

## Foreword

### East of a New Eden book

When we were still just children, we were taught, broadly speaking, that the world was divided into two quite distinct and easily recognizable camps. On this side of the Iron Curtain was the Free World, and on the other was the frightening world of Communism representing a real and constant threat: the USSR, which seemed to us so aptly named, as the French version, URSS, evoked the word *ours*, or bear, and was thus an extremely colorful acronym our childhood imaginations transformed into the living and terrifying symbol of that immense and mysterious region. It was an uncouth bear, frightening, surely disheveled, and (for good measure) probably foul smelling as well; a musky but also a musty smell, unnerving and disturbing. Between these two forces — that of good (us) and that of evil (the Bear) — lay the countries that were partially victims and partially complicit. We weren't entirely sure what side to put them on, but a few revolutions crushed by an iron fist reassured us — without being given the chance to act as saviors and defenders of freedom — that we really were on the right side. These countries made up the security belt, the buffer zone between two worlds.

Some would say it was a strange time, a fortunate time, when the origins of evil were not in doubt. A time when the fear of the wild beast served as a brake upon an unfettered free-market economy, and when every worker undeniably felt to some small extent protected by the mighty shadow of the plantigrade animal we preferred to have at a distance.

It was after we had more or less set aside these views, in a world still in search of its identity, that in 2000 we happened upon an article in the newspaper *Le Temps*. It spoke of a “fortress Europe” then under construction and of the ongoing process of expansion. “Expansion”: one could hardly have chosen a more unfortunate word to describe the *reunion* that Hungarians, Czechs, and Slovaks had been hoping and praying for for so many years. But fine — let Brussels show its generosity, with that hint of arrogance that has always characterized the West. For while the choice of words may not be fortunate, it at least has the virtue of clarity: we can't possibly be expected to let them think we come from the same world !

One can almost feel the fear that underlies this rush toward expansion: the horrifying possibility that the countries in question might not come back to the fold, the nightmare of an empire too small to be taken seriously. The watchtowers of the European Union seem to have two different functions, that of keeping immigrants out and that of asserting the Union's hold upon the new countries, of preventing them, in some sense, from escaping.

Nor does the surveillance end with the watchtowers and the patrols stationed all along the border — far from it. Information on the migrants is shared among member countries by means of a data network called the Schengen Information System, or SIS. The nerve center of this network is in Strasbourg, where the data is processed and then redistributed to the appropriate authorities in each of the member states.

Thus, it was with an attitude of curiosity that our little team set out to discover the external borders of the European Union. To see where Europe ends, where the Union ends, on what terrain and with what foreign lands in the distance. We made a first approach, almost canine, by sniffing the air all around in search of a trail. We sought for the trail of recent or distant pasts, of pasts finished and done with and others all too present — and of futures that are inevitably bright. Each of us set out with a GPS receiver in his pocket and his favorite camera. A short time before, we had drawn lots to decide which one of us would start from the North and which from the South. Then — one from the shore of the Baltic Sea and the other from that of the Black Sea — we began our journey toward the middle of the continent. From patrol to patrol — Estonian, Latvian, Romanian, Hungarian — we advanced through the snow-covered landscapes of Central Europe. We shared the life of the border guards, who sometimes gave us their opinions on their new mission. Having formerly worked under the jackboot of one empire, they now worked for another one, a new one, with newer equipment and more attractive salaries. Some of the officers were still accustomed to the strictures of the previous regime and were having difficulty adapting to those of the new era.

Every time we encountered a scene that piqued our photographic interest, we stopped beside the border, often with a patrol stamping their feet behind us to keep warm as they waited for us to finish waiting. For the photographer's trade is made up of periods of waiting and attentive observation. And then, for reasons that (at least from the outside) were never entirely clear, we would snap the picture, and the patrol — a little bit irritated, a little bit mocking — would relax. After having noted the geographic position from where the photograph was taken, we would carry on walking until the next scene captured our attention.

This is the journey we invite you to discover through our photographs. Photographs that attempt to convey the impression that was made on us by this region of the world. An impression of transition, but a transition frozen, trapped in the frost, like those mammoths discovered intact in blocks of ice, witnesses to a transitional period in history. Borders change and do not change ; sometimes they retain the same course for centuries but take new names as empires come and go. But sometimes they change completely, and the names of entire nations sink into oblivion. Since the question of borders was becoming far too complex for mere traveling photographers like us, we decided to invite contributors from a wide

variety of fields to join the discussion. Geographers, archaeologists, experts in photography and art, sociologists, and others came along to share their views, to talk about the notion of borders from their own perspectives. Sometimes quite technical and at other times artistic, the sum total of these discussions resembles our own approach, which alternates between the rigors of geopolitics and a personal vision ; and though it does not provide any answers, it does, we hope, raise questions in a spirit of openness.

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