

FREEMASONRY IN FORMER 'SOVIET BLOC' COUNTRIES

by Tony Pope

Since the collapse of the Soviet system in 1989–91, Freemasonry has been introduced or restored in the Russian Federation and most Eastern European countries. This has been achieved with the help of several European and American Grand Lodges—not always working in concert.

This article provides a brief outline of the development of Freemasonry in former 'Soviet Bloc' countries over the past decade or so. While primarily concerned with Freemasonry sponsored from 'mainstream' Grand Lodges, it also covers Masonic activity from other sources.

The Baltic states

Finland supplied the impetus for the restoration of Freemasonry in Estonia, the northernmost of the Baltic states, while Germany has been responsible for its introduction into Latvia and Lithuania.

Estonia: Between 1993 and 1998, the Grand Lodge of Finland chartered four lodges in Estonia, and then assisted in the erection of the Grand Lodge of Estonia by these lodges in 1999. Two of the lodges meet in the capital, Tallinn, and there are one each in Pärnu and Tartu. All meet at 6 pm, and hold a formal dinner after the meeting. They work an Estonian translation of the Finnish ritual, derived from the Webb-form ritual of the Grand Lodge of New York.

Co-Masonry has been established in Estonia as part of the Finnish Federation of the International Order of Co-Freemasonry *le Droit Humain*, which has a website at <<http://www.droit-humain.org/Finland>>.

Latvia: So far, only one lodge has been re-established in Latvia, Lodge Jānuguns #1010, chartered by the Grand Lodge AF&AM of Germany in 1996. It meets in the capital, Riga, at noon on the fourth Saturday of each month, and works a Latvian translation of its parent Grand Lodge's ritual. It has a home page at <<http://www.freimaurer.org/januguns.riga>>.

Lithuania: In Lithuania, three lodges have been chartered from Germany, in 1993, 1995 and 1999. All meet at the same location, at the same time, in the capital, Vilnius, on the second Sunday of each month at 2 pm. All work the Schroeder ritual in Lithuanian.

Former Yugoslavia

On the southern borders of Western Europe lie the Balkan states of former Yugoslavia, a troubled region much in the news. Freemasonry exists in three of these states, Croatia, Slovenia and the present Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia: Three German lodges, whose members were mainly Yugoslav exiles, relocated to Belgrade, capital of Yugoslavia, when communist rule collapsed, and in 1990 they formed the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, with the support of the Grand Lodges of Germany and Austria. Other lodges were chartered, but a schism occurred in 1993. From this we now have two Grand Lodges: the Regular Grand Lodge 'Yugoslavia' (RGLY), supported by the United Grand Lodges of Germany and other mainstream Grand Lodges, including the United Grand Lodge of England; and the National Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, which became one of the founders of the United Grand Lodges of Europe, a union sponsored by the Grand Lodge of France.

The Regular Grand Lodge 'Yugoslavia' now has six lodges, four of them working in Belgrade, one elsewhere in Serbia, and one in Montenegro. They meet at least twice per month, and use the Schroeder ritual in Serbo-Croat. The English-language version of the RGLY website is at <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5020/NEWRGLY.htm>>.

Croatia: By 1995 about 70 Croatians had been initiated in Austria, and at this stage the Grand Lodge of Austria chartered three lodges to meet in Croatia. These formed the basis of the Grand Lodge of Croatia, erected in 1997 and quickly recognised by the Grand Lodge of Austria and subsequently by the United Grand Lodge of England. All three lodges meet weekly in the capital, Zagreb, on Mondays or Tuesdays at 8 pm, and work the Schroeder ritual in Croatian. The lodges recess in June, July and August. The Grand Lodge has an excellent website with an English translation at <<http://www.vlh-glc.org/indexeng.htm>>.

Slovenia: In 1990 some Slovenians were initiated in Yugoslavia, but the following year they joined a 'deputy lodge' under the Grand Lodge of Austria, working in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana. In 1994 a second 'deputy lodge' began work in the capital, and both were given full charters in 1996. A third Austria

lodge was chartered in 1998. These three lodges were the foundation of the Grand Lodge of Slovenia, erected in 1999 with the blessing of the Grand Lodge of Austria. The lodges all meet weekly at the same location, on Mondays and Tuesdays at 7.30 pm, and work the Schroeder ritual in Slovenian. As is common in Europe, they recess for the months of June, July and August.

Central states

On the eastern borders of Germany and Austria are Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, all of which have had Freemasonry restored, some from surprising sources.

Poland has had Grand Lodges at various times in its chequered history, commencing with one of English origin as early as 1769. Between the two world wars was a National Grand Lodge, formed from lodges chartered by the Grand Orient of Italy. When Freemasonry was banned in 1938, one of these lodges moved to France and obtained a charter from the French National Grand Lodge. In 1990, this lodge returned to Warsaw, capital of Poland, where it was soon joined by two others that had been in exile in Italy. These three lodges re-established the National Grand Lodge of Poland in 1991, with the assistance of the French National Grand Lodge and the Grand Orient of Italy. There are now five lodges in this jurisdiction. They meet monthly, three in Warsaw, one at Krakow, and one near Poznan. All work the Scottish Rite Craft degrees, four in Polish and one in French.

Also active are: the Grand Orient of Poland, with seven lodges, which is aligned with the Grand Orient of France; a Grand Lodge 'Humanitas' (the name suggests it is mixed-gender); the Polish Jurisdiction of the International Order of Co-Freemasonry *le Droit Humain*, comprising five Craft lodges and a 'high degrees' lodge, which is registered according to Polish law, and has a website at <<http://www.ceti.com.pl/~masonipl/STAN.html>>; and lodges or 'triangles' from the Grand Lodge of France and the Feminine Grand Lodge of France.

Between the two world wars there were two Grand Lodges in what, for most of the 20th century, was called Czechoslovakia—one derived from Germany and the other from Italy. Both were widely recognised and they worked in amity until both were suppressed by Hitler in 1939. At the end of World War Two, the Grand Lodge of Czechoslovakia was revived by surviving Masons, but was again suppressed after the communist coup of 1948. The Grand Lodge of Czechoslovakia was revived yet again in 1990 by those few Masons who survived, and they elected as Grand Master a brother who had been initiated in 1926.

Czech Republic: In 1993 Czechoslovakia split into two republics, Czech and Slovak, and the Grand Lodge was renamed the Grand Lodge of the Czech Republic. By the year 2000 it had six lodges, five of them meeting in the capital, Prague. Four of these work in Czech and the other in French. All use a Schroeder-derived Emulation-type ritual.

The sixth lodge was originally located in Bratislava, which became the capital of the new Slovak Republic. Exercising the Masonic virtue of Prudence, the lodge relocated to Brno, in the Czech Republic, but by February 2000 the political climate in Slovakia seemed more conducive to Freemasonry, and the lodge moved back to Bratislava.

The Czech Grand Orient, which is affiliated with the Grand Orient of France, was founded in June 1993. It has three lodges in Prague and three in country towns. The National Grand Lodge Humanitas Bohemia, derived from a mixed-gender Italian body, the Grand Lodge of Italy of Ancient Free Accepted Masons, has two lodges in Prague and two in country towns. It is a member of the international mixed-gender organisation, CATENA.

The Grand Lodge of France, the Feminine Grand Lodge of France, and the International Order of Co-Freemasonry *le Droit Humain* each have a lodge in Prague.

Slovakia is less well represented, with just one lodge under the Grand Lodge of the Czech Republic and one chartered by the Grand Orient of France, both of which meet in the capital, Bratislava. The Grand Orient lodge, which also has close ties with the Czech Grand Orient, has two websites, at <<http://www.humanizmus.sk>> and <<http://www.slobodomurar.sk>>.

Hungary: In the 19th century, Hungary had a Grand Lodge derived from Germany and a Grand Orient derived from France. In 1886 they united as the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary. This was dissolved in 1920 and revived in 1946. It lasted just four years before being closed by the secret police in 1950. In 1989 the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary was restored, with assistance from the Grand Lodge of Austria, and now has seven lodges, all but one of which meet in the capital, Budapest. Six of the seven use a form of the Schroeder ritual, five in Hungarian and one in German. The seventh lodge uses the Oxford ritual, in English.

Most lodges meet every two weeks at 6 pm, with a light meal and wine after the meeting. All recess in July and August.

South-eastern states

Among the states in South-eastern Europe, Freemasonry is established in Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and the Ukraine, and is in the process of gaining a foothold further east in Armenia and Georgia.

Bulgaria: The Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia chartered three lodges in Bulgaria, which formed the Grand Lodge of Bulgaria in 1992. Unfortunately, the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia developed internal problems at this time, which reflected on the Grand Lodge of Bulgaria, and general recognition was not forthcoming.

The United Grand Lodges of Germany established three lodges in Bulgaria in 1994, and two more in 1996. These formed the Grand Lodge of Bulgaria AF&AM in 1997, with the blessing of the United Grand Lodges of Germany and other mainstream Grand Lodges.

In April 2001 the two Grand Lodges of Bulgaria amalgamated as the Grand Lodge of AF&AM of Bulgaria (United). The new Grand Lodge has the support of the United Grand Lodges of Germany and the Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland, and is likely to gain widespread mainstream acceptance.

There are also four lodges in Bulgaria under the International Order of Co-Freemasonry *le Droit Humain*.

Romania: Like Bulgaria, Romania has had two Grand Lodges in recent years, which have now amalgamated. The Grand Orient of Italy chartered lodges in Romania, and in 1993 these re-constituted the National Grand Lodge of Romania, with assistance from the Grand Orient of Italy and the Grand Lodge of California. The National Grand Lodge gained mainstream recognition, and thrived. By early 2000 it had 59 lodges.

Meanwhile, a Romanian Scottish Rite body, which had gone into exile in France while Romania was under communist rule, and whose members had joined the French National Grand Lodge, returned to Romania and proceeded to erect their own Grand Lodge, called the United Grand Lodge of Romania.

Negotiations began as early as 1994, to amalgamate the two bodies, and on two occasions lodges of the United Grand Lodge switched allegiance to the National Grand Lodge. Finally, all were brought under the one banner in 2001, as the National Grand Lodge of Romania. The new Grand Lodge has 90 active lodges and about 2000 members. It has a website under construction at <<http://www.freemasonry.ro>>. One of its lodges, Forum Lodge #64, meeting in the capital, Bucharest, produces a high-quality monthly magazine in Romanian and English, with papers on history and symbolism, and has an electronic version at <<http://www.forumlodge.ro>>.

There are also at least six lodges in Romania under the Grand Orient of France.

Moldova: The Republic of Moldova is located between Romania and the Ukraine. During 1997 and 1998, five lodges were chartered from the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy (GLRI), four meeting in the Moldovan capital, Chisinau, and one in a country town. In October 1998 they were formed into a Regional Grand Lodge under the GLRI. Over the next 12 months, four more lodges were chartered, all meeting in Chisinau, and in October 1999 these nine lodges formed the Grand Lodge of Moldova, with the blessing of the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy. These lodges work the English Emulation ritual in Romanian.

Ukraine: In 1993 the French National Grand Lodge (GLNF) chartered a lodge in Paris, for the purpose of initiating Ukrainians. This lodge moved to Kiev, capital of the Ukraine, in 1996. Two years later the GLNF chartered a second lodge in the Ukraine, at Kharkov. Both use the GLNF's Scottish Rite Craft ritual in Ukrainian, and are administered from France.

In 1998 the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy (GLRI) chartered three lodges in the Ukraine, two at Odessa and one at Kiev, and formed these into a Regional Grand Lodge. Over the next 12 months the GLRI chartered three more lodges, two at Odessa and one at Kiev, and in October 1999 these six lodges formed the Grand Lodge of the Ukraine, with the support of the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy.

Armenia: In recent years Armenians have joined lodges in Argentina, England, France, Israel, Lebanon, Romania and the USA. In late 1999 the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia chartered a lodge for Armenians, meeting initially in Washington but intending to move to Armenia as a working lodge. It is still in the USA. At about the same time, the Grand Lodge of Russia (before the schism resulting in formation of the Russian Regular Grand Lodge), the French National Grand Lodge and the National Grand Lodge of Romania (before the Union) each planned to charter one lodge in Armenia, so that these might form a Grand Lodge, but these plans have not come to fruition.

Georgia is situated between Russia and Turkey. A number of Georgians have been initiated in Moldova and the Ukraine, in lodges derived from the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy (GLRI), but no news has been received, as yet, of lodges established in Georgia.

Russia

Since 1922 the French National Grand Lodge (*La Grande Loge Nationale Française*, GLNF) has had a lodge for Russian Masons and many of these members took Freemasonry back to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in 1995 the Grand Lodge of Russia was erected, with a constitution, regalia and regulations based on the GLNF. The lodges work the Scottish Rite Craft degrees, mostly in Russian, but some work in English, French and Armenian. The Grand Lodge website is at <<http://freemasonry.ru>>. By the beginning of 2001 there were 15 lodges under the Grand Lodge of Russia, including a research lodge, Quatuor Coronati #8, and two others worthy of special mention.

Lodge Brotherly Love #10 was granted a travelling warrant. With a membership drawn from Russia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Lebanon, Austria, France and Germany, it is permitted to travel outside the Russian Federation, to meet in other jurisdictions (with their permission) and in countries where Freemasonry does not exist—particularly in those east of the Ural mountains. The other unusual lodge is Lodge Pacific Rim #12, based at Vladivostock. It was formed with assistance from the Grand Lodge of Alaska, which initiated its founding members and continues to support it by soliciting ‘honorary’ membership of the lodge among mainstream Masons worldwide.

However, all was not well with Russian Masonry and early in 2001 the Deputy Grand Master, both Grand Wardens and about 40% of the membership broke away from the Grand Lodge of Russia (GLOR) to form the Russian Regular Grand Lodge (RRGL), with claims that the Grand Master of GLOR had forfeited sovereignty of his Grand Lodge and was operating under the influence of a Supreme Council, that he was in breach of the civil law by refusing to register his Grand Lodge in accordance with Russian law, and that there had been misappropriation of funds and breaches of the constitution. In all, some 76 members have quit GLOR, leaving an estimated 86 behind. The actual number remaining is uncertain because GLOR follows the GLNF practice, allowing plural membership and counting heads more than once if a brother belongs to more than one lodge.

The Russian Regular Grand Lodge (RRGL) has five Craft lodges and a lodge of research, Quatuor Coronati Lodge; five lodges meet in the capital, Moscow, and one at St Petersburg. The new Grand Lodge has adopted a constitution based on that of the United Grand Lodge of England, and is considering adopting English regalia. The lodges are working the same Scottish Rite Craft degrees ritual as the GLOR at present, but have the option of adopting other rituals.

The RRGL has registered in accordance with Russian Federation law as an ‘Association of Rough and Perfect Ashlars—Russian Regular Grand Lodge’, and has published its allegations about the GLOR worldwide. The GLOR has not publicly answered these allegations, other than to say the split is ‘political’.

In addition to these two Grand Lodges, the Grand Orient of France has established a Grand Orient of Russia, and the Grand Lodge of France has six lodges in Russia.

Conclusion

Thus Freemasonry has been introduced or restored in 17 countries formerly under Soviet rule or influence, largely by the efforts of nine mainstream Grand Lodges, six of them Western European and three American, and by at least five other Western European bodies. Germany has been active in Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, while neighbouring Austria has promoted Masonry in Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Yugoslavia. Three Masonic bodies in Italy have been sponsors in Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Moldova and the Ukraine, and the initiative has been taken by five French Masonic organisations in relation to Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Armenia and the Ukraine. Direct aid has been provided by the Grand Lodges of Alaska, California, and the District of Columbia for Russia, Romania and Armenia respectively, while Estonia has benefited indirectly from New York, via Finland, and others have been influenced by US-sponsored Scottish Rite bodies and individuals. Similarly, English guidance has been felt, particularly via its associates, the French National Grand Lodge (GLNF) and the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy (GLRI).

Freemasonry in former Soviet Bloc countries has already adopted some of the diversity of Freemasonry Universal, with variety of ritual and practice, and with mainstream, liberal and a-dogmatic Grand Lodges. Unfortunately, it has also demonstrated that it is heir to some of the ills that beset the Craft worldwide, as

evidence the schisms in Yugoslavia and Russia. However, the speedy healing of differences in Bulgaria and Romania, and the solid growth in the latter country, auger well for the future, as does the fact that six new Grand Lodges (Czech Republic, Moldova, Romania, Russia, the Ukraine and Yugoslavia) have themselves assisted in spreading Freemasonry beyond their own borders.

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