

## **EDITORIAL NOTE: OLD AND NEW SMALL NATIONS IN POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE**

The totally unexpected break-up of three multinational communist states between 1989 and 1992 has radically changed the political map of Europe, giving birth to 22 new and old countries, ranging from the gargantuan—the Russian Federation—to the lilliputian—Macedonia. Among the new states are, territorially and/or demographically, fairly substantial countries, such as Kazakhstan and Ukraine respectively. But also among them are relatively small ones such as Estonia and Slovenia.

The latter category has been the object of considerable attention in previous issues of *Nationalities Papers*, especially from the vantage point of the early struggle for and the consolidation of independence. To date, two Special Topic issues have appeared, one dealing with Slovenia (Spring 1993) and the other with Estonia (Spring 1995). This issue, the third, focuses on Moldova. In general, it too is devoted to assessing the difficulties of transition—the way out of the Soviet Union and the path to full-scale political independence with all the attending problems, not least those posed by multi-ethnicity.

The concept “small state” is, of course, somewhat amorphous. Nevertheless, however vague or subjective, it is still a useful term, if only relatively or comparatively. A “small” nation can be measured territorially by its limited space. While Estonia’s size is arguably not small compared to its Baltic neighbor, Latvia, it is indisputably a mini-state if compared to its giant neighbor the Russian Federation which stretches about five thousand miles, from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. The same equation can be applied using demography as a criterion. Similarly, Slovenia enjoys a “small” status if measured against the size of its neighbors, though not quite as dramatically as the Estonia–Russia comparison. Still, compared to Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy, it is far less than a junior peer; it is undeniably small—politically, militarily, economically, as well as by population and area. From a national security perspective, small Slovenia is anything but secure in the company of its four neighbors, judging from twentieth-century history.

In this light, Moldova also deserves to be classified as small. Squeezed between two not disinterested neighbors—Romania and Ukraine—and subject to considerable post-communist imperial pressures from not-too-distant Russia. Moldova’s exit from the Soviet Union and its precarious first steps as an independent state exemplify the impact of its geopolitical circumstances. Its leaders must steer a course predicated on a realization of the small state status of their land-bound country *vis-à-vis* their more dominant neighbors.

In this collection of articles compiled by Professor Michael F. Hamm, the small country characteristics of Moldova are a constant theme. *Nationalities Papers* is

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indebted to Professor Hamm for this carefully balanced set of articles, most of which assess the degree of autonomy that is enjoyed by Moldova in its first half a dozen years out of the confines of the former USSR. Once again *Nationalities Papers* is pleased with the degree of cooperation it enjoys with scholars around the world in bringing about this “small countries” series within this series of Special Topic issues.

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