



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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Special Issue on Refugees from the CIS and Eastern Europe

The Plight of East European Refugees

Nationalism has become a destructive force throughout the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Masses of people have become uprooted as a result of border clashes between people of newly independent states and discriminatory—at times genocidal—policies that their governments pursue. Most of these people flee to neighbouring regions of what used to be their country. Relatively few manage to escape to the West. The number of those who are accepted by Western countries is even smaller. Certainly not everyone wants to flee to the West, but even those who do are held back by barriers erected by receiving countries to prevent massive refugee inflows.

European and North American governments' immigration policies have become more restrictive as a result of at least three factors. First, broad anti-Communist, pro-market reforms in the former Soviet bloc countries produced euphoria in the West that blurred the vision of Western countries and made them close their eyes to human rights abuse by these seemingly "democratic" states. As a result, several asylum and

refugee-receiving countries have adopted policies that disqualify Soviet and Eastern Europe refugees from being recognized as such and at times from even claiming refugee status. In Canada, for instance, as of September 1990, the Designated Class category for self-exiled persons from Soviet and Eastern European countries was removed. The Designated Class category applies to those displaced people who do not fit the strict UN Convention's refugee definition under which a claimant needs to prove a well-founded fear of persecution. It is expected that in

September 1992 the Lautenberg Amendment, which exempts certain categories of Soviet applicants from establishing a well-founded fear of persecution, will be lifted in the United States. In 1990, both France and Switzerland announced that they would cease accepting asylum applications from nationals of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Second, the economic recession has contributed to deficiencies in the budget for immigration process and resettlement on the one hand, and xenophobic sentiments among the host population on the other. In the United States the

Contents:

The Plight of East European Refugees <i>Editorial</i>	1
Reflections on Hungary <i>Earl Noelte</i>	4
Albanian Refugees in Italy <i>Giovanna Campani</i>	7
The Canadian Refugee Policy and Practice Towards Refugees from the Commonwealth of Independent States <i>Tanya Basok</i>	11
The Third Road: Where Is It Leading Russia? <i>Alexander Benifand</i>	17
Jews and Cossacks in the Jewish Autonomous Region <i>Felix Ryansky</i>	19
Jews in Ukraine <i>A. Polyakov</i>	22

