

Introduction

When the West Meets the East: Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Eastern Europe*

Kataryna Wolczuk and Galina Yemelianova

Introduction

The economic and political pressures which eventually led to the collapse of the communist system between 1989 and 1991 also contributed to the disintegration of all three of the multinational socialist federations—the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The political vacuum caused by the demise of the communist political systems triggered a wave of demands for “national self-determination,” which led to the formation of a number of new states. This desire for independent statehood followed the predictable and indeed only legitimate model of statehood in Europe, the nation-state, namely one in which the state is associated with one people (nation). In practice, however, like most states, these new states had to contend with a different reality, namely one of ethnic diversity rather than homogeneity. Moreover, belated state- and nation-formation processes mixed together with frequent border changes account for the particularly complex and sensitive nature of ethnic diversity in the region.

Clearly, imperial rule was a major contributor to the ethnic and regional diversity of the region in Eastern Europe (EE). In Western Europe, stable dynastic states, such as Britain, France and Spain, emerged with relatively fixed boundaries, which, when allied to their centralizing tendencies, tended to subdue regional differences. In these cases, nations formed within existing states. In contrast, in EE the dominant political form was an empire comprising many different ethno-national groups, cultures and religions. According to Hroch, in the process of “national awakening” of EE, the nationalism of the so-called non-dominant ethnic groups developed in opposition to the host state (empires).¹ In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a mosaic of ethnic groups, often living side by side, which were mobilized by different national movements. In the process, ties based on common kinship, ethnicity, neighbourhood, religion, language, customs and “mentality,” rather than common political institutions and territory, became the basis for nationhood.

Kataryna Wolczuk and Galina Yemelianova, Centre for Russian and East European Studies (CREES), European Research Institute (ERI), University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. Email: k.wolczuk@bham.ac.uk and g.yemelianova@bham.ac.uk

The imposition of communist rule in the region in the first half of the twentieth century both slowed down and modified the process of nation building in EE. Under communism, which officially opposed nationalism, overt manifestations of nationalism were suppressed, although it persisted in disguised forms. The actual nature of nationalism varied significantly from country to country and was determined by four interrelated factors. The first was the ethnic composition of the state, and in particular the size of the titular majority and size and number of non-titular ethnic groups. The second factor was concerned with the specific characteristics of the titular ethnic group, or nation, its level of ethno-national consolidation, its history of relations with minorities and their kin-states and its socio-economic and political development. The third factor related to the structure of the state (a unitary state, a federation, or an asymmetrical federation). The fourth consideration was the nature of the ruling regimes, including the role that nationalism played in elites' political strategies.

After the demise of the communist systems, accommodating the sheer range of ethnic diversity in the region presented a challenge of immense complexity and sensitivity.

The Legacy of Soviet Nationality Policy

Although the demise of these federations spelled a formal end to their respective nationality policies, after more than 15 years of post-communist development the process of nation- and state building across the region is still influenced by the legacy of communist-era nationalities policies and theories. However, the degree of this influence has differed from country to country. Thus, it has been especially prominent in most of the USSR successor states and less prominent in the Baltic States and some other states of EE.²

Soviet nationality policy differed strongly from the national policies of Western European and American state builders, who de facto institutionalized the political and economic supremacy of the dominant ethnic group, or groups (Belgium, Switzerland, Canada) and carried out assimilation policies towards other ethnic groups, which were qualified as "ethnic minorities."³ By contrast, their Soviet counterparts, although formally adhering to the principles of internationalism, not only did not deny ethnic diversity but granted ethnicity explicit political recognition.

Lenin and Stalin believed that effective control and management of an enormous and multi-ethnic state could be achieved only through a combination of political and economic centralism, on the one hand, and the provision for limited "self-determination" for non-Russian peoples, primarily in the ethno-cultural sphere, on the other. Under Stalin's plan of national-territorial delimitation, the implementation of which began in 1922–1924, some ethnic groups, or nationalities (*natsional'nosti*), were classified as "first-class nationalities," others as "second-class" or even "third-class nationalities," while yet other ethnic groups (*narody*, or *narodnosti*) were not recognized at all and were incorporated within larger ethnic communities. Only 15

out of more than 100 nationalities acquired “first-class status” and were entitled to form their own union republics within the Soviet federal state. The others were assigned either to the status of an autonomous republic, an autonomous province (*krai*), an autonomous region (*oblast'*), an autonomous district (*okrug*) within a union or an autonomous republic, or completely denied any form of autonomy or homeland.⁴ Ethnic groups within this four-tier hierarchy were allocated different rights and privileges, with more extensive rights reserved for a titular “first-class” ethnic group and correspondingly less for those below.

These ethnic distinctions were reflected in the institutional structures. All union and autonomous republics acquired their own legislative, executive and juridical institutions, academies of sciences, mass media, higher schools, national theatres and publishing houses. They also acquired national schools with national languages of instruction. (It is symptomatic that under the Soviet regime the representatives of 57 ethnic groups had the right to be educated in their own language.⁵) As the article by Akkueva shows, the Soviet authorities provided for the development of national schools and the creation of written forms of national languages, which had existed only in vernacular form before the Russian Revolution. An ethnic dimension was also evident in Moscow's policy of indigenization (*korenizatsia*), which was aimed at the creation of loyal indigenous elites who would secure the indirect rule of the Kremlin. While formulating this policy, the Bolsheviks took into account the long-existing, unwritten distribution of power and resources among local clans, ethnic groups and other networks. In the North Caucasus, for example, Moscow reinforced the existing supremacy of largely Christian Ossetians, of the Avars in Dagestan, the Kabardinians in Kabardino-Balkaria and the Cherkess in Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

On the other hand, Moscow fostered an internationalist project, which sought to merge representatives of various ethnic groups into the supra-national entity of “Soviet people” (*Sovetskii narod*) and to form a civic Soviet nationality. This policy included some of the key elements of nation building such as the introduction of a unified alphabet (Cyrillic) across the whole country, the promotion of the Russian language as the lingua franca and the use of Russian in higher education as the sole language of instruction. These measures facilitated the assimilation of some ethnic groups, especially those deprived of their own territory.

Moscow combined those two distinctive Soviet approaches, institutionalization and internationalization, with the traditional imperial policy of “divide and rule” in relation to various non-Russian ethnic groups. Decisions to grant, or not to grant, political recognition to a particular ethnic group tended to be political. While some relatively small and economically and politically less developed groups like the nomadic Kyrgyz, or Turkmen were elevated to the status of “nations” and were granted their own union republics, others, despite being more numerous and economically and politically advanced, like, for example, Jews, Germans and Poles, were denied any form of political recognition. Similarly, the Tatars, who had a lengthy tradition of statehood, were only allowed to have an autonomous republic within Russia.

This was done in order to prevent further territorial consolidation of those national communities that could threaten Moscow's authority in the future.

The "divide-and-rule" approach was particularly evident in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga-Urals region. The newly drawn "internal" borders often either cut across homogeneous ethnic communities or united ethnically and linguistically different peoples within a single administrative and territorial unit. In Central Asia, for example, the territorial delimitation created a significant Tajik minority in Uzbekistan, as well as Uzbek minorities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In the South Caucasus, the delimitation was responsible for the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, the splitting of the Ossetian people between Russia (North Ossetia) and Georgia (South Ossetia), of the Lezgins between Russia and Azerbaijan and the incorporation of Abkhazians (Adyghs) into Georgia.⁶ Predictably, this resulted in ethnic tension, which erupted into arenas of violent ethnic conflict in the late Soviet period, one of the most prominent of which is the ongoing conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These are discussed in detail in the papers by Broers, Clogg and Akkieva.

Tensions between some ethnic groups were further aggravated as a result of Moscow's policies of group or collective "punishment" and mass resettlements of entire peoples, in some cases of entire nations. Neighbouring ethnic elites helped determine Moscow's choice of a people who were designated for deportation, usually by manipulating the centre for their own ends. Among the victims of deportation were Koreans, Meskhetian Turks, Khemshils, Kurds, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachay, Kalmyks and Crimean Tatars. The land and property of deported peoples were appropriated by their neighbours. The subsequent return of deportees to their homeland further exacerbated relations between them and the neighbouring ethnic groups who had benefited from their deportation. In Dagestan, Moscow's policy of mass "resettlement" of Avars, Dargins and some other highlanders on the plains, which were traditionally populated by Kumyks and Nogay (both Turkic people), led to animosity and suspicion between the highlanders and the plain-dwellers.

Other factors also led to tensions. For example, because of nationwide Soviet industrialization and labour distribution projects, there was a massive influx of Russians and others into the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Kazakhstan and the Tatar autonomous republic, which significantly altered the ethnic composition of those republics. Inter-ethnic relations were also strained as a result of the Stalinist campaign against leading representatives of various national elites, who were accused of "bourgeois nationalism."

The theoretical framework for the Soviet nationality policy was based on Stalin's theory of a nation, according to which only those people who shared common territory, language, ethnicity and mentality constituted a "nation." In addition to these requirements, a "nation" had to number over 100,000 people. The smaller ethnic groups were regarded as "people" (*narodnost*).⁷ The main condition for the existence of a nation was its statehood within defined territorial borders. This statehood legitimized

the supremacy of the dominant ethnic group—the “indigenous nation”—compared to all other inhabitants of the same territory, who were often treated as “non-indigenous peoples.”⁸ The echoes of such an approach are present in the current national policies and academic discourse in southern Russia, Georgia and Ukraine, as demonstrated in the articles in this special issue.

Interestingly, despite the introduction of a socialist definition of a “nation,” the actual application of this term by Soviet policy makers and academics was very limited. The same applied to normative—that is Western and “bourgeois”—terms, such as a “race,” “ethnic group,” “ethnicity,” “ethnic minority” and “minority rights.” Instead, Soviet politicians and academics working in the ethno-national sphere designed a specific socialist ethno-national terminology, which they portrayed as the Soviet contribution to the Marxist and Leninist theory of nationalism. Its central elements were notions of *natsional’nost* (nationality), *etnos* (a wider ethnic community), ethnographic group, *narod* (people), *narodnost’* (numerically small people), and indigenous and non-indigenous people. This terminology was supposed to replace, or to counterbalance, the Western academic terminology. This new socialist scholarly apparatus was promoted through a network of humanities and social science research institutes (Institutes of Anthropology, Ethnography, Ethnology, History, Language, Literature, etc.), which were established all over the USSR. Soviet cartographers were summoned to produce ethnic maps with clear-cut territorial boundaries between different ethnic groups.

The central role in the scholarly legitimization and fixing of Soviet nationality policy belonged to the Institute of Ethnography (later renamed the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology) of the USSR (later Russian) Academy of Sciences. Its staff consisted of several hundred researchers, each specializing in a particular ethnic group. Academic research was focused on the issues of the ethno-linguistic genesis of various people, the degree to which they were deemed indigenous to a particular territory, their ethnographic peculiarities (costumes, music and folklore, etc.) and other static characteristics. Compared to researchers in the West, their Soviet counterparts barely addressed issues of national mobilization and its role in nation- and state building, which are central to Western theories of nationalism. As a result, Soviet academic discourse on the nationalities was predominantly descriptive and apolitical in nature. The main reason for this was the prevailing political and ideological ambivalence about any national phenomena. Until the collapse of the Soviet system any manifestation of nationalism and its academic investigation were treated with suspicion as remnants of “narrow bourgeois-nationalism.” Numerous political trials of leading non-Russian Soviet “nationalists” like Veli Ibrahimov, Mir Sayid Sultan-Galiev, Turar Ryskulov, Vyacheslav Chornovil and Feyzullah Hocaev were effective deterrents against any attempts at in-depth analysis of national mobilization in the USSR. As a result, Soviet academics were forced to play it safe and to confine themselves to a predominantly ethnographic descriptive framework.

Soviet academic institutes were modelled on the Communist Party, with its rigid hierarchy and centralism. Therefore, any expression of intellectual dissent, or

disagreement with the “official” line, could cause serious political, professional and personal implications. The political and ideological constraints imposed by the Soviet regime suppressed genuine academic debate within Soviet academia with grave consequences for academics’ ability to engage in and inform public debates and policy making following the end of communism.

On the whole, Soviet nationality policy enabled the centre to strengthen its control over the multi-ethnic and poly-confessional regions of the Soviet Union. An essential source of stability of the Soviet regime was the Kremlin’s recognition and determination of ethnicity. According to Zaslavsky, the Soviet Union, through the use of a complex system of divisive and integrative measures, proved capable of generating a high degree of compliance during a period of extensive development and relatively abundant resources.⁹ Moscow skilfully redirected the grievances of one ethnic group towards neighbours and away from itself, instead championing itself as the arbiter, though at the cost of planting the seeds of the conflict which exploded into existence once the “imperial” centre imploded. Nevertheless, integrative measures prevailed and accounted for the considerable success of Soviet nationality policy in draining nationalism of its power in many areas. Moscow succeeded in the creation of Russified national elites who felt a stake in the system.¹⁰ However, the effectiveness of Moscow’s control over the non-Russian republics was dependent on the stability of the centralized Communist Party, system of Soviets and a right of control and redistribution of economic resources. The loosening of these pillars under Mikhail Gorbachev was accompanied by the sudden eruption of ethnic sentiments and, in some places, inter-ethnic tensions.

When the end was imminent, and in order to preserve their power, the ruling party elites of the Soviet republics abandoned communism. By severing links with the “centre” they retained their legitimacy in the eyes of the increasingly disillusioned public. For Soviet elites, sovereignty came to signify freedom from any constraints, whether communist or democratic. Nationalist mobilization in many post-Soviet republics was a tactic in the strategy of elites. However, once elites championed the rights to sovereignty along republican boundaries and mobilized their constituencies along ethnic lines, ethnicity became the primary social bond. As Zaslavsky puts it: “Ethnicity, once politicized, becomes a fact of life as real as any material concern.”¹¹

The communist leaders of the Soviet satellite states in EE, although largely succumbing to Moscow’s ideological pressure, applied Soviet nationality policy with considerable modification, catered to satisfy local needs. As a result, for historical and political reasons, an assimilationist drive in the process of state- and nation formation in Eastern Europe (EE) was stronger than in the USSR. This was despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that when new states were created in the aftermath of the Second World War it was difficult to draw new political boundaries according to the ethnicity principle. The fact that the “ethnic” did not coincide with the “political” inspired assimilation and/or suppression in the name of the dominant ethnic group, which claimed “ownership” of the state. In those states, as the internationalist ideology of socialism failed to generate mass mobilization and support for the system, the regimes resorted to

nationalism in order to advance their own goals. This often took the form of bureaucratic nationalism—state-led mobilization of intolerance against ethnic minorities. While most Soviet satellite states experienced bureaucratic nationalism, it was strongest in the states with the least open communist regimes such as Albania, Romania and Bulgaria.¹² In Bulgaria, between 1984 and 1990, the government engaged in an intense campaign to assimilate its Turkish minority, involving the compulsory change of names and removal of signs of Turkish culture and heritage. The implications of that policy are discussed in the paper by Bernd Rechel.

The differences in nationality policies of the USSR and the countries of EE accounted for the different role of nationalism in the demise of communist regimes across the region. In states that emerged “intact” in territorial terms from the collapse of communism, such as Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, communist regimes had done much to obliterate the evidence of ethnic and regional diversity. But any remaining diversity could not be suppressed under the conditions of greater political freedom that followed the demise of communism. While titular majorities exercised their right to self-determination, national minorities tended to reassert their presence, thus posing the question of their rights and position in post-communist states. Therefore, while new states were created in the name of “the nation,” the answer to the question “who was it for?” was far from evident. Both titular majorities and national minorities desired freedom of self-expression once the ideological straitjacket of communist ideology and institutions was removed. This prompted the question at the very basis of statehood: “at the most fundamental level, a ‘decision’ must be made as to who ‘we’ are, i.e. a decision on identity, citizenship and the territorial as well as the social and cultural boundaries of the nation-state.”¹³

Virtually all post-communist states therefore faced the problem of integrating diverse ethnic and regional communities with their own populations into a coherent “body politic.”¹⁴ But while the “national question” plays a prominent role in virtually all post-communist countries, they each approach it rather differently, depending on their history as well as their cultural, political and economic traits.

Understanding Nationalism after Communism

How well was academia able to explain these unfolding processes? Despite nationalism in EE being a distinctly minority interest in Western academia, the field soon found its voice as Western scholars embarked on the momentous task of exploring “nationalism” and focusing on issues ranging from the level of prejudice and xenophobia at the mass level to discourses on nationhood, from the revival of ethnic and regional minorities to minority rights and their protection, from the role of the diaspora, transnational communities, and language policies, to advocating policy prescriptions on accommodating diversity. From a marginal pursuit, nationalism became a prominent theme in studies of post-communism.

Initially, Western academics tended to explain the resurgence of nationalism in EE in terms of historical continuity. Many scholars asserted that EE reverted to ethnic nationalism, based on Kohn's idea of the division of Europe into two parts, in which different types of nationalism prevailed throughout history. Typically, the break-up of multi-ethnic federations has been interpreted as a revival of the EE's ethno-nationalist past. Rupnik argues that "as Eastern Europe enters the twenty-first century, it is reverting to nineteenth-century ideologies centered on the building of nation-states."¹⁵ The conflicts in Yugoslavia and the former USSR reinforced the image of EE as a "land of ethno-nationalism." The "resurgence of nationalism" framework, which accentuated and naturalized the differences between East and West, reinforced the dichotomous, bi-polar view of two parts of Europe, in spite of the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The concepts used to capture nationalisms in the East and West had strong normative undertones: by presenting Western nationalism as liberal, civic, enlightened, progressive and responsible it was believed that Western Europe had succeeded in neutering ethnicity and nationalism of its "harmful" elements, whereas its Eastern counterpart was deemed to be primordial, irrational, regressive, authoritarian and aggressive. These academic perceptions of EE had real-world ramifications as they were often called upon by international organizations to inform their policy making. While Western academics transferred the concept of minority rights to ethno-national situations in EE, their theoretical constructions informed politics, making, for example, the "civilized treatment" of minority rights one of the central conditions for the accession to the European Union (EU) by ex-communist states, even though the EU has no competencies in this particular domain in so far as the existing member states are concerned.

At the same time, however, many Western researchers recognized the diverse nature of nationalism in the countries of EE. Bunce, for example, argued that in the conditions of post-communist transition, nationalism did not just increase the number of sovereignty claims, generate conflict, and undermine democracy in ethno-federal settings; it also liberated states, united people in a common cause, and supported democratic governance.¹⁶

Will Kymlicka was one of the Western researchers who challenged the prevailing paradigms. He became the most ardent and prominent de-constructor of the dichotomous view of Europe. He approached EE not as a binary opposite of Western Europe but on the basis of similarities. Thus, he criticized Western literature on nationalism and ethnic relations, which presupposed a deep gulf between East and West. He held that because Western academics treated the West European and East European contexts not only as different but as radically incommensurable, they were precluded from making any meaningful comparison between analogous situations in EE, on the one side, and Western Europe and North America, on the other.¹⁷

According to Kymlicka, the main difference between Western Europe and its Eastern counterpart lay in the different means by which ethnic diversity was accommodated. Kymlicka argued that virtually all Western liberal democracies had, at one

point or another, attempted to diffuse a single societal culture, namely that of the dominant majority. However, in some Western countries, the gradual extension of liberal principles to different societal groups in the second part of the twentieth century included ethnic minorities. Furthermore, through a discourse of minority rights and multiculturalism, the myth of ethno-cultural homogeneity and neutrality of the state came to be dispelled. Public recognition and accommodation of ethno-cultural diversity happened through application of the principle of justice. In practice, this amounted to a shift from having the right to integrate into the dominant culture through living the norms of the dominant group to the right to a positive self-expression of group difference. By publicly acknowledging and supporting minority rights and multiculturalism, some countries not only opened up their public space to expressions of diversity but also provided state support for the preservation of this diversity, through support for schooling in minority languages, political representation, etc. An increasing number of Western democracies abandoned the myth of “ethno-cultural neutrality” and recognized that they were “multination states” rather than “nation-states” and revised the terms of inclusion of different ethnic groups.¹⁸ The concepts of ethno-pluralism, liberal pluralism, or multiculturalism have come to signify a quest for recognition and accommodation of ethnic diversity in the public sphere.¹⁹

By exposing the myth of Western “ethnocultural neutrality” Kymlicka called into question the very existence of the “Western model.” Comparing national policies of different Western liberal democracies in the past, Kymlicka did not identify any common principles in them. Instead, a wide range of policies was applied, which implies that the West is hardly a homogeneous, “post-ethnic” entity itself.²⁰ But, importantly, where it happened, ethnic diversity came to be managed through principles and practices of liberal democracy and social justice.

However, the transfer of Western approaches aimed at accommodating ethnic diversity (and centred on the concepts of “minority rights,” “discrimination” and “multiculturalism”) to EE has been riddled with difficulties and met with very limited success. This is not only because the principles themselves are not universally recognized and applied in the West but because the historically conditioned situation in post-communist countries makes such a transfer problematic, and even misguided. These concepts have been applied to a region not only conditioned by a completely different set of historical, political and cultural factors but where a very different ethno-national paradigm prevailed. The resonance and take-up of these concepts and related set of practices is also complicated by an absence of pre-conditions, that is a strong functioning state and liberal democracy in many post-communist (especially post-Soviet) states.

The Legacies of the Soviet-Era Conceptual Paradigm

In contrast to the West, as has been mentioned, ethnicity was not only formally recognized at the level of the individual but often given a territorial-institutional

recognition, even if different ethnicities found themselves placed arbitrarily in a hierarchy of “favour.” To a large extent this is caused by the conceptual and political link between the essentialist, primordial notion of ethnicity and territoriality established in the Soviet Union. As discussed above, the cornerstone of the Soviet theory of ethnos was the relationship between a nationality and a particular territory, in line with Stalin’s 1913 definition of nation. The research of ethno-genesis of individual nationalities was used to establish priority claims to a particular territory. This perception of ethno-national relations as a scientific domain made the Soviet approach to nationality dogmatic, rigid and not open to political debates and contestation. The discourse on minority rights challenges the fundamentals of this Soviet conceptual paradigm, which—as the papers in this special issue illustrate—is still prevalent in many post-Soviet countries. Minority claims to territory previously associated with one ethnic group often provoke accusations of falsification of science and claims that the established ethno-cultural balance developed on the basis of this Soviet-era “scientific” approach is being threatened. A “scientific” view on the objective characteristics of an ethnic group takes precedence over the “subjective” type of evidence, such as the degree of its ethnic mobilization.

While in Western social sciences and history, ethnicity is widely regarded as a social construct, in post-Soviet states the essentialist view of ethnicity/nationality, established during Soviet rule, dominates academic discourse, with only some challenges from the margins. Thus, for example, a list of nationalities “created” during the USSR period has been adapted only marginally to take into account the numerous instances of mobilization and demands from unrecognized groups in a number of post-Soviet states (for example, on the recognition of Rusyns in Ukraine as a separate ethnic group rather than a sub-ethnic group within the titular majority see Hrytsenko in this special issue).

The academic discourse of ethnicity and nationalism in post-Soviet countries has been characterized by theoretical eclecticism and ambiguity. While some academics became attracted to Western theoretical approaches, others opted for a bizarre synthesis of Soviet nationality theory, Western terminological borrowings and “indigenous” theoretical paradigms of nation building. Moreover, it is the essentialist paradigm which tends to inform official policy, and which as a result in most cases is an adapted version of the Soviet approach to ethno-cultural diversity. However, as will be argued below, many post-Soviet states have not been actually capable of pursuing a coherent ethno-cultural policy.

Challenges with the Definition and Recognition of Minorities

One of the most under-appreciated facts about post-communist EE is that nationalism in the region has taken on different forms and produced highly differentiated outcomes, so that it is inherently difficult to make meaningful generalizations about ethno-cultural relations about the region as a whole.

The minority rights discourse utilizes an image of society as a constellation of ethnic communities. Yet as Karklins puts it: “nationalities are neither homogenous nor static.”²¹ Soviet nationality policy had a significantly different effect on different ethnic groups. In some cases, rigid national identities, anchored in memories of conflict and contestation, solidified, but in many others, more fluid identities came to prevail. In addition, a high degree of linguistic and cultural Russification and a high rate of intermarriage meant that ethnic boundaries became fluid. Many ethnic groups do not constitute a clearly recognizable community—they live side by side with the titular majority as well as other minorities. Thus, they hardly form “the complete and functioning societies on their historical homelands prior to being incorporated into a larger state” as suggested by Kymlicka’s definition of national minority.²²

The question of distinguishing between the minority and majority is vexed in many post-Soviet countries and regions, including Ukraine where the eponymous majority itself is highly heterogeneous and shares many characteristics with the largest minority (Russian). Discrepancies in self-identification along ethnic and linguistic lines raises not only an academic challenge of defining minority but throws the practical question of what type of data on ethnic and linguistic composition of society state policy should be based on.

Furthermore, any discourse on minority rights cannot avoid the peculiar historical status of many minorities in EE, who were involved in oppressing the majority, often in conjunction with their kin-state. In many cases, the memories of injustice inflicted by the previously dominant ethnic group, which subsequently became a minority, exacerbate the sense of vulnerability of the existing majority. In post-conflict Georgia, Georgians are one such majority to the extent that the concept of “double minority” rather than majority–minority relations best captures their plight (see Broers in this special issue). As Karklins points out: “the role of minority and majority have changed so often that all national groupings feel culturally vulnerable.”²³ Indeed, some majorities are hardly majorities. This applies to many ethnic republics within Russia as well as Abkhazia. As Clogg argues, the Abkhazian titular majority behaves as a minority due to an acute sense of threat from often less numerous minorities, conditioned by historical memories of repression by kin-states of these minorities, most of all the Georgians. In light of previous violent conflicts, minorities’ demands for recognition and rights is perceived as a danger to the very existence of the majority. These rather peculiar situations mean that the focus of Western scholars and policy makers on the plight of minorities rather than vulnerable majorities undermines the thrust of their arguments and, by default, credibility of their prescriptions.

The willingness of elites and societies to accommodate ethnic diversity requires a degree of trust that the minority itself will exercise the self-restraint. Yet such trust seldom exists in EE. For example, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria has often pursued a maximalist agenda and maintained close links with the Turkish state, which has sometimes appeared to be guiding the minority’s strategy vis-à-vis the

host state, thereby evoking memories of the past domination. In the case of Ukraine, many non-governmental organizations are comfortable with engaging with what they regard as “genuine” minorities, such as the Roma. However, they have reservations about promoting the minority rights of ethnic Russians, who are not regarded as a “real” minority as they not only still benefit from a privileged position acquired under the USSR but have also become a tool in the foreign policies of their kin-state, Russia.

Absence of Strong States and Liberal Democracy

Communist systems were highly contradictory in relation to accommodating ethnic diversity: suppression and assimilation coexisted with the promotion and co-option of ethnic minority elites (for example, in Bulgaria after 1968), the provision of territorial autonomy (as in Romania until 1968) and the establishment of ethno-territorial federalism of the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.²⁴ At the same time, however, the communist political systems, with their preference for top-down solutions, did not favour the development of principles and practice for mediating and resolving inter-group conflicts. As Schopflin observes:

[...] communism could not and did not create the means of resolving the conflicts that derived from modernity—the normal contest of ideas, interests, institutions—because it insisted on a very high level of ideologically determined homogeneity and thus could not provide the cognitive and concrete instruments for resolving the problems of complexity it had created.²⁵

Being a low-capacity, low-prestige agency, post-communist states have been hardly equipped to foster the development of such new principles and practices.

As Popov and Kuznetsov argue in this special issue, the model of multiculturalism—often advocated by Western scholars for EE—relies on the presence of a functional democracy, which guarantees individual civil and political rights. This reflects the origins of liberal pluralism in the West and the gradual expansion of liberal principles and practices to the domain of ethno-cultural relations. Indeed, Kymlicka himself acknowledges that:

All Western democracies have the rule of law, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, habeas corpus, free elections, universal adult suffrage etc., [...] Indeed, we can say that the protection of these rights and liberties is part of the very definition of a liberal democracy.²⁶

Thus the minority rights discourse presupposes not only liberal democracy but also a strong functioning state capable of implementing the principles of liberal democracy and social justice. These conditions are hardly met in post-Soviet countries.

Not only may minorities be discriminated against and marginalized but the majorities themselves are disempowered. The majority often feels disregarded, oppressed and/or marginalized in the harsh post-Soviet socio-economic realities

and unresponsive political systems that serve as vehicles for advancing the narrow interests of the ruling elites. The majorities responded in different ways to such circumstances. As Broers argues in this special issue, in Georgia, in the context of conflict and a failing state, ethnicity became the main source of coherence in the public sphere, the only meaningful narrative of loyalty, solidarity, sacrifice and commitment, binding the individuals together into society and commanding general support.

But, at the same time, states may not be capable of influencing the preferences of the majority. Despite strong popular support for ethno-nationalist principles in public life, the Georgian state has been too weak to pursue them in a coherent set of policies. In Ukraine, the inconsistent implementation of the language policies results in discrepancies between formal policies and actual practices in the public sphere. This discrepancy, in turn, generates simultaneous criticism from proponents of the linguistic Ukrainization (i.e. “rolling back” the use of Russian in the public sphere) as well as defenders of the status quo (i.e. extensive presence of the Russian language in the public sphere) at the same time.

Doroszewska captures the problem of state weakness when she addresses the challenge of promoting multiculturalism in EE:

[these] theoretical propositions are based on the premise that these post-Soviet states function in the same way other European states do, that is they have the political will to solve problems resulting from their ethnocultural diversity; there exists some kind of national “majority” which defines the state’s policy toward national “minority”; and the state has a vision of what this policy should and should not be, and makes the appropriate decisions to meet these objectives.²⁷

Yet, in fact, owing to the disinterest of the ruling elites in regulating public life, in many areas no policy decisions are being made, let alone implemented. As a number of contributions to this special issue argue, in most post-Soviet states/regions no identifiable, coherent and consistent minority policy is pursued. Policy inertia is only too evident in Abkhazia, Ukraine and Georgia. Even in southern Russia, the regional authorities endeavour but, at least in some areas, fail to impose a consistently discriminatory regime due to the problem with enforcement of law.²⁸ Thus, the official policies, whether of a discriminatory or affirmative nature, are greatly circumscribed by the pervasive weakness of the state. In many countries of EE, accommodating minority nationalism has come about as a result of inconsistencies, weakness, and indifference, rather than by design.

When the East Meets the West

This special issue addresses the major issues facing theorists and practitioners working in the sphere of ethnic relations in EE. The issue is the result of a three-year international project entitled “Releasing Indigenous Multiculturalism through Education” (RIME, 2004–2006), funded by the European Commission under the European

Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights programme (EIDHR).²⁹ The project was led by British academics from the Centre of Russian and East European Studies and the Centre for Global Ethics, both at the University of Birmingham; the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick and Conciliation Resources, London.³⁰ RIME brought together academics and practitioners working in ethnicity-related fields from the UK, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Abkhazia.³¹ In academic terms the project sought to generate a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the countries and regions of EE, Russia and the Caucasus. It examined how those issues are perceived by local scholars, policy makers and the wider public, and how they are reflected in laws, policies, institutions, administrative norms and practices. The project was especially concerned with the existing patterns of victimization and exclusion of individuals and groups. Particular attention was devoted to forced migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, as well as particularly vulnerable groups such as Roma, Meskhetian Turks and Kurds. The project also sought to compare the nation-building and minority rights academic discourses in the West and the targeted countries and regions. Besides its practical objectives, the project sought to contribute to narrowing the existing theoretical gulf between academics in the West and EE, particularly through reflection on the way in which the sphere of ethnic relations is conceptualized.³²

The actual realization of the project presented its participants with a number of challenges of a cultural, conceptual and practical nature. The major surprise for Western academic participants, who regarded themselves as informed about, and sympathetic to, the peculiarities of post-communist EE, was their “detachment from the field,” i.e. the views and aspirations of people actually engaged in various ethno-national activities in the selected regions, as well as from local academics working in the field. At the first round of RIME workshops the Western academic participants and the local academics and practitioners (activists of various NGOs, youth clubs, teachers and young leaders) struggled to reach a common understanding as there were stark differences in their priority themes, their approaches and vocabulary. Most regional participants questioned the appropriateness of some central notions of the project. In particular, they opposed the application of such terms as “racism” and “multiculturalism” for the analysis of the ethno-national situation in their countries/regions. They treated these terms as purely “Western” imports reflecting Western realities. They argued that the use of such terms in their societies would either distort the actual situation or even jeopardize the existing inter-ethnic stability. Thus, most ex-Soviet participants pointed out that, compared to Western “multiculturalism” which was a reaction to the previous policy towards ethno-cultural homogeneity, in the ex-Soviet countries multiculturalism was a historical reality. There, ethno-cultural diversity was never denied, as in many Western countries under the banner of civic, ethnicity-blind nation-building, and hence the concept of “multiculturalism” was not appropriate for the region. Similarly, all regional participants, both academics

and practitioners, strongly opposed the use of the term “racism” for description of any form of ethnic hatred, or prejudices, which existed in their societies. They associated racism exclusively with the practices of British and French colonialists in Africa, and North American slave-owners.

The participants from EE also voiced similar scepticism about the application of terms such as “ethnicity,” “ethnic identity,” “indigenoussness” or “minority rights” in their regional contexts. The Ukrainian participants expressed their reservations on the applicability of the concept of “minority rights” in Ukraine, where the highly heterogeneous Ukrainian majority shared many characteristics with the largest minority (Russians). Others argued that the use by academics and politicians of the word “ethnicity” and other related terms contributed to the growth of ethnic self-awareness among the inhabitants of poly-ethnic regions and subsequently to the rise of ethnic tensions. In particular, they feared the disrupting consequences of mechanically applying Western concepts to complex (and often tense) realities. The project’s ambition to promote “indigenous multiculturalism” was received coldly by academics and practitioners from southern Russia where the discourse of “indigenoussness” has had overtly negative overtones and has been directed against representatives of some ethnic minorities (Meskhetian Turks and Armenians among others). These concerns echo Wolff’s scepticism about the promotion of multiculturalism by Western scholars and policy makers because of its slim chances of securing harmonious inter-ethnic relations there in the long term. (He focuses on the solidifying of ethnic identities as a factor in exacerbating ethnic tensions rather than abating them and argues that de-securitization requires de-ethnicization of politics.³³)

Another “finding” of the project was the conceptual and political distinctiveness within the academic communities in the region. While the majority of academics in most of the researched regions have remained within the old communist-era national paradigms, the relatively small Westernized and English-speaking minority have adopted, at least nominally, the Western paradigm, but often with major qualifications, criticism and modifications. However, it is the latter group that has constituted the main source of information and contacts for their Western colleagues, as well as donors and policy makers. As a result, Western academics have been receiving local academic perceptions that often did not represent the mainstream academic approaches to the issues under discussion. So, in the course of the RIME project, its structure, implementation and vocabulary underwent some modifications in order to make it equally engaging and stimulating for Western and Eastern participants.

The Case Studies

This special issue consists of six academic papers, which were presented at the RIME workshops between June 2004 and June 2006.³⁴ They were selected on the grounds of their academic interest and geographical range. All the contributions aim to establish

what role, if any, Western concepts of multiculturalism, minority rights, discrimination and, where appropriate, xenophobia and racism play in shaping domestic discourses and policy making in the countries concerned. The effects of the transposition of Western concepts are assessed against the background of inter-ethnic relations and state policies on ethnic relations.

The case studies begin with “Imagining the Community: Perspectives on Ukraine’s Ethno-cultural Diversity” by Oleksandr Hrytsenko. It examines the approaches adopted by the Ukrainian state to managing its poly-ethnic composition against the backdrop of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Ukraine. He reveals the major shifts in the ethnic composition of Ukraine and the complexities of the linguistic profile of the country, which together account for the difficulties in conceptualizing ethno-linguistic groups and defining their boundaries. The paper then proceeds to a critical evaluation of the conceptual apparatus developed by Western and Ukrainian scholars to capture the ethno-linguistic situation and the diverse normative stances that ensue. It is argued that in conceptual terms there is a considerable degree of pluralism and several trends coexist, often with tensions between them. It is the influence of these competing trends on the nation-building policies of the Ukrainian state that explains the often inconsistent and contradictory nature of the Ukrainian nation-building project.

The second paper, written jointly by Anton Popov and Igor Kuznetsov, addresses the problem of ethnic discrimination and xenophobia in the Krasnodar region of southern Russia. The authors examine the position of various ethnic minorities in the region and analyse the de facto discriminative official policies towards them. The paper then proceeds to a critical evaluation of academic, legislative and mass media discourses within which ethnic discrimination is (re)created, justified, and accepted, or rejected, by the population, including the ethnic minorities themselves. It pays special attention to the ways in which the Krasnodar political elite manipulates post-Soviet academic discourse to serve its particular interests, and questions the relevance of Western liberal concepts of multiculturalism and minority rights for the Krasnodar region, and poly-ethnic post-communist societies in general.

The next paper, “The Caucasus: One, or Many? A View from the Region” by Svetlana Akkueva, explores the ethno-cultural historical dynamic of the Caucasus, which is home for many different ethno-linguistic and religious communities. The author argues that Caucasians, despite their ethno-linguistic and religious differences, share a sense of a geographic, cultural and spiritual “Caucasian home,” which has been threatened by post-Soviet ethno-political upheavals and economic hardship. The author believes that the ethno-political stability of the region could be achieved through the adherence of all Caucasians to the principle of coexisting with others without forgetting themselves. The author’s views are reminiscent of the Russian/Soviet ethnological tradition, which continues to dominate the ethno-national academic discourse in the North Caucasus.

The next two papers continue the focus on the Southern Caucasus. In the paper entitled “Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post-conflict

Georgia,” Laurence Broers examines post-Soviet nation building in Georgia. It analyses contrasting conceptualizations of ethnicity and ethnic diversity in official, academic and “popular” discourses in Georgia and pays special attention to Western theoretical approaches to post-Soviet ethnic politics in Georgia. The paper is logically linked to the next paper, by Rachel Clogg, on “The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Abkhazia: Managing Diversity and Unresolved Conflict.” This rare academic contribution on ethnic relations in post-conflict Abkhazia explores the constitutional and legislative provision for minority rights in the de facto state and analyses the extent of institutional discrimination in Abkhazia. The paper pays special attention to the current intellectual and political discourse in Abkhazia regarding inter-ethnic relations and examines the impact of ongoing conflict on identity politics.

The final paper, entitled “Ethnic Diversity in Bulgaria: Institutional Arrangements and Domestic Discourse,” by Bernd Rechel, moves from the former USSR to the Balkans. It offers an analysis of the ethnic relations in a former Soviet satellite state and a new member of the EU. Rechel analyses Bulgarian official policies in the area of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations and pays special attention to existing restrictions in minorities’ rights and the social marginalization of some minorities. He also exposes the limited impact of the EU pre-accession conditionality on promoting minority rights in Bulgaria. Like in the post-Soviet states, it is a range of domestic political, economic, cultural and historical factors, rather than external influences, which predominantly shape the inter-ethnic relations and minorities’ situation.

NOTES

1. The editors and contributors would like to express their thanks to the European Commission for its financial support.
2. Hroch, “Nation Self-Determination from a Historical Perspective,” 283–98.
3. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, the article refers to the post-communist countries in Europe as Eastern Europe rather than differentiating sub-regions, which tend to be singled out according to various and contested criteria.
4. Kymlicka and Opalski, *Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported?*, 20. See also Kymlicka, “Nation-Building and Minority Rights,” 183–212.
5. Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam*, 116.
6. Tishkov, *Etnichnost’ i Vlast’*, 27.
7. Further examples of this policy include the North Caucasus where the ethnically and linguistically close Kabardinians and Cherkess (both Adyghs) were split and united with the Turkic Balkars and Karachay, who were also ethnically similar. In the Russian Volga-Urals, two-thirds of Tatars were left outside the Tatar autonomous republic, while Bashkirs made up only one-third of the population in the Bashkir autonomous republic.
8. Tishkov, *Etnichnost’ i Vlast’*, 18.
9. *Ibid.*, 15.
10. Zaslavsky, “Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies,” 97–121.
11. Roeder, “Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization,” 196–232.

12. Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies", 115.
13. Banac, "Political Change and National Diversity," 141–59.
14. Offe, "Capitalism by Democratic Design," 886.
15. Batt and Wolczuk, eds. *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2.
16. Rupnik, "Europe's New Frontiers," 91; see also Alter, *Nationalism*, 107–08.
17. Bunce, "The National Idea: Imperial Legacies and Post-Communist Pathways in Eastern Europe," 433.
18. Kymlicka and Opalski, *Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported?*, xiv.
19. Kymlicka, "Nation-Building and Minority Rights," 189.
20. Tariq and Werbner, *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*, 19.
21. Kymlicka, "Nation-Building and Minority Rights," 183.
22. Karklins, "Ethnopluralism," 231.
23. Kymlicka, "Nation-Building and Minority Rights," 187.
24. Karklins, "Ethnopluralism," 222.
25. Salat, "South-Eastern European Challenges to Representative Democracy," 20.
26. Schopflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe 1945–1992*.
27. Kymlicka, "Nation-Building and Minority Rights," 183.
28. Doroszewska, "Rethinking the State, Minorities, and National Security," 126.
29. See Popov, "Transnational Locals."
30. The editors would like to express their thanks to the European Commission for its financial support of the project.
31. RIME was based at the Centre of Russian and East European Studies at the European Research Institute of the University of Birmingham and since October 2005 at the Department of Sociology of the University of Warwick. The leader of the project was Professor Hilary Pilkington.
32. RIME's academic and practical aims were achieved through six workshops which took place in Sisak (Croatia), Kiev (Ukraine), Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Lazarevskoe (Krasnodar krai, Russia), Subotica (Serbia), Gelenzhik (Krasnodar krai, Russia) and a final conference in Varna (Bulgaria). These workshops consisted of discussions of academic papers and training exercises related to perceptions and experiences of racism, xenophobia or ethnic discrimination in selected countries. They identified common and different problems arising from the collision between civic and ethno-national principles of nation building in those countries. In addition to facilitating cross-regional NGO networking and the sharing of experiences, they also provided an opportunity for the NGO community to engage directly with theoretical and empirical research relevant to their work and, with them, to work through questions about the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of academics and practitioners working on questions of ethnic prejudice and the promotion of tolerance.
33. In practical terms the project sought to develop a training methodology, supported by relevant training textual and visual materials, for local teachers, young leaders and NGO activists which would assist their trainees, especially those involved in ethnic conflict, in addressing the importance of reconciliation and identifying and overcoming the psychological barriers which prevent people from moving forward.
34. Wolff, "Beyond Ethnic Politics in Central and Eastern Europe."
35. The selected papers present only a fraction of the academic papers presented at the RIME workshops. Six other RIME academic papers are collated in the parallel special issue of the journal *Ethnopolitics*, entitled "Cultural Production and Transmission of Ethnic Tolerance and Prejudice: Young People's Narratives," edited by Hilary Pilkington and Anton Popov.

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