In 1991 the wheel of history appeared to change its course. The decades of despotic and imperialist rule by the Soviet Union over nations in East Europe gave way to a new age of freedom and independence. Russia itself rose out of the ashes, in the words of Mikhail Gorbachev, "to join the family of European nations", while nations long repressed by Soviet Russia raced to catch up with and join Western, democratic Europe. The struggle of the new Russian Federation to escape the long shadow of the Soviet experience now appears to have failed. As the old imperial impulses reappear, East European nations, having enjoyed a quarter century of freedom, are challenged to protect their freedom.