold Schwarzenegger's infamous epithet.

### Altruism of Smokers and Drinkers

Some years ago I pointed out that we non-smokers in the high-tax social-securitised West should be eternally grateful to smokers and encourage them in their filthy

habit. For, based on British statistics, which I am sure must be typical,

- the punitive taxes collected on the puffers' tobacco during their miserable smoking lives, plus
- the pension payments they then forego due to their early deaths from hideous cancers

far exceed the cost of medical care when they get sick. Moreover, unlike some diseases such as AIDS which cut down people in the prime of their earning power, smokers generally get sick only after they've retired so there is little effect on their productivity and remuneration.

Therefore they are unfairly subsidising all the righteous non-smokers in the community, the same who lecture them on the wickedness and anti-social nature of their addiction.

Were they all to give up the evil weed tomorrow, other taxpayers would have to immediately cough up, as it were, the missing revenue, or else public services would have to be cut back.

A recent piece in the Sunday Times now leads me to a similar conclusion as regards British drinkers and their co-topers in Ireland and elsewhere.

According to two reputable UK institutes, in 1998, HM Revenue collected nearly £11 billion in duty and VAT from sales of alcohol. By 2005 this had risen to a colossal £14 billion, and there's no reason to suppose the steady rise is not continuing today.

According to columnist India Knight in a moan about binge drinking, alcohol misuse currently costs the National Health Service £1.7 billion a year, to which should be added a further £7 billion as the cost of alcohol-fuelled crime.

Big as they are, these figures nevertheless mean that alcohol actually produces a net financial profit of £5 billion to the Exchequer, to be shared among ... teetotallers.

Ms Knight also says that employers lose another £6.4 million a year, but I don't think that should enter the equation, because, frankly, businesses are **choosing** to tolerate this loss. All it demonstrates is that certain bosses are stupid or incompetent or both. (Or drunk.)

So, just as we should smile sweetly at smokers as they blow smoke in our faces, teetotalling non-smokers should equally beam indulgently at late-night binge-drinkers as they vomit all over their shoes.

Both groups are sacrificing their bodies and lives so that others can live with more cash in their pockets to spend on

wholesome pursuits like muesli and sandals. As the Lord didn't say two thousand years ago in John 15:13, "*greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his lungs and liver for his fellow taxpayers*".

How altruistic can you be.

### Intermezzo, Timișoara - Restaurant Review

The beautiful town of Timișoara in western Romania is famous for two things, as I found on a recent trip: street lighting and revolution. And lately for a quirky third: ballet-dancing policemen.



Outside the entrance to the town's principal museum, the Muzeul Banatului, stand two proud lampstands. Inscribed on the quaint-looking lampshades, in different languages, are the words "*Timișoara – the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1884 – the first town of Europe with streets illuminated by electric light*".

Unfortunately and ironically, only one of them functions; the other is dead. But it's good to be famous for something.

Then there are those light-footed policemen. They recently made the international news when Sorin Baltica, a ballerina with the Romanian Opera for 27 years, agreed to train twenty officers. They hope the ballet lessons will make them more “agreeable” and “graceful”, help them to “move with elegance on the streets” whilst also making the traffic also more “fluent”. I must say, anytime I've been stopped back home by the boys in blue, I have noted how inelegantly they march up to my car and how unagreeably and gracelessly they demand I blow into a bag. And downtown the traffic flow is anything but fluent. So I am all in favour of ballet for bobbies. If the 2003 World Rugby Cup Champions England can engage ballerinas to help them loosen up - as they did - then I don't see why the police shouldn't. Those Romanians are ahead of their time.

On a more serious note, Timișoara is also where Romania's remarkable anti-Communist revolution began in December 1989, which resulted in the execution just nine days later of the disgusting Communist killer and dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his slimy wife Elena.

On 16 December antigovernment demonstrations broke out in Timișoara. The next day, as protesters marched on the Communist Party headquarters in the city, Ceausescu ordered his security forces to fire on the crowd, as a result of which some 4,000 died, a huge number from a population of just 300,000. But then elements of the army joined the demonstrators and in a few days the town fell to the protestors. This inspired the rest of the country and demonstrations mushroomed up all over the country.

The next day, the worried Ceausescu organised an adulatory demonstration of their own in Bucharest, which was broadcast live on TV. Nicolai gave a speech, but was visibly shocked when he was shouted down by chants remembering Timișoara and those he had had gunned down there. Whitefaced, he retreated back into his palace and shortly after was seen fleeing from the roof in a helicopter.

By then the army and police had switched sides, and they tracked him down to a house a hundred kilometres away. On Christmas day they tried him and his wife before a military tribunal, sentenced them to death and immediately shot them. Images of the couple's bodies were aired on television to prove they were

gone, to the wild delight of Romanians everywhere.

This memorial in Timișoara, symbolising stylised bodies piled up on a tombstone, pays tribute to the thousands killed there on that fateful but historic day.



Within Romania, you get the feel that there are quite strong associations with Italy. At the least, a big proportion of the restaurants are Italian, many run by Romanians returning after years spent there, and the few I tried were of a very high quality. Top of the list was Intermezzo, located in a basement just off the beautiful Unirii square, where the quality of food and the service were as

good as you will encounter in the best restaurants in Rome.

At the very table illustrated below, my wife and I had a risotto with porcini mushrooms that was simply outstanding, followed by succulent steaks cooked perfectly to our liking, with crispy French fries and luscious spinach liberally impregnated with garlic. For desert we shared a delicious panna cotta. Including a couple of beers and a bottle of wonderful Romanian wine (a Byzantium cabernet sauvignon), the bill came to just €38, a hefty sum for Romania but fantastic value if you're a foreigner.



My only complaint was that they served no Romanian beers, just Italian. That's a pity, because the local beers are very good, but surprisingly hard to find in bars

and restaurants. It's as if the locals are slightly ashamed of their beer, but with no good reason to be.

Nevertheless, my overall assessment is 75%.

Intermezzo is at Piata Unirii 3, Timișoara, on the corner of Vasile Alecsandri, telephone +40-61-25-643.2429. There's no website, but on Google Earth, you'll find it at 45°45'25.46"N 21°13'42.24"E.

So now you have four reasons to visit this lovely town.

### Issue 171's Letters to the Press

Two letters, neither published. In view of my new opportunity as a columnist in the Irish Times, I may have to curtail such missives - or have them curtailed for me.

- FF Was in the Red but Ahern Kept Raiding its Finances  
- to the Irish Times  
Madam, - In Fintan O'Toole's excellent article, "FF was in the red but Ahern kept raiding its finances", he talks about the so-called B/T account in the name of Tim Collins, from which £30,000 was withdrawn as a loan to Bertie Ahern's life partner.

Surely "B/T" couldn't possibly mean "Bertie/Tim"? Nah, of course not!

- Israel and the Palestinians  
- to the Irish Times  
Theo Dorgan makes an eloquent case against what he calls the "collective punishment" of Palestinians due to the blockade of Gaza.

But he misdirects his ire. For it is their fellow-Arabs in Egypt who actually hold the key to their incarceration, and whose security forces brutally injured 90 of them when the Egypt/Gaza wall was recently breached. The Egyptians have now rebuilt it to keep the Gazans in again, yet they don't even have the excuse that their Palestinian brothers are trying to kill them with a daily precipitation of cross-border Qassam rockets. - Yours etc,

### Quotes for Issue 171

----- J I H A D -----

Quote: "There's one law for everybody and that's all there is to be said ... I think that's a bit of a danger."

Rowan Williams, the nutcase Archmullah of Canterbury, makes a dhimmi call for Sharia law to partially displace a thousand years of Common Law in England

Quote: "World powers have created a black and dirty microbe named the Zionist regime and have unleashed it like a savage animal on the nations of the region ... The cancerous growth Israel will soon disappear... we will witness the disappearance of this cancerous growth Israel by means of the Hezbollah fighters' radiation [therapy] ... Lebanese and Palestinian combatants... [will] continue the struggle until the complete destruction of the Zionist regime and the liberation of the entire land of Palestine."

Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his leaders of the Revolutionary Guards Corps and of the Armed Forces generously add to Iran's previous warnings about its planned nuclear obliteration of Israel

Quote: "Mugnieh's blood will lead to the elimination of Israel. These words are not an emotional reaction."

Hizbullah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah threatens Israel after Imad Mugnieh, one of his top military commanders is assassinated, he presumes by the Mossad. Israel usually claims responsibility for such targeted killings, but denies this one

----- R U S S I A -----

Quote: "Although it seems as if the Kremlin would have won even a free election, even a fair election, they did not allow it, that's the real point. Why does a power, who can be sure to stay in power, not really allow a free competition?"

Andreas Gross, head of a delegation from the Council of Europe, the only major European democracy watchdog that will monitor the upcoming ~~coronation~~ election of President Vladimir Putin's chosen successor, Dmitry Medvedev.

----- AUSTRALIA -----

Quote: "We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians ... for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families ... for the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities ... and for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry."

Australian prime minister apologises to the Aborigines and Islanders for removing their children from them for almost a century, supposedly for their own good.

----- O B A M A -----

Quote (minute 8:41-9:11 in the audio): "Barack Obama will require you to work. He is going to demand that you shed your cynicism. That you put down your divisions. That you come out of your isolation, that you move out of your comfort zones. That you push yourselves to be better. And that you engage. Barack will never

allow you to go back to your lives as usual, uninvolved, uninformed."

Michelle Obama explains that there is going to be a lot of new compulsion from the US Government once her husband becomes president.

Workshyness, cynicism, division, isolation, comfort, declination, ordinariness, disengagement, uninvolved, lack of information - they will all be banned, no doubt with hefty prison terms for miscreants.

Quote: "Lifting whole passages from someone else's speeches is not change you can believe in, it's change you can Xerox."

Hillary Clinton berates Barack Obama for plagiarising material for his own speeches

----- U K -----

Quote: "Allowing some patients to access treatments that others could not pay for is unthinkable."

Alan Johnson, the UK's "health" secretary, want to forbid you from spending your own money on your own health, even if you're dying

----- I R E L A N D -----

Quote: "Maireád was a brave, lovely and wonderful Irish woman."

Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin, pays tribute to Maireád Farrell, who was in fact a distinctly unlovely, murderous, IRA terrorist, a convicted bomber, who was thankfully shot dead by the SAS, along with two colleagues, in Gibraltar in 1988.

They were there to plant a Semtex car-bomb at the weekly changing-of-the-guard ceremony.