



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Recent Books

Vera and the Ambassador: Escape and Return. BY VERA BLINKEN AND DONALD BLINKEN. State University of New York Press, 2008, 350 pp. \$24.95.

After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Hungary went through a painful, at times disruptive, transition from communism to democracy. Tensions peaked in the mid-1990s as it struggled to shed socialism and a command economy for a parliamentary market economy. Although there is still some unfinished business, the transition is largely over. Hungary is beyond the point of no return; today, it is a member of the European Union and NATO. Donald Blinken, U.S. ambassador to Hungary from 1994 to 1998, was a valued contributor to Hungary's journey to freedom and a keen defender of U.S. interests in eastern Europe. Vera Blinken, his wife and co-author, is a native Hungarian who escaped in 1950 from the country's communist regime. Once safely in the United States, she built a successful business and established projects to benefit Hungarians. By the time the Blinkens arrived in Budapest, she was a dedicated and knowledgeable partner to the ambassador. Their memoir provides an illuminating picture of how embassies work to manage demanding and tense negotiations at pivotal points in history. It is also a gripping account of a refugee's escape and an engaging peek at the social and cultural aspects of ambassadorial life.

JAMES HOGE