

office her husband was keeping in the same palazzo, with a benediction to the effect that I was welcome to whatever shelter this offered.

Reminiscent of the *commedia dell'arte* skit “*La Casa Stregata*,” or “The Jinxed House,” the production of the ensuing comedy calls for a split-level stage. Pantalone is told by the doctor that he is ill and must take a house in the country for a change of air. The miserly Pantalone remembers at once that he owns a place in Castello—in Monopoly terms, this is like remembering that you own a tenement in the Bronx—which is rented to Arlecchino. He throws out the hapless ingenue and, looking forward to his *petit-bourgeois* lungs devouring all that free Castello air, moves in himself. Whereupon Arlecchino’s friends come together to persuade Pantalone that the house is haunted, and night after night he is forced to pay the princely sum of four *zecchini* to the psychologically astute Brigheffa playing the scary ghost.

On the upper level, Pantalone contemplates the fate of Venice’s pigeons and the future of the euro while Mrs. Pantalone stirs away at the cocktail of his political ambition, one part Mother Teresa to six parts Lady Macbeth. On the lower level, Arlecchino and friends plot ghostly revenge on the infernal couple. Pulcinella, the owner of the palazzo, and all the comic *zanni* run back and forth between the two levels, scrambling on top of one another like the famous Brustolon angels on the vase supports in the grand ballroom of Ca’ Rezzonico, tripping over the furniture and falling over in unimaginably funny ways.

After more than three months of such slapstick, a veritable fool’s cap on more than a year of agonized pantomime that preceded it, imagine my relief when, one dark day in late November, *deus* finally came out of the *macchina da caffè* to intervene on the side of the downtrodden. Over an espresso in Campo S. Luca, a friend of mine, young Hugues L—, told me of a family house of theirs, Palazzo Contarini-Michiel, that was in the process of being vacated by the Greek consul in Venice after some 20 years of neglectful occupation. And yes, his father would let me have the same “*quattro più quattro*” that the consul had.

The 15th-century palazzo stands on the Grand Canal next to Ca’ Rezzonico, the very grand house where Robert Browning lived and died, and it is under its roof, needless to say—because this is Italy,

where every good *commedia dell'arte* plot must always have the happy ending conducive to healthy digestion—that I am now writing this proclamation of final and quite irreversible triumph. When I told Lady Pantalone that I had made other arrangements and was no longer in need of her ambiguous hospitality, the copperplate Roman look on the blank of her ivory-laid face was recompense enough for the eternity I had spent in addressless anguish. Curtain, applause, polenta for the actors.

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Letter From Belgium

by Tomislav Sunic

The Coming Belgoslavia?



What was meant to grow separately cannot last long as an artificial whole. This prehistoric wisdom seems to be forgotten by advocates of multiculturalism—which is just a misleading euphemism for polyethnism and multiracialism. The unpredictable side of multiracial conviviality seems to be deliberately overlooked by political elites in multiethnic and multiracial Belgium, a miniscule country that has recently been rocked by pedophile scandals in the lofty corners of high politics. Its venerable royal court, under King Albert, and the liberal-leftist coteries in power have found themselves popularly referred to as the “Chester Molesters in charge of running Belgoslavia.”

The separatist-minded Flemings also derisively dub the Belgian state “the last Soviet republic.” There may be some truth to that appellation, and not just because Brussels is the site of the Ceausescu-style building that houses the E.U. eurocrats. The Belgian postal authorities have recently produced a stamp with Lenin’s face on it. That which would be violently rejected in the more virile post-communist Balkans or Russia seems to enjoy market value among the political class and socialist trade unions in this artificial state. By contrast, any minor and inoffensive joke against the rising tide of illegal Asian immigrants, or any criticism of the Asian and Albanian drug dealers

who have invaded Antwerp, can get you into legal trouble and earn you the label of a racist right-winger.

A complicated coalition government, elected on a proportional basis, runs the country. Belgium has two parliaments but refuses to accept the Flemings as a separate and distinct ethnic group within the clearly defined federal republic. Instead, the leftist-controlled media refer to the Flemings as the “Dutch-speaking residents of Belgium residing in the ‘region’ of Flanders.” The phrase “*region de Flanders*” is in every politician’s mouth. In the early 1970’s, the Flemings, after a century-long legal (and often violent) fight, had managed to win a great deal of linguistic and cultural autonomy, but Francophile Jacobinism still lurks everywhere. The pro-government media quickly rebukes as racism any sign of Flemish separatism or nationalist sentiment.

The towering irony is that the Flemings are not an ethnic minority in Belgium. They represent the absolute majority, totaling 6.6 million residents. Unlike the 3.5 million French-speaking Belgian Walloons, who are located in the southern half of Belgium, the Flemings have a more pronounced sense of national identity and cultural distinctiveness, which cannot be solely attributed to their Germanic roots or their distinct language. For over a century, Flanders has been part and parcel of a larger entity, and most Flemings, regardless of their political credo, reject centralism, which has been exported to them by neighboring France since the 14th century. Within this context, we can understand why the so-called right-wing nationalist Vlaams Blok has a rather poor and awkward relationship with Jean-Marie le Pen’s Front National in France. The party is, however, rather supportive of the separatist Québécois in Canada and shows no hesitation in backing the autonomy of Northern Ireland or the Basques. In France, on both the right and left wings of the political spectrum, hardly anyone questions the centralized structure of the French state.

That is not the case in Flanders, which nurtures a strong central-European, confederalist, and quasi-imperial attitude toward former bits and pieces of the defunct Habsburg Empire. The Belgian government, eager to show its politically correct credentials, was in the forefront of the condemnation two years ago of the alleged xenophobia of Austria’s Jörg

Haider. Flemish nationalists quickly responded to the Belgians' undiplomatic posturing. The Vlaams Blok loudly sided with Haider's beleaguered FPO party and his coalition government, rapidly dispatching truckloads of Flemish youngsters to mountainous Austrian Corinthia on skiing holidays.

The Flemings' pro-Central European inclinations are firmly grounded in history. During the Flemish-born Charles V's reign, Flanders became part of the vast, confederal Holy Roman Empire, whose longevity and solid structure overshadows the nebulous Soviet-inspired European Union. The Holy Roman Empire's main goal was to chase the Turks out of Europe and to keep the Turkish ally in the West—treacherous proto-Jacobin France—from crossing the Rhine River. The terrorist artillery bombardment of Brussels by Louis XIV is often cited among Flemings as a warning against any rapprochement with France. By the end of the 17th century, while Louis XIV was realizing his aggressive dreams in the west, Flemish volunteers, along with thousands of Central European fighters under the charismatic Prince Eugene of Savoy, were desperately trying to stem the Turkish tide in Central Europe. Even today, Flemings harbor a great deal of sympathy for the Habsburg Empire and its mythic queen Maria Theresa. Not surprisingly, Flemish nationalists were among the first to flock to the aid of Croatia after Croatia's proclamation of independence in 1991. The Walloons, as well as the neighboring French, were not happy with the dissolution of multiethnic Yugoslavia. Its breakup vividly reminded them of their own historical miscreants.

A foreigner must be cautious in addressing a Flemish passerby in French. A Fleming will feign ignorance and play dumb, although he may speak perfect French. Yet, when approached by a foreign tourist, he will immediately start speaking fluently in both English and German and will escort the tourist to the next village and show hospitality. Even a simple Flemish garbage collector gets by in three different languages. In Wallonia, it is a miracle to encounter a public official who speaks a word of Dutch, let alone one who can stutter broken English or mutter some German words.

Although smaller nations are seldom enamored of their big neighbors, Flemish nationalists are amicable toward Germany. Their overtly warm ties to Germany during the past century have led to

setbacks in their quest for independence. They are immediately called "former Nazi collaborators" by leftist journalists each time the Vlaams Blok makes some politically incorrect statement. And while the Flemings speak the same language as the neighboring Dutch (and despite the fact that Flanders was, from 1816 to 1830, part of the larger United Kingdom of the Netherlands), they do not have pronounced affection for the Dutch. Their Catholic tradition and their baroque mentality have separated them from their Protestant and mercantile next-door neighbors. An important figure from the Vlaams Blok Youth, lawyer Karim Van Overmeire, told me that the Flemings reject with horror the permissiveness and decadence of the Dutch and cannot accept their tolerance for drug consumption.

This is not to say that the Flemings are pious Catholic believers. In fact, the Vlaams Blok includes a considerable number of agnostics and pagans among its ranks. At political gatherings, you seldom see a Catholic priest—as is almost always the case in Croatia—pontificating on the virtue of global brotherhood or multiracialism. Flemish nationalists, unlike other European nationalists, have also avoided clannish nationalism and party intrigues, which have been a hallmark of Umberto Bossi's Lega Nord in Italy and Le Pen's Front National.

The greatest weapon that Flemish nationalists wield in their quest for more autonomy is their thriving economy, built on their exceptional service industry, which is the best in Western Europe. The Flemings could easily bail out of Belgium, but the Walloons, whose work ethic is poor and whose corrupted politicians and trade unions have become addicted to generous Flemish subsidies, could not. A prominent Flemish scholar of Hinduism, Dr. Koenraad Elst, who is also critical of "Belgoslavia," summarized the psychology of the Walloons in one curt sentence: "The debtors always hate their creditors." Until 1970, the Walloons had run the Belgian military and diplomatic show, but their economic clout began to fade by the late 70's. Wallonia—which had been, since the Industrial Revolution, the main European location of industry—lies barren and destitute today. Closed-down factories in the cities of Liege and Charleroi, decorated by throngs of idle and destitute Arab youth, look like they belong in Third World countries.

By contrast, the Flemings—who, until the early 1950's, were held in contempt and often derided by Walloon high bourgeoisie as lowly proles who are only good for milking cows and shoveling horse dung—have surpassed the Walloons in wealth. Flanders' economic growth has been on the order of 2.5 to 3.2 percent annually over the past decade, while the growth in Wallonia has not exceeded 1.9 percent during the same period. The number of unemployed in Flanders stands at 4.9 percent of the population; in Wallonia, it is a staggering 15 percent. Flanders accounts for 86 percent of the country's exports. A major point of contention is the centralized social-security system and government-run pension funds, whose prime benefactors are Walloons. Flemish fiscal transfers to Wallonia are about 120 billion Belgian francs annually (approximately three billion U.S. dollars). In other words, each Flemish family pays over \$500 per month in welfare to Wallonia.

Along with the historical and cultural gap between these two peoples, the economic arguments seem reason enough to write the country off the map. This may not be easy, considering that the European Union chose the tiny multiethnic and multiracial Belgium as its Politburo. Only when Belgium begins balkanizing into Euroslavia will some eurocrat in Brussels likely start scratching himself behind the ear. As in the case of the former Yugoslavia, it may be too late.

Tomislav Sunic, a writer and former Croat diplomat, resides in Europe.

Letter From Texas

by Wayne Allensworth

Christmas, Texas



I am fumbling in the console, looking for my Jim Reeves Christmas CD, when I notice the wall of rolling, gray clouds approaching from the east. The sun is sliding slowly beneath the horizon in the west, shooting shards of orange-red hues into the purple-blue sky, presenting a striking contrast to the dark gray wall, fading into black in its core, bearing down on us like a biblical judgment.