Nationalities Papers, Vol. 35, No. 3, July 2007

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Introduction

Identities, Nations and Politics after Communism

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This collection of essays focuses on questions of identity that have confronted the various countries of Central and Eastern Europe as a result of the collapse of the communist system that had provided them with an identity for several decades of the twentieth century (and in the case of much of the Soviet Union, three decades before that).

As part of the "communist world," these nations had an identity thrust upon them by their ruling communist parties, led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union under successive authoritarian leaders. The dominant ideology gave an identity to these nations that were deemed to be engaging in the construction of socialism, to be followed by a communist society based on Marxist principles. They were also distinguished by a developed welfare system, a centralized command economy run by the state, and a political system that was based on control of varying degrees of severity. The system styled itself as the antithesis of the "capitalist countries" with the economic free-for-all that favored the owners of wealth at the expense of the working class and peasantry, and was in turn seen by those ideological opponents as a different world, characterized by lack of freedom, atheism, an overbearing state and other negative features that reflected a rejection of liberal democracy.

The collapse of the communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, entailing loss of power by the ruling parties and abandonment of the ideology, led also to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia into their constituent republics. These now became independent states, in some cases for the first time in their history, joining those countries that had cast off communist rule and rejected Soviet "leadership." These developments both facilitated and necessitated a reassessment of the now independent nations' history, orientation, symbols and identity. In some cases, new states were created without a clear national identity, while in others the nation was regaining statehood, but not always within borders that had an historical association with the nation concerned. The multiethnic character of the space of the former Soviet Union and its erstwhile "satellites," and the long historical legacy of complex relations, boundary changes, population migration, and economic and social changes, presented different challenges to the various nations and states concerned.

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ISSN 0090-5992 print; ISSN 1465-3923 online/07/030407-4 © 2007 Association for the Study of Nationalities
DOI: 10.1080/00905990701368639

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990701368639 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The essays in this collection explore a number of cases in attempting to elucidate and understand the issues of ethnic and national identity and their relationship to the emerging statehood in various regions of the post-communist world. It is clear that some nation-states were far better prepared to handle these issues than others, and that the longer term impact of the communist experience has varied. Moreover, the choices made by the elites in consultation with their peoples (or simply on their behalf), or in a reflection of the clearly enunciated national mood, have been different, and different factors have been at play in promoting particular new identities and political orientations, in place of the half-century or more in which all roads led, metaphorically speaking, to Moscow.

In the first essay that follows, which raises important theoretical points that draw from a constructivist perspective, Alina Curticapean examines how collective identities—and especially national and ethnic identities—have been conceptualized in the field of international relations and how the theoretical concepts have been deployed in the study of Central and Eastern European identities. It claims that the *naturalization* of national identity is a phenomenon more pronounced in studies of Central and Eastern Europe than in studies of Western Europe. Arguing that the conceptualization of identity has political consequences, as reading national or ethnic identities as natural constructs rather than imaginings already forecloses certain political options, this article calls for a *softening* of the understanding of group identity as applied to Central and Eastern Europe.

In the first of the substantive examinations of identity, Harlow Robinson notes that the ballets of Aram Khachaturian occupy a special place in the history of Soviet ballet and of Soviet music and reflect diverse identities. An Armenian, brought up in Georgian Tbilisi and later trained in Moscow, the musically cosmopolitan Khachaturian was entirely a creation of the Soviet musical and dance establishment. Yet his ballets reflect diverse identities: the ethic of Soviet ideology, including the heroism of the working class and peasant builders of socialism, and friendship between Russians and ethnic minorities; the folk music traditions of Armenia and the Caucasus; and the new Soviet patriotism embracing multiple ethnic cultures. The Armenian identity of the music has never been challenged, and even *Spartacus* reflects the question of relations between a ruling group and a small ethnic minority, despite its "ideological" subject. Khachaturian's ballets therefore offer conflicting interpretations, allowing them to reflect and support conflicting identities: Soviet and nationalist.

Claudia Weiss's examination of the place of Siberia in imperial Russia's efforts in the late nineteen century to project an image of imperial grandeur and as justification for Russia's inclusion among the great powers of Europe is an interesting study of an early example of state-sponsored propaganda or public relations. She focuses on the role of a series of international expositions as the venue for Russia's efforts to project an imperial identity that would instill in others an appreciation of Russia's newly gained importance in world affairs. The incorporation of Siberia into Russian identity patterns freed Russia from the pressure to

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990701368639 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be more European than it actually was. Thus, it helped the Russian Empire to overcome an old sense of inferiority in relation to the West and to place itself self-confidently as a Eurasian state. This important role of Siberia in Russian identity patterns has continued to this day.

The next study of national identity is Aurora Álvarez Veinguer's examination of the multidimensional relationship and the complex dialectic in the process of identity (re)presentation that emerges in the Republic of Tatarstan (Russian Federation) among three different areas: political discourse, institutional praxis, and everyday life. There is a dialogue between a formal rhetoric of inclusion, a rigid discourse and primordial understanding of identities transmitted by some institutions (i.e. national gymnásias) that aim to reinforce particular practices of segregation, as well as personal transgression in everyday life. Tatar national gymnásias create and reinforce static notions of ethno-Tatar identity (ethno-national representations), reproducing and supporting ethno-cultural Tatar segregation which consolidate strong mechanisms of differentiation between Tatar and Russian populations.

In the third substantive examination of identity, Triin Vihalemm notes that the Russian population in post-Soviet Estonia faced a trauma, as their Soviet identity was removed and they became an unwelcome, alien community in the Western-oriented, individualistic state in which they lived. They were confronted with a dilemma of choice over their identity. Research shows that in the past some had considered themselves "Soviet persons" or inhabitants of the Baltic region, while others' identity was of "Russians" or "Russian-speakers"; today their identity focuses on Russianness or language use, or on their residence in Estonia; fewer consider themselves citizens of Estonia, but the identity of "Baltic inhabitant" survives, and has been joined by other broad categories: "northerner," "European" and even "world citizen." The patterns of identity development reflect these dilemmas.

The final three articles concern the impact of identity on international relations. In the first of these, Søren Jacob Riishøj notes that the collapse of communism forced Central European nations to reassess their orientation: after several decades of enforced orientation towards the East they could "return to Europe." However, strains of pro-European sentiment combine with Euroskepticism and strong national feelings to underline mutually overlapping multiple identities. These sentiments are related in part to social factors and to political currents, parties and individual politicians. The examples of Poland and the Czech Republic illustrate these trends and suggest the emergence of "soft" and "hard" versions of Euroskepticism.

Krzysztof Fedorowicz deals with the emergence of a new, national interest-based foreign policy in Poland. The year 1989 marked the beginning of the system transformation in Poland. Its effect was the change of the principal aims of Polish foreign policy based on Polish conceptions of their national identity and their national interest. The process of the vivid changes in Poland after the end of the socialist period coincided with the changes in Europe's geopolitical situation. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the democratization of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990701368639 Published online by Cambridge University Press

unification of Germany, the process of Soviet disintegration and the struggle of the Soviet republics for independence presented a totally new challenge for Polish diplomacy.

The main purpose of this article is to explain the complex formation and evolution of Poland's eastern policy in the context of a changing international reality. A new geopolitical situation forced Polish diplomacy to consider international affairs in a different way, as well as to create a new element in its policy—an eastern policy. The essence of this eastern policy was, initially, to establish and set diplomatic relations that would meet Poland's interests, as well as to create the grounds for political dialogue with new countries in the east that border on Poland (Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Lithuania).

The third and final essay on the impact of identity on international affairs is Rosalind Marsh's overview of the treatment in the post-Soviet media and culture, especially in literature and film on historical themes, of certain aspects of the perennial debate about "Russia and the West." It traces a shift from the expression of significant pro-Western sentiments in the late 1980s and early 1990s to the increased manifestation of anti-Western and Russian nationalist sentiments in the late 1990s and the early years of the new century. Issues include writer's exploration of messianic attitudes and the search for a "new Russian idea," the similarities and differences between Russia and the West, and the harmful impact on Russia of Western-style capitalism. Is the West still regarded as Russia's "Other," or at a time when Western and Russian tastes in historical fiction are apparently converging, is such a polar opposition now fundamentally dated?

These articles were selected for publication here from papers on issues of national identity that were originally presented at the VII World Congress of Central and East European Studies, held in Berlin in July 2005. The editor wishes to express his sincere appreciation to all the authors for making their essays available for inclusion in this special issue of *Nationality Papers* and for the time and effort that they have put into revising their original papers. He also wishes to thank those authors whose articles were not selected for inclusion for making those papers available. Finally, he wishes to express his special appreciation to Professor Ronald Hill of Trinity College, Dublin, who was instrumental in the initial selection of these papers for possible publication.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990701368639 Published online by Cambridge University Press