

BEYOND BORDERS



THE RETURN OF KIN-STATE POLITICS IN EUROPE

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The relationship between ethnic homelands, conationals in neighboring states, and host countries, a triangular relationship referred to here as *kin-state relations*, tends to be complex and often fraught with instability. Kin-state relations, which for a long time were a somewhat neglected topic in the literature on nationalism, became highly explosive with the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Moreover, these relations raise a range of questions that cannot necessarily be dealt with smoothly within the prevailing European notions of minority protection.

In this article I will examine two distinct cases of kin-state relations, namely those of Russia and Hungary. Today there are approximately 25 million Russians living in states neighboring Russia and some three million Magyars living in states around Hungary. At 23 percent of Hungary's population versus 18 percent of Russia's, the Hungarian diaspora is relatively speaking larger than the Russian. But as the heir to the Soviet Union, Russia's case is clearly more complex and volatile than Hungary's. Contemporary Hungary is a comparatively small country within NATO and the European Union, while post-Soviet Russia remains a vast multi-ethnic federation with many trappings of a traditional empire. There are several obvious differences between the two cases. First, while Russia became a kin-state only after the end of the Cold War, Hungary has been a kin-state since the end of the First World War. Second,

while contemporary Hungary must be classified as a "normal" nation-state within the framework of the European Union, Russia seems bent on restoring and reinforcing the ties that made up the empire of the Soviet Union. Finally, while Hungary has come up with relatively well-defined instruments to interact with Magyars in other states, Russia has been inconsistent and far from transparent in its handling of Russians in former Soviet republics. Even if they differ in their approaches, Hungary and Russia, however, are similar in the sense that they have taken very active measures to shape and strengthen the ties between the "homeland" and the external minority. On the other hand, both countries have engaged in kin-state politics without the direct use of violence. Russia, however, abandoned this position in 2014, with the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine.

abstract

Two distinct cases of kin-state relations are examined: that of Russians living in states neighboring Russia and that of Magyars living in states around Hungary. The role of kin-state relations in Europe is studied from a historical perspective and, with reference to Rogers Brubaker's concept of a triadic nexus between nationalizing states, a national minority, and an external homeland. It is argued that the fall of communism – and the fall of several multi-ethnic federations, in particular – revived old territorial conflicts and hostility among national groups both within and between states. The question of kin-state relations is put at the forefront of European minority issues.

KEY WORDS: minorities, kin-states, nationalism, Eastern Europe, border studies.

Kin-state relations and the borders of Europe

The phenomenon "kin-state relations" is rather straightforward: ethnic boundaries rarely coincide perfectly with state borders, and the presence of minorities across the border has caused tensions between states, accusations of ethnic discrimination, and suspicions of disloyalty against minorities. Needless to say, it has also led to wars and military interventions on behalf of external minorities, and to expulsion and mutual population transfers.

On the whole, during the Cold War the continent experienced relatively few conflicts based on kin-state relations. There are several obvious reasons for this. For a start, many of the formerly divided





states became much more homogenous. National groups with potential for pursuing a kin-state agenda, like the Serbs and the Russians, were now united under the same state (i.e. the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia). In addition, the communist regimes restricted direct expression of ethnic allegiances. The issue certainly did not vanish entirely; nevertheless, under those regimes, it became unacceptable to emphasize ethnic allegiances above class interests.

Across the Iron Curtain, Western Germany had several issues to settle regarding German nationals residing in the Soviet Union and Soviet satellite states. Considering itself to be the only legitimate German state, the Federal Republic of Germany refused to accept the Polish-German border along the Oder-Neisse line, but was hampered by the fact that Germany itself was divided and that Poland and the German Democratic Republic had agreed on their common border. Throughout the Cold War, Western Germany continued to pursue a policy of improving conditions for its co-nationals in Eastern Europe, although the scope for action was highly restricted.¹

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN Western and Eastern forms of nation-building is well tested, fairly banal, and yet controversial.² It comes down to the following: national identity in Western Europe has predominantly been tied to the territory and institutions of the political community, while the Eastern European notion of national identity has always placed a strong emphasis on cultural uniqueness, kinship and organic community – often without the support of institutions and clearly defined territorial borders. In a nutshell, the state usually preceded the nation in the West, while the nation was formed in opposition to existing empire states in the East. The absence of well-defined cultural boundaries is a key factor here. Certainly, the political and cultural boundaries in Europe are rarely fixed – with a few exceptions, such as those of Iceland. But the cultural and political boundaries in eastern parts of the continent are exceptionally fuzzy. An ancient problem in Central and Eastern Europe is that many members of a national community have either been left outside the confines of the state or that significant numbers of “non-members” have ended up inside. Countries as diverse as Russia, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Albania have all faced this dilemma at some point – and many still do.

West European states were, on the whole, consolidated at a much earlier stage, borders were contested to a much smaller degree, and cultural standardization was implemented on a more comprehensive scale.³ In short, the territorial model of nationalism, which arguably has been dominant in Western Europe, left small scope for kin-state nationalism. The presence of, for instance, Italian-speakers in Switzerland has not caused conflicts based on the triadic kin-state relationship. The thorni-

est and by far most violent example of kin-state nationalism in post-war Western Europe was played out between the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and the Protestant and Catholic communities of Northern Ireland.

After the Second World War, a policy of non-interference regarding kin-minorities became prevalent among Western democracies; individual rights came at the expense of collective rights.⁴ Indeed, the question of ethno-cultural relations became increasingly marginalized and was considered to be a diminishing force in the light of modernization – despite the rise of regional opposition in several Western democracies. However, when the communist regimes fell apart so suddenly towards the end of the 1980s, this almost exclusive focus on individual rights

came under challenge. Most urgently, with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Europe experienced a sudden and radical upsurge in conflicts based on kin-state relations, which led to an unprecedented number of territorial splits and newly independent states. Many of these entities were not in the business of building up just any statehood: they were clearly bent on carving out their own, narrowly defined national states, sometimes with rather limited concerns for minority interests.

As a result, preventing these conflicts from escalating quickly became

the main concern among Western leaders. It involved a shift away from individualism in favor of active promotion of and support for minority rights. In a parallel fashion, the stronger focus on minority rights can be linked to the emergence of liberal pluralism, which was largely a response to the increasingly multicultural composition of many Western societies.⁵ It also fit well in the liberal international framework – such as the European Union (formerly the EC), the OSCE (formerly the CSCE), and the Council of Europe, which have all tied Western European democracies closer together.⁶

Ménage à trois?

The extent to which a kin neighbor – often a larger, more imposing country – actually interferes on behalf of its co-nationals will vary a great deal. However, certain states continually declare their undisputable right – even *duty* – to monitor and promote the interests of their kinsmen across the border. It is vital to stress the interactive aspects of this nexus.

In contemporary nationalism literature, Rogers Brubaker's *Nationalism Reframed*⁷ is an obvious reference point describing kin-state relations. Brubaker has elaborated a simple model of this triangular relationship. At one pole, there is the host state. Often it is a comparatively new, small and insecure state with strong urges to promote itself and express its uniqueness. Brubaker labels it a “nationalizing state”.⁸ The nation may perceive itself as historically threatened, vulnerable, and in a “weak

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cultural, economic, or demographic position within the state”. It feels threatened by the ever-present larger neighboring state and its co-nationals as a national minority. Nationalists might consider such minorities as intruders or colonists – potentially disloyal groups. Exclusive nation building may thus be considered as suitable compensation for past oppression. Characteristically, a nationalizing state has a relatively high proportion or concentration of national minorities, but nevertheless holds on to the ambition of becoming a nation state. In a sense, it can be regarded as an “incomplete” nation state. A nationalizing agenda is obviously at work if these aims are more or less explicitly stated by the ruling elites of the state. National elites may deny that they are pursuing a nationalizing agenda, but these claims are of little importance as long as the minority or external homeland perceive them to be pursuing one. As Brubaker⁹ puts it:

To ask whether policies, practices, and so on are “really” nationalizing makes little sense. For present purposes, a nationalizing state is not one whose representatives, authors, or agents understand and articulate it as such, but rather one that is perceived as such in the field of the national minority or the external national homeland.

But it is not sufficient for the minority (or the external homeland) to simply claim that the state is undertaking a nationalizing project; it also has to be socially sustained and directed towards certain objectives or policies, which again can produce a political battle.¹⁰ Perceptions and subjectivity are also factors that are difficult to account for when such inter-ethnic nexuses are studied.

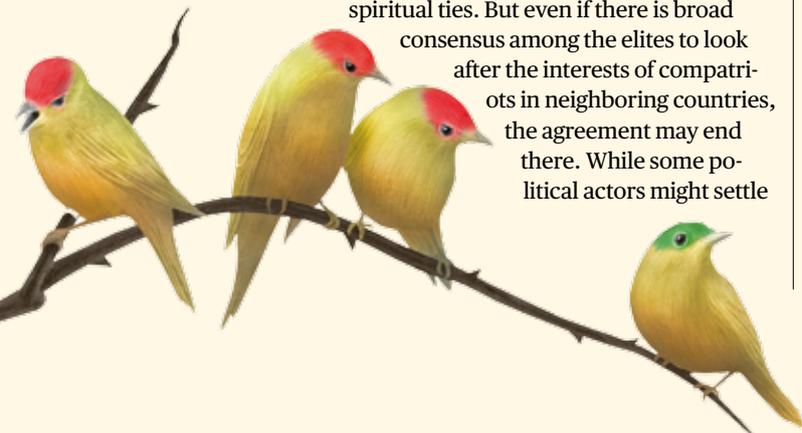
National minority is a very broad term, capturing several sub-categories from small, indigenous minorities to labor immigrants and refugees from other parts of the world, to minority groups that happen to be residents of a particular state as a result of border revisions. Minorities of this category are likely to have co-nationals in one or several neighboring countries, including their external homeland, the third actor in this nexus. Often a large power (or a formerly large power) the external homeland may have experienced border changes that have effectively cut it off from many of its co-nationals. It is common practice for any state to protect its citizens abroad, but the peculiar point about what we call kin-state relations is that citizenship is not a precondition. The claim to “protect” co-nationals is rather founded on ethnic belonging or linguistic, historic, and spiritual ties. But even if there is broad consensus among the elites to look after the interests of compatriots in neighboring countries, the agreement may end there. While some political actors might settle

for a mild form of moral support, others are prepared to take a much more active stance, ranging from providing material or financial support to repatriation programs. Much of it is obviously rhetoric, such as complaining loudly about violations, imposing demands upon the host country, or talking about recapturing lost territories. In extreme cases, the external homeland may actually use its self-declared right to protect co-nationals as a pretext to wage war on a neighbor. Some minorities may ask for assistance from their kin nation. But rather frequently, the minority is reduced to a spectator, a pawn in the conflicts between the host nation and the external homeland.

As a heuristic tool, Brubaker’s model for understanding contemporary kin-state relations in Europe has been met with some important criticism. One critique has focused on its reliance on interwar Poland to understand contemporary kin-state issues.¹¹ Others have focused on the concept of “nationalizing nationalism” and questioned whether it really differs substantially from the nation-building pursued by West European states at an earlier time.¹² But perhaps the most serious criticism of the model comes from a number of scholars who point out that it really should be a quadruple nexus which includes international organizations.¹³ Unquestionably, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and, in particular, the European Union have played vital roles in shaping kin-state relations on the continent since the end of the Cold War.¹⁴ But exactly how strong the impact of normative pressure and conditionality have been is a matter of scholarly debate and hard to measure precisely – partly because former communist states entered the post-communist era with their own perceptions and expectations of Europe and the West.¹⁵ As Vello Pettai has pointed out, “deriving generalized hypotheses about how the axes work becomes almost impossible to the extent that there is no longer any reality in the model, just subjectivity and multiple contestation”.¹⁶

The role of diaspora in rebuilding Russia

One of the most pressing issues in the breakup of the Soviet Union was that some 40 million former Soviet citizens ended up outside their titular republic, more than half of them Russians residing outside the Russian Federation. This factor certainly had a profound impact on many of the former Soviet republics, not least on Russia itself. As the spiritual and ethnic homeland of 25 million co-nationals in the borderlands, there has also been wide consensus within Russia that the country has a right, and even a duty, to protect these groups. But other than that, there has in fact been no coherent, long-term strategy on what kind of role Russia should play in relation to other former Soviet republics. The formation of a Eurasian Economic Union, officially launched in January 2015 and initially comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kirgizstan, might thus be seen as the latest attempt to revive the ties between former Soviet republics – with Russia very much at the center stage. “Russia” is itself not a very homogenous and clearly designated entity, which may explain why it is often understood in a cultural or even *civilizational* way, rather than in terms of ethnicity. A broad, non-ethnic under-



standing of Russia and Russian-ness undoubtedly makes it easier to reach out to former Soviet citizens who considered themselves spiritually linked to Russia and Russian culture. But this rather ambiguous understanding of Russian identity also carries drawbacks, as it has proved difficult to build a coherent policy towards external Russian communities around this loose concept. It also serves as a reminder of how difficult it is to pinpoint the extent and essence of Russia and Russian identity. Just before the fall of the USSR, the late Alexander Solzhenitsyn posed the question “What is Russia?”¹⁷ The question seems to be as difficult to answer today as it was when the Soviet Union collapsed.

RUSSIAN POLICYMAKERS have used a range of terms to define

Russia’s relationship with Russians and Russian-speakers in neighboring countries, including “Russian diaspora” (*rusaskaia diaspora*), “Russian-speakers” or Russophones (*ruskoia-zychne*) and “compatriots” (*sootchestvennik*). More recently, the term “Russian world” (*ruskii mir*) has been frequently employed, by Putin himself among others, to describe the bonds that allegedly unite Russian-speakers, Slavs or even Orthodox Christians.

In the words of Kirill, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, the “Russian world” is a distinct civilization whose unique spiritual and cultural values must be preserved.¹⁹ A *Ruskii Mir* Foundation was established by Putin in 2007 to promote the Russian language and “Russian values”. Envisaging Russian-speaking communities worldwide as an “archipelago”, architects of the “Russian world” concept have emphasized the vast potential in reaching out to Russians and Russian-speakers not only in neighboring countries, but also the diaspora beyond the post-Soviet space.²⁰ A global language community in the vein of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie *La Francophonie* might itself seem like a rather benign idea. However, the scope of the *ruskii mir* clearly goes well beyond a shared love for the Russian language and has eventually come to serve as a set of ideas that underpins Putin’s evolving geopolitical doctrine, which also juggles distinct yet overlapping concepts like nationalism, imperialism, pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, and Soviet nostalgia.²¹ Arguably, the Kremlin’s approach to its “kin-minority” was for a long time quite incoherent and seemed to lack real clout. To put it differently, there was quite a bit of noise, but not much substance. This state of affairs might be linked with the fact that there is not really such a thing as a single Russian minority outside Russia: from Central Asia to the Baltic states, Russian communities are products of different circumstances.²² But after the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in southeastern Ukraine, Moscow’s approach to its neighbors and Russian-speakers beyond its borders has been sharpened to a significant degree and a full-scale irredentist agenda might indeed be on the table: to reunify “lost” territories inhabited by ethnic kinsmen with their mother country. Citizen-

ship has turned out to be another vital tool for Russia vis-à-vis the “near abroad”: the Russian citizenship law of 1993 allowed every citizen of the former USSR living outside Russia to become a Russian citizen by a simple procedure of registration. Hence, the law made it apparent that Russian-speakers living abroad would enjoy the protection of the Russian state. And after some intense promotion, substantial numbers of people were indeed persuaded to take Russian citizenship. Some of them, as in Estonia, were non-citizens, but most of them were already citizens of another state. Since most of these countries refuse to accept dual citizenship, the de facto dual citizens usually hide their Russian passports. It should be pointed out that ethnic affiliation or place of birth are not the sole criteria for obtaining Russian citizen-

ship: in the run-up to the war with Georgia in 2008, Russian passports were widely distributed to people living in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Most of them were not ethnic Russians. Nevertheless, by turning them into Russian citizens, Moscow could claim that it was intervening in order to “protect Russian citizens”.²³ Conversely, the “right to protect” is by no means restricted to Russian citizens. Apparently “whole segments of the Russian world” may require

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Moscow’s protection: “It has to be stated with sadness that a huge number of our compatriots abroad (...) continue to face serious problems in securing their rights and lawful interests”, one Foreign Ministry official proclaimed, singling out the “creeping offensive against the Russian language” as one issue that Russia would not tolerate.²⁴ The “right to protect compatriots” became a pretext for intervening in Ukraine in the spring of 2014.

IN THE FOLLOWING, I will sketch out some of the most significant developments between Russia and co-nationals in Russia’s “near abroad” from region to region.

A community of 4.5 million Russians comprise one-third of the total population of Kazakhstan. Although by far the largest and most important Russian population in Central Asia, this number is a significant drop from Soviet times. According to the Soviet census from 1989, the Russian-speaking share of the population was actually above the 50 percent mark. The region as a whole was, for a long time, seen as a Russian frontier – the wild east as it were.²⁵ But since the 1990s, large numbers of Russians have left Central Asia.²⁶ Today, northern Kazakhstan is practically the only significant area of Russian settlement. Although local Russians and Moscow alike complain about repression and exclusion, Russians do indeed make their presence felt in Kazakhstan. So does Russia – by far the country’s most important trade partner. However, it is noteworthy that ethnic tensions between Russians and Kazakhs have rarely erupted. In 2000, the uncovering of an alleged Russian separatist plot heightened the tensions somewhat, perhaps also exposing the volatility of the region.²⁷ But the relative tranquility between the new Cen-

tral Asian republics, their Russian minorities, and Russia itself partly comes down to large-scale suppression. The last thing the leaders of the region want is to unleash the forces of nationalism, which in Central Asia also have a pronounced religious dimension.²⁸ Without a strong nationalist agenda, the scope for Russian minority opposition is obviously reduced. This state of affairs stands in contrast to several post-Soviet states, including Ukraine and the Baltic countries.

THE PRESENCE OF ethnic Russians in the three former Soviet states in the Caucasus is almost negligible. But even though the proportion of ethnic Russians in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia is comparatively small, the ties with Russia are often much more complex and volatile than those in Central Asia. The most significant and highly instructive example emerged in 2008, when ethnic violence broke out in the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia. Tbilisi had staged a campaign to bring South Ossetia and its fellow breakaway region Abkhazia back into the fold. Meanwhile, Russia pledged to protect its citizens abroad, citing Article 51 of the UN charter on the right of self-defense. Indeed, very few ethnic Russians live in the two regions, but virtually all South Ossetians and Abkhazians had been handed Russian citizenship beforehand.²⁹ The result was a brief but extremely disruptive war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008.

It was not the first time that post-Soviet Russia intervened militarily in its neighborhood. In 1992, the Moldovan enclave of Transdniestria – a region of only half a million inhabitants, evenly divided among Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians – broke with the rest of the country, causing a brief civil war. Tensions had been mounting for some time, and by the time war broke out, Russia's 14th Army – formerly the Soviet 14th Army, with headquarters in the Transdniestrian “capital” of Tiraspol – had been transformed into a fully-fledged army for opposition to Moldovan independence.³⁰ The ceasefire brokered by Russia imposed Russian peacekeepers on the region. The forces included a special Russian unit in addition to the 14th Army, which was rebranded the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova. Russian forces were supposed to leave by 1997, but are still stationed in the self-proclaimed *Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic*. After the Russian annexation of Crimea, an issue evaluated below, the political temperature in Transdniestria might rise even further.

The Russian population of Moldova stands at a modest 6 percent. Another 8.5 percent are Ukrainians, many of them Russified denizens of Transdniestria. But this is a relatively small minority compared with the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Unlike Moldova, Ukraine shares a long border with Russia and is clearly of much greater importance for Russia. Russia has for centuries referred to Ukraine as “Little Russia”. Once a geographical denotation, it is clearly a derogatory term

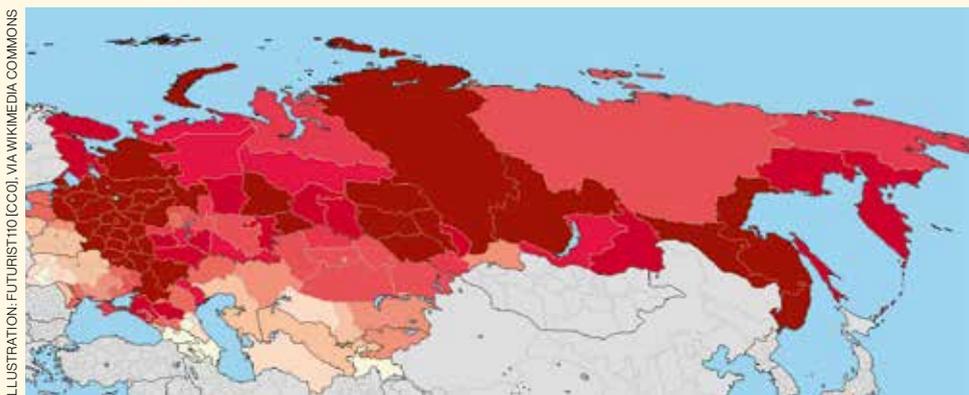


ILLUSTRATION: FUTURIST110 (CCO). VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
Ethnic Russians in former Soviet Union states according to the most recent census.

to many Ukrainians today, but one that nevertheless illustrates the perception widely held among Russians that Ukraine is an indispensable part of Russia and Russian-ness. President Putin made this very clear in his speech in Crimea on March 18, 2014: “Our concerns are understandable because we are not simply close neighbors but, as I have said many times already, we are one people. Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other.”

At eight million, the number of Russians in Ukraine comprises the largest Russian kin-minority anywhere.³¹ They make up 17 percent of the total population, with a heavy concentration in the eastern part of the country, as well as in the annexed peninsula of Crimea in the south. The presence of many “Russified” ethnic Ukrainians in the east adds to this picture.³² This ethno-geographical cleavage has had a serious impact on Ukrainian politics and at times threatened to pull the country in opposite directions, a possible scenario that has been emphasized by many analysts since the breakup of the Soviet Union.³³ Few analysts, however, could have predicted that the outcome would be the declaration of the Luhansk and Donetsk “people’s republics” and a full-scale civil war in eastern Ukraine. Then again, this scenario would have been unimaginable without the larger picture: the protests at the Maidan, the ousting of the Yanukovich regime, and Russia’s reactions to the events in Ukraine.

With its one million Russians, Crimea is in a place of its own. Transferred from the Russian to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954, partly as a friendship gesture and partly for practical reasons, it was also the only autonomous region of post-Soviet Ukraine. Generally pro-Moscow and accordingly anti-Kyiv, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea never quite accepted its fate as part of Ukraine. It is home to the Russian Black Sea fleet and several high-profile politicians in Russia had suggested for a long time that the peninsula ought to return to Russian hands, although Russia had recognized the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

ETHNIC RELATIONS on the peninsula are further complicated by the presence of Crimean Tatars, a minority that was deported en masse to Siberia and Central Asia by Stalin in 1944, but allowed to return during the Gorbachev era. Today there are almost

300,000 of them, and they have fought hard for ancient land rights but have often been met with hostility – particularly from the Russians. Because they are a disaffected Muslim minority, there has been fear that some Tartars might slide towards extremism.³⁴ In the hastily arranged referendum of March 2014, the Tartars were overwhelmingly against joining Russia and stayed home instead of voting. Their future in the Russian-held peninsula remains highly uncertain: their unofficial leader, Mustafa Dzhemilev, is barred from entering the peninsula and some Tartars have decided to emigrate.

There were certainly separatist aspirations to be found in Crimea before 2014, but they were little more than occasional harsh statements and some low-level violence. Nonetheless, there were evidently no guarantees that it would stay that way: Russia had quietly set the stage for a confrontation by handing out passports to Russian Crimeans – a practice it also followed in other former Soviet republics. Ukraine does not allow dual citizenship, but this did not deter large numbers of Russian Crimeans – all Ukrainian citizens since 1992 – from taking Russian citizenship. In 2008, this development prompted speculation about Crimea becoming the next South Ossetia: Russia was steadily whipping up tensions in the region and waiting for an excuse to step in on the pretext of defending its citizens.³⁵ By March 2014, these predictions took on an entirely new meaning when Russia – at a breathtaking pace – not only wrenched control of Crimea from Ukraine, but even incorporated it in the Russian Federation. This turn of events will certainly have repercussions on upcoming studies of kin-state politics and, more seriously, international relations.

RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP have been a major topic in the two Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia. Both countries took the radical step of denying automatic citizenship rights to residents (and their descendants) who had moved there during Soviet times. This move systematically affected the position of the Russian minority and other mainly Slavic immigrants in the two countries. The core argument, then as now, was that the countries had been annexed and occupied by the Soviet Union, and hence, immigration which had taken place during those years must be deemed illegal. Many nationalists demanded a large-scale exit of Soviet-era immigrants.³⁶ More pragmatic forces acknowledged that this was an improbable and impractical solution. They opted instead for gradual integration of Russian-speakers, but only within a more or less predefined national framework. After more than two decades of independence, many of Estonia's and Latvia's Soviet-era immigrants have finally become citizens, while an undisclosed number have opted for Russian citizenship (particularly in Estonia), and many remain stateless, although the latter numbers are steadily dropping. Meanwhile, relatively few have voted with their feet (i.e., moved to Russia or another former Soviet republic).

Russia has quite skillfully managed to draw attention to the issue of stateless Russian minorities and alleged breaches of human rights and democratic deficits in Estonia and Latvia, appealing frequently to the EU and the Council of Europe.³⁷ However, there has been very little action from the Russian side. Given that Russia had some 130,000 troops stationed in the Baltic states during the early post-Soviet years, it could have turned out rather differently – perhaps on a par with what happened in Moldova's Transnistria region. Russia did indeed use the issue of troops as a stick, threatening to halt – or even reverse – the withdrawal process unless Estonia and Latvia agreed to grant citizenship to all Russian-speakers.³⁸ But ultimately these attempts failed entirely. Several years later, Russia protested loudly against NATO membership for the Baltic states. But the issue never became a red line for Russia, as some analysts had anticipated.³⁹ In the meantime, Baltic-Russian ties hit another low in the spring of 2005, when the presidents of all the three Baltic countries were pondering the question of participation in the VE Day celebration in Moscow to mark the 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. The Baltic leaders reasoned that, although it marked the end of the Second World War in most of Europe, it was also the beginning of another fifty years of occupation for the Baltic countries. Many believed that attending the ceremony would effectively amount to recognition of the Soviet

annexation in 1940. The event sparked a heated debate about the Second World War history of the Baltic states: the three countries insist that Russia must apologize for the Soviet incorporation of the republics. But Russia was – and remains – completely unwilling to give in to these demands, maintaining that the term “occupation” cannot be used as a legal assessment of the situation: “The term ‘occupation’ cannot be used for legal assessment of the situation prevailing in the Baltic region

in the late 30s of the past century because the USSR and the Baltic states were not in the state of war and no hostilities were on. The introduction of troops was done on the contractual basis and with manifest agreement from the then authorities of these republics, no matter what they are thought of”, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry.⁴⁰

MEANWHILE, RUSSIA OFFERED Estonia and Latvia border agreements to be signed in connection with the VE Day celebration. Fifteen years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the border issues between the Baltic countries and Russia had yet to be resolved. Estonia and Latvia maintained that the peace treaties they had signed with Soviet Russia after the First World War were still valid. When the Baltic states were incorporated into the USSR, both Estonia and Latvia lost a certain amount of territory as a result of border revisions.⁴¹ Theoretically, the claims about the peace treaties implied that the two countries had made territorial claims towards Russia, as Moscow argued. It was

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evidently not the territories that concerned the two countries: if anything, a return of territory would only increase the number of Russians in their populations. Their purpose was rather to force Russia into recognizing the illegality of the Soviet annexation.⁴²

Russia has for centuries seen the Baltic region as strategically vital to its security interests. From the beginning, the Russian Federation was reluctant to treat other Soviet successor states simply as foreign states, instead labeling them collectively as the “near abroad”. On the other hand, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states have tried to distance themselves from the rest of the former Soviet region as much as possible, politically, economically, and culturally. Meanwhile, the more Russian nationalists and communists talked about “restoring the old Soviet borders”, the more the Baltic leaders were inclined to turn to the West for protection. Independence from Russian influence became a matter of survival. As of 2015, not only fringe groups talk about restoring the Soviet borders. In the Baltic capitals, tensions are running high.

Hungary and the wound of Trianon

After the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary was severely reduced in size. Validating the military advances of the Romanian, Czech, and Yugoslav armies after the war, the Treaty of Trianon (1920) stripped the country of no less than two-thirds of its territory. Some of it went to Czechoslovakia, other parts to Yugoslavia, while the entire region of Transylvania went to Romania. Hungary regained some of the territories in its alliance with Nazi Germany, but inevitably lost them again after the Second World War. The Trianon Treaty did not of course just mean a major territorial loss; Hungary also lost three-fifths of its population (including many people of non-Magyar origin). Today around 3 million Magyars reside outside Hungary. Hungary itself has some 10 million inhabitants.

There can be no doubt that Hungary, a defeated power, was treated harshly by the Allies after the First World War. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was an obvious target for the victorious powers, which, led by the USA, were bent on breaking up Europe’s multi-ethnic empires permanently. But the Hungarian part of the empire arguably lost much more than its imperial assets. While the Allies seemed to consider some lost territories as colonial possessions, Hungary saw them as core parts of Hungary. The Magyar population of Transylvania, Ruthenia (Transcarpathia/Zakarpattia), Vojvodina, and Upper Hungary (Slovakia) stood at approximately 30 percent. In some areas, such as Transylvania, partition could quite easily have followed ethnic lines, but the Allies wanted none

of it. The various regions were instead granted to Hungary’s neighbors.

Strikingly, Hungary lost on every count. Hence, it is hardly surprising that Hungary went through a long period of national



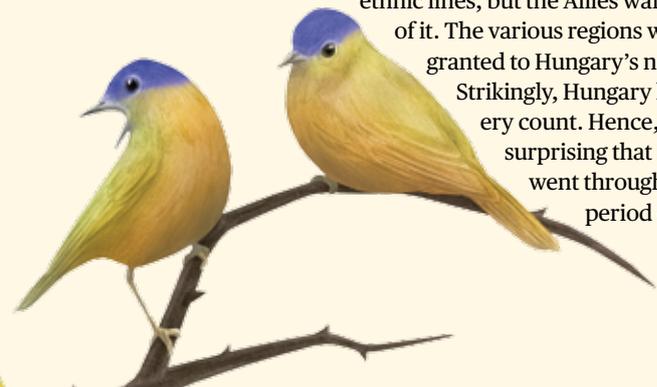
A Cossack patrol near the Baku oil fields, 1905.

trauma and political turmoil after Trianon.⁴³ The pact with Nazi Germany notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that no wars broke out over the 1920 settlement. Nor were there any major outbreaks of violence between any of the host states and their Magyar minorities in the interwar period.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Magyar minority groups did not perhaps face as dramatic a fate as the Germans did. The Czechoslovakian government in exile, led by Edvard Beneš, had wanted to expel all “disloyal” minorities, but failed to receive acceptance from the Allied powers for a wholesale expulsion of the Magyars.⁴⁴ But like Magyars in Transylvania and Vojvodina, many were stripped of their citizenship and property. Some were expelled, while others escaped to Hungary. A limited population transfer also took place. The Magyars of Ruthenia probably faced the bleakest prospects when they became a part of the Ukrainian SSR. It cut them off from Magyars elsewhere and they were given no autonomy within the USSR.

The imposition of a communist dictatorship never did away with ethnic tensions, but unquestionably put a firm hold on them. When the communist regimes of the region fell in quick succession, the minority question returned to its former prominence. Hungary’s first post-communist leader, József Antall, declared that he wished to be “the spiritual prime minister for 15 million Magyars”.⁴⁵ The statement irked Romanian and Slovak officials, who saw it as part of a shadowy irredentist plot to undo the territorial settlement of Trianon.⁴⁶ Antall’s suggestion that some of the post-Habsburg states were “artificial political creations” did not improve matters. Partly inspired by the German reunification, but also by the Slovenian and Croatian aspirations to independence from Yugoslavia, Hungarian officials openly began to advocate border revisions.⁴⁷ While criticism from Brussels, Washington, and Western governments seemed surprisingly muted in the beginning, domestic opposition parties flatly rejected such talk, suggesting that Hungary instead had to make it very clear that she had no intention of acquiring any of her neighbors’ territories, either by force or by peaceful means.⁴⁸

For their part, Romanian and Slovak officials happily joined in on this ethno-political spat. Slovakia made a huge leap in a





Tsar Nicholas II among his troops during World War I.

nationalist direction when the Czechs and Slovaks decided to go their separate ways. Before the “velvet divorce”, Prague had appeared to be rather accommodating towards Magyar minority demands, even supporting the idea of a Magyar university in Bratislava.⁴⁹ But it was ultimately Vladimír Mečiar, not Václav Havel, who ruled in Slovakia. The Magyars had been opposed to Slovak independence. In the new republic, Slovak became the sole official language and the constitution made no reference to the more than one in ten Slovak citizens of minority background. Hungary protested and tried to add strict conditions for the Slovak candidacy of the Council of Europe, even attempting to block its entry when these conditions fell through.⁵⁰ But Hungary’s leverage was limited. Subsequently, the Magyar minority had to put up with a rather orthodox policy of Slovakization and electoral manipulation of boundaries throughout the 1990s. Before he was ousted from power in 1998, Mečiar even proposed a “voluntary” population exchange between the two countries.⁵¹

BUT A CHANGE of direction did in the end occur when a large coalition government, which included a party serving Magyar interests, the Hungarian Coalition, replaced the increasingly authoritarian Mečiar government. The new government was preparing for EU membership and introduced a new language law that pleased the Magyar minority and, not least, the European Commission. The inclusion of the far-right Slovak National Party in the government in 2006 certainly increased the pressure on the minority question. Infamous for his radical remarks, the National Party leader Ján Slota remarked that the “Hungarians are the cancer of the Slovak nation, without delay we need to remove them from the body of the nation.”⁵² Shortly afterwards, his proposal to re-enact the Beneš Decrees was adopted by the National Assembly with the support of a large majority. Members of the Czech parliament had had their minds fixed on former Sudeten Germans when they had voted for a similar bill five years earlier. The Slovaks had the Magyars in mind. The decrees had led directly to the expulsion of about 2.6 million Germans and 100,000 Magyars from Czechoslovakia, and remain a point of contention between the Czech Republic and Slovakia and their

neighbors Germany, Austria and Hungary to this day. The Czech rationale for confirming the decrees had a lot to do with fears of opening a floodgate of claims from expelled Germans and their families. The Slovaks may also have been worried about restitution demands, but the decision also smacked of chauvinism and revanchism – particularly since a far-right party had first proposed it. Slovakia’s lawmakers must surely have known that to continue imposing collective guilt on the large Magyar population would affect interethnic relations in the country and infuriate Hungary, the external actor. The relationship between the Slovakian government, on the one hand, and the Hungarian minority and Hungary itself, on the other, hit another low in 2009 when Slovakia introduced an amended language law, which severely limits the use of minority languages. Under this law, only Slovak can be used for official communication, but the law is rather vague in determining what constitutes “official communication”, particularly in regard to private businesses and associations.⁵³ Infringements are punishable by fines of up to 5,000 euros.⁵⁴

UNLIKE SLOVAKIA, ROMANIA is not a new, nationalizing state. But even though Romania was not a recent, insecure state, ethnic relations in the country looked rather unpromising in the mid-1990s. Romania’s problems stemmed from the particularly harsh and nationally-minded brand of communism championed by Nicolae Ceaușescu. Relations between the government and ethnic minority groups were immediately improved after his sudden downfall: the interim National Salvation Front made overtures to the Magyar minority by promising proportional representation, and even spoke of reopening the Magyar-speaking University in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. But this peaceful state of affairs would not last long. As in Slovakia, but in an intriguing contrast to many of the Russian communities outside Russia, the Magyars were unified and politically well organized. From the start, the Hungarian Democratic Federation of Romania (HDFR) successfully captured the Magyar voters, who have continued to rally around the party. A vocal and self-assured party, the HDFR rallied against the constitution in the early 1990s, since it offered no guarantees for specific minority rights, such as the use of Hungarian in public. More irking for many Romanians, the party sent a complaint to the Council of Europe, accusing the government of colluding with ultra-nationalists.⁵⁵ The party went a step further than the Slovak Magyars when it pressed for territorial autonomy, a demand that was flatly rejected by the rest of the political establishment. The party also suggested a law that would give minorities status as autonomous groups with collective rights, which were ignored.⁵⁶

Romania, for its part, had indeed made a turn in a nationalist direction in the early 1990s. Two strongly nationalist parties started to make their presence felt just as the mainstream conservative parties shifted to a more nationalist orientation. Transylvania became a battleground in the standoff between nationalists and Magyars. The former did well in national and local elections and became a force to be reckoned with. Tensions reached a boiling point when nationalists started a local

campaign to remove all symbols of Magyar culture and history.⁵⁷ But the situation improved after the elections in 1996, which produced a coalition of moderate Romanian parties and the HDFR. The latter was forced to lower some of its demands, including territorial autonomy, but successfully bargained for bilingualism in towns and regions where Magyars made up at least 20 per cent of the population, as well as for schooling in Hungarian.⁵⁸

Romania also earned international recognition for implementing the Charter on Regional and Minority Languages and the Framework Convention on the Protection of Minorities (both Council of Europe documents). These improvements coincided with Romania's application for membership in the European Union. Despite some wrangling between Bucharest and Budapest, including early attempts to block Romania's entry to the Council of Europe, it is noteworthy that Hungary remained supportive of the Romanian EU bid.⁵⁹ Hungary was presumably concerned about the fate of the 1.5 million Romanian Magyars, if Romania had not become part of the Union. EU membership opens up possibilities for interaction among Magyars that were unimaginable in the past.

In the meantime, Hungary passed a controversial Status Law in 2001, which granted a range of privileges to Hungarians living beyond the borders of Hungary. They included educational opportunities, work permits, and access to health care and social security normally only granted to Hungarian citizens. The aim was to "ensure that Hungarians living in neighboring countries form part of the Hungarian nation as a whole and to promote and preserve their well-being and awareness of national identity within their home country".⁶⁰

THIS CREATED A VERITABLE STORM of protests from Romanian and Slovakian officials, who accused Hungary of undermining their sovereignty, interfering in domestic affairs, hinting at extraterritorial claims, and breaching regular conduct of inter-state relations.⁶¹ Three years later, Hungarian voters had the opportunity to further strengthen these ties when they were asked in a referendum if Hungarians living in neighboring states should receive preferential naturalization if they wished to become Hungarian citizens. The proposal came about because the World Federation of Hungarians managed to collect the required 200,000 signatures to stage the referendum. A wafer-thin majority did support the proposal, but it fell through due to a turnout of only 37.5 percent. This time it was the Magyars outside Hungary who were furious, staging demonstrations and threatening to cut ties with their spiritual homeland.⁶² Meanwhile, the defeat could, at the time, be interpreted as a sign that Hungary had, despite the considerable support for the proposal among elites and ordinary citizens alike, finally come to terms with the fact that it was better off as a nation state than a bitter ex-empire. But with the stunning victory of Fidesz in the 2010 parliamentary election, a bill allowing dual cit-

izenship for Hungarians in other countries put even more strain on the troubled relationship between Hungary and her neighbors. The new government quickly changed the citizenship law, allowing Magyars residing outside Hungary to become citizens. They were initially not to be allowed to vote in Hungarian parliamentary elections, a restriction that was scrapped in 2011. Slovak officials had warned that Hungarians in Slovakia who took Hungarian citizenship would be stripped of their Slovak citizenship. Nevertheless, around half a million individuals, many of them from Slovakia, had become Hungarian citizens by the time new parliamentary elections were held in 2014. Not surprisingly, the new citizens overwhelmingly endorsed Fidesz.

Kin-state relations and European norms

When Hungary passed its Status Law in 2001, Romania and Slovakia claimed that it ran counter to international law. Romania went on to ask the Council of Europe's Venice Commission to examine the compatibility of the law with the norms of the European Union. Predictably, the verdict was mixed: in its report, the commission carefully avoided direct criticism of Hungary, but also acknowledged that the Romanian allegations were in part justified.⁶³ Indeed, the Venice Commission seems to share with Romania a critical approach to the basic tenets of the law. The Romanian position may of course have been born of convenience rather than conviction: it is worth keeping in mind that Bucharest wrestles with similar dilemmas as Budapest in relation to Moldova. In fact, both Slovakia and Romania have their own status laws, albeit more limited than Hungary's.

But the practical and essentially self-serving calculations of individual countries aside, what are the prevalent attitudes in Brussels towards kin-state relations – if any? The European Union does have a policy on minority protection, but its Community law says little about *standards* of minority protection – which leaves plenty of scope for independent action among its member states. Since 1993, however, all new and aspiring EU members have been bound by the Copenhagen criteria, which indirectly also involve becoming a signatory of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). But what the EU does not have is a clear policy concerning

“WITHOUT A STRONG NATIONALIST AGENDA, THE SCOPE FOR RUSSIAN MINORITY OPPOSITION IS OBVIOUSLY REDUCED.”

kin-minority protection, which makes it rather difficult to assess the appropriateness of Hungary's Status Law. True, Article 12 of the EC Treaty explicitly forbids all discrimination based on nationality.⁶⁴ The catch is that the Status Law cannot be said to discriminate in terms of *nationality*, but rather of language and ethnic origin. The FCNM is itself open to different interpretations on this point. But as long as Hungary unambiguously respects the territorial sovereignty of other states, treaties that have been signed, and good neighborly relations among states, as well as fundamental principles of human rights and anti-discrimination,



Hungarian traditional costumes. Illustration for *Il costume antico e moderno* by Giulio Ferrario, 1831.

there is little to suggest that the Status Law directly violates the EU's basic principles. Moreover, the idea of a transnational language community is not unheard of in Western Europe. By way of example, France cultivates links with French-speakers elsewhere through the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

HOWEVER, THE HUNGARIAN approach seems to go several steps further than La Francophonie in linking its national interests with those of Hungarians in other countries. When Viktor Orbán, several times prime minister of Hungary, asserted that “the future of Hungary lies not in the Hungary of 10 million but in the Hungarian nation of 15 million,”⁶⁵ he echoed his predecessor József Antall's wish from the early 1990s to be a “spiritual prime minister for 15 million Hungarians”. Moreover, he made it clear that the days of extraterritorial politics are not yet over in Europe. And Hungary is not the only country in the region to have a clause on “preferential treatment of co-nationals abroad” in its constitution: Croatia, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania are cases in point, albeit of less importance than Hungary.⁶⁶ But whether the spirit of kin-state relations can be accommodated within the liberal framework of the European Union is a moot question. To grant special provisions to a particular ethnic group in terms of, say, education is certainly pushing the boundaries of kin-state politics beyond the acceptable for many member states. It might also be a challenge for the liberal institutional framework of Europe to try to define “ethnicity” in legal terms.

The issue of kin-state relations is undoubtedly far more complex in the case of Russia than Hungary. Although Moscow actively makes use of European platforms – the Council of Europe, the European Court of Justice and even the European Union – to pursue its interests and to voice its opinions, Russia is not a member of the EU and hence not bound by its regulations and codes of behavior. Russia appears to be unwilling and unable to come to terms with the loss of an empire and to redefine her role in world politics as something other than a superpower. Given



Magyar folk assembly.

the assertion that the Russian approach to neighboring countries is highly intertwined with domestic issues, one of the most alarming undercurrents of Russian politics has been the way nationalists and hardliners have exploited the diaspora issue. However, what used to be a fringe position has been elevated to the mainstream in Russia since Putin started his third presidency. At the time of writing, Russia has already annexed Crimea and is asserting its power in eastern Ukraine. Since the military intervention in Georgia in 2008, Russia has also insisted that it has a “duty” to protect its “citizens” abroad.⁶⁷

The 25 million-plus Russians residing outside Russia (which does not include all those who are Russian-speakers) may not share a pronounced Russian identity, but they certainly have one important characteristic in common: the legacy of the Soviet Union and their fate as ethnic minorities in post-Soviet states. Although many of them might not care much about a “common destiny”, this factor is nevertheless a powerful weapon in the hands of hardliners within Russia. There have been speculations about a revanchist Russia since the early 1990s: Russia had “lost” the Cold War, its global status and much of its territory. Meanwhile, former satellite states joined ranks with “the other side” and the borders of NATO rapidly moved much closer to Russia itself. Russian leaders and many ordinary citizens have expressed that they were being “humiliated” by the West. The loss of the Soviet Union also became a source of mourning and regret. On the eve of the VE celebration in 2005, Putin declared that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. Almost a decade later, he declared that the “Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders.”⁶⁸ Many observers have drawn parallels to interwar Germany and the way Adolf Hitler sold his message of humiliation at Versailles and promises of restoring German pride. There are also parallels to the exploitation of some 10 million Germans in other countries as a pretext to invade Germany's neighbors. By March 2014, these parallels no longer seemed so far-fetched. By annexing a part of a sover-

eign state, Russia had turned the most pessimistic predictions into reality. Whether it stops at Crimea remains a moot question.

Concluding remarks

In this article I have argued that the fall of communism – and the fall of several multi-ethnic federations, in particular – revived old territorial conflicts and hostility among national groups both within and between states. It also put the question of kin-state relations at the forefront of European minority issues. The kin-state issue is by no means a new one, but its political relevance had practically vanished in Western Europe (with few notable exceptions, such as Northern Ireland and Cyprus). The notion of collective minority protection in Western Europe had rather low priority immediately after the Second World War, and was almost ignored. The experience of war and extermination made West European leaders staunchly favor promoting individual rights at the expense of collective rights. The liberal state would, it was maintained, ensure fairness and equality regardless of ethnic belonging. But the rapid increase of new minorities as a result of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s eventually forced a re-thinking of minority strategies. Instead of pretending that ethnic identities were not important, many European countries moved towards a much more active policy of minority protection, fully endorsing the idea of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism.⁶⁹ At the same time, the notion of collective rights was embedded in agreements on minority protection, notably in the 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. However, it is important to keep in mind that the emphasis on individual rights and anti-discrimination was not abandoned in favor of collective rights. The latter merely became a *supplement* to the former.

In certain respects, the communist half of the continent followed a parallel development. Nationalism did not disappear under communism, even after the extensive migration and expulsions that took place just after the Second World War. But nationalist sentiment was heavily wrapped in officially sanctioned Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. Hence, there was a lot of public denial concerning minority issues. On a pragmatic level, the communist states often made generous provisions and even provided institutional platforms for minority groups. But whereas many Western European states, together with the EU, CoE, and OSCE, gradually came around to a more proactive approach to minority questions, the sudden implosion of the communist model exposed a great deal of antagonism between ethnic groups and states in Central and Eastern Europe. Kin-state politics re-emerged either as a result of state disintegration (Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union) or because old and essentially unresolved territorial issues re-emerged (such as those resulting from the Peace of Trianon and even the postwar borders be-

tween Poland and Germany). Traditional kin-states have asserted their “duty” to protect and speak up for their kinsmen in neighboring countries and have often accused the host states of neglecting or even mistreating their minorities. The host states, on the other hand, have been provoked by what they see as meddling in internal affairs. They have also been suspicious about potentially disloyal minorities, apprehensive that these groups would betray them under pressure. Meanwhile, the minorities have often protested against what they believe is a form of ethnocide – the scope for expressing their identity being dismantled. They sometimes seek support from their external homeland to halt this process, or the homeland may protest first. In the end, it is difficult to judge who exactly is provoking whom.

UNRESOLVED KIN-STATE RELATIONS have increasingly become a Europe-wide issue and might eventually change the way that European organizations like the EU, CoE, and OSCE handle them. While, for instance, all EU member states have committed themselves to a predefined framework on minority protection, they are also in a position to put their mark on this framework. While the conclusions of the Venice Commission’s report on Hungary’s Status Law seem somewhat ambiguous, it is clear that the participation in the EU of countries like Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania (the latter actually being in a double position with its approach towards Moldova) will shape Europe’s approach to kin-state relations in the years to come.

How can we envisage the role of kin-state politics in the Europe of the future? It is evident that the approach taken by Hungary towards its co-nationals in other states has stirred up conventional notions of sovereignty and non-interference – cornerstones of the Westphalian state. But the European Union is itself challenging the time-honored state system in several respects. Some scholars are pondering the emergence of a post-Westphalian Europe – a neo-medieval empire with pooled sovereignty and porous borders.⁷⁰ In such a perspective, the Hungarian approach might not be so out of touch. It arguably points to a Europe of *national* rather than *state* sovereignty.⁷¹ On the other hand, the Status Law is more reminiscent of a neo-medieval Europe than a cosmopolitan, post-national

Europe. More problematic still, it may have repercussions in other parts of Europe, notably in candidate countries in the Western Balkans; it also demonstrates that kin-state politics remains a source of nationalist resistance to the EU project.⁷²

With regard to Europe beyond the European Union, I have discussed Russia’s position vis-à-vis its neighbors, including the current EU members Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. While Russia is not asking for EU membership, other countries in the region might want to join – although none are likely to receive an invitation from Brussels soon. In order to overcome the growing barrier between insiders and outsiders, the EU has designed a European

“THE APPROACH TAKEN BY HUNGARY TOWARDS ITS CO-NATIONALS IN OTHER STATES HAS STIRRED UP CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY AND NON-INTERFERENCE.”



Neighborhood Policy (ENP), whose heavy emphasis on cross-border development between communities across the external EU borders could point towards a novel form of kin-state relations among EU members and between EU countries and adjacent states. However, Moscow's own ambitions in the very same neighborhood are strongly at odds with Brussels' evolving framework: the drawn-out battle for Ukraine might ultimately determine the shape of European kin-state politics in the 21st Century. ✕

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- 61 However, some of the rhetoric was clearly – and probably intentionally – provocative. The Hungarian prime minister at the time, Viktor Orbán, later explained his own intention as to ‘begin the process of national reunification [of] the Hungarian nation’, Stewart, 2003.
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- 64 Accessed October 1, 2009, http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no9_ses/09_hornburg.pdf. On the other hand, the purpose of Article 13 – which also has given birth to the Race and Equality Directive – is to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.
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