

CHAPTER 5

Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation

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As Central and East European societies emerged from communism in the early 1990s, people throughout the region expressed their preference for democracy, free markets, and the European Union (EU). Many in the West expected the EU to supersede the political ideology of nationalism, which has traditionally pursued the establishment of territorially sovereign, culturally homogeneous nation-states. In earlier centuries, efforts to achieve such congruence between the political and national units in Europe involved aggressive efforts to change state boundaries, eject or assimilate nonconforming groups to “purify” the nation, or encourage minority populations to repatriate to other countries.¹ By the end of the 1980s, such methods of nation-state creation were no longer acceptable in the western part of the continent. Leading scholars of democratic development in other regions, too, argued for a new paradigm to address the need for democracies to accommodate ethno-cultural diversity.² In Central and Eastern Europe, European integration seemed to offer the best prospect for moving beyond the era of the traditional nation-state.

A lesson that much of the scholarly literature about nationalism drew from West European development in this period was that, if democratization and marketization could progress unhindered, politics grounded in ethnic and national identity would lose its relevance, and more advanced—rational, individualist, and inclusive—notions of citizenship would take its place. These were the thoughts voiced from within the Iron Curtain during the communist decades by dissident Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and other intellectuals who articulated alternative visions of a free society and spoke poignantly about universal human values and inalienable individual rights and freedoms. Against the backdrop of such expectations, the story of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist regimes is filled with reasons for disappointment. After decades of democratization and Europeanization in the 1990s and 2000s, signs of autocratization appeared in a growing number of countries in the region in the 2010s. This chapter provides an account of how ethnicity and nationalism played a role in these trajectories as defining features of institutional development before and after democratization and EU membership.

Even after the initial euphoria over the end of communism, the voices expressing themselves most forcefully spoke about “nationhood” and, in the overwhelming majority

of cases, exalted the supposed inalienable rights of groups rather than of individuals. Ethnically conceived national groups all over the postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe viewed democratization as the opportunity finally to achieve or consolidate sovereignty over territories they claimed as their “national homelands.” National aspirations contributed to the collapse of all three multinational federations (the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia). Of the seventeen countries commonly considered to belong to this region, twelve were established or reestablished after 1989 along national lines. Only five countries continued within their existing borders. Conflicts over nation-building became significant features of the difficult process of regime change in most of these states.

Nationalism not only remained relevant after the collapse of communism but also emerged as the most powerful ideology that most important and popular political elites and parties advanced and that publics in these countries found appealing. At the same time, the desire to “return to Europe” and join Western institutions was also a very significant motivation throughout the region. In some cases, aspirations to strengthen national cultures while joining an integrated Europe seemed fully compatible. For instance, people throughout the West cheered the fall of the Berlin Wall, which led to the subsequent reunification of the German state. Although wary of the disintegration of the Soviet state, Westerners also celebrated the reestablishment of the three Baltic states as examples of forward-looking, Western-oriented nationalism. When mass nationalist violence broke out in former Yugoslavia, however, influential public voices in the West began asking whether Central and East Europeans were returning to their violent past rather than transitioning into a peaceful and prosperous future in a common European home. Some argued that ancient hatreds made the rebirth of nationalism inevitable in such places as the Balkans.³ Others argued that the process of democratization engendered manipulative elites’ interest in employing nationalism.⁴ Such arguments are often associated with a debate between “primordialism” and “constructivism” in nationalism scholarship. The first label describes explanations based on the assumption that enduring elements of ethnic kinship serve as “primordial” sources of nationalism. The second label describes arguments that emphasize the significance of institutions, particularly the modern state, and the role of political actors in “constructing” nationhood.⁵ An increasing number of scholars today question the usefulness of these labels and aim to develop more nuanced explanations for the salience of ethnicity and nationalism in contemporary societies.⁶

Developments in other parts of the world since 1989 have demonstrated that neither the popular appeal of nationalism nor the problems that this ideology poses for democratic governance are specific to the postcommunist region. Wherever political elites design nationalist strategies, the process reveals sources of tension rooted in the “Janus-faced” character of nationalism: as with other political ideologies, nationalism is forward-looking in the sense that it articulates a vision of the future; at the same time, nationalist strategies almost always call for turning to the past for self-definition.⁷ When nationalists claim self-government rights for “the nation” on a “national” territory or “homeland,” they usually offer a certain interpretation of history to justify these claims. Whether such a historiography relies on historical evidence is less important than the degree to which it can foster a sense of shared history and purpose. To express this idea, “national myth” is the term most often used to describe national stories. Some national myths have been



Map 5.1. Ethnic Minorities in Central and Eastern Europe, 2014. The map includes minorities over 0.2 percent of the population in the latest official census for each state.

more successful than others in accommodating ethnic diversity. The so-called civic type of nationalism, which builds community on shared political traditions, is potentially more inclusive than “ethnic nationalism,” which requires members of the nation to share a common ethnicity. Nonetheless, even countries commonly considered textbook cases of “civic nationalism,” such as Britain, France, and the United States, reveal significant similarities to “ethnic nationalism,” as schools, churches, the media, the military, and various other state and private or public institutions perpetuate unified national stories and literatures and mental maps of national homelands.⁸

In many instances, the national myth contains stories about ethnic competition over territory, invoking memories of past ethnic dominance and subordination, which continue to influence current state- and nation-building processes. Yet not all ethnic groups engage in national competition. A key difference between ethnic and national groups is that, although ethnic groups aim to reproduce particular cultures, only national groups claim self-government rights on a particular territory.⁹ In postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe, the majority and minority groups that articulated competing notions of self-government rights were national groups that defined “nation” on the basis of ethnic markers—most commonly language, in some cases religion. Yet significant differences emerged in the way national aspirations were articulated and posed against one another. Before offering explanations for these differences, the following pages provide a brief account of state- and nation-building in the period that preceded democratization, highlighting processes that created the conditions in which postcommunist democratization and nationalism subsequently took shape.

Nationalism before Democratic Competition

The pursuit of modern nation-states by nationalist political elites and counter-elites within the Hapsburg Empire began in the second part of the nineteenth century, and the dynamics of these efforts revealed the fundamentally competitive character of modern nationalism. Whether in the framework of the multinational Hapsburg state (reconstituted after 1867 as the dualist Austro-Hungarian Empire) or its successor states, the nationalist policies that a dominant ethnic group adopted invariably triggered resentment and engendered conflicting nationalist aspirations from other groups. During this process, national literatures emerged in vernacular languages, and national historiographies were written and became justifications for nationalist demands. Czechs and Hungarians defined their national myths and aspirations in opposition to Austria’s Germans. After the creation of the dualist state, the same pattern remained characteristic in both parts of the monarchy. In the Austrian part, Czechs and Slovenes challenged German cultural dominance and articulated unsuccessful calls for national sovereignty. In the Hungarian part, the nationalist movements of non-Hungarians (Slovaks, Croats, and Romanians) encountered rejection by Hungarian elites.¹⁰ Besides challenging one another, nationalist political elites also competed for international support and legitimization for their conflicting notions of national power. The complex matrix of these domestic and international interests led Austria-Hungary into World War I and, at the end of the war, resulted in the dissolution of the monarchy into its successor states.

When the victorious powers agreed to establish the successor states at the end of World War I, they relied on the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination. The demographic patterns of the region, however, made the delineation of clear “national” borders impossible. The states created to bring justice to previously subordinate national groups of the monarchy also became multinational, with new “titular” nations attempting to establish political and cultural hegemony over national minorities. Although relations of dominance and subordination were reversed after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian state, the same pattern of nation-building continued, with multiple groups sharing the same state but holding conflicting notions about legitimate territorial sovereignty. Incompatible narratives about the “justice” of the post–World War I settlements became part of conflicting national historiographies that have remained significant sources of tension over territorial sovereignty in the region.

Sovereignty is a fundamental principle of political organization and also one of the most contested because it takes different forms, and these forms are at times incompatible with one another. As J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin observe, “There has been a historical tension between state sovereignty, which stresses the link between sovereign authority and a defined territory, and national sovereignty, which emphasizes a link between sovereign authority and a defined population.”¹¹ This tension had become particularly apparent in Central and Eastern Europe by the mid-nineteenth century and remained salient throughout the region’s history. Yugoslavia, created to provide southern Slav peoples with a common state, in reality comprised a diversity of national groups that maintained strong prejudices and reproaches against one another. A famous expression of Slovene prejudices, for instance, is the 1927 statement by Catholic party leader Anton Korošec: “In Yugoslavia it is thus: the Serbs rule, the Croats debate, and the Slovenes work.”¹² Even in Czechoslovakia, where the leadership established the strongest democratic institutions in the region, large national minority populations remained discontented with their status and continued to challenge the legitimacy of the new state.

With the political principle of national self-determination internationally legitimized, competing nationalist aspirations crystallized in the interwar period and formed the basis for strategies that later escalated into some of the atrocities committed during World War II. The Hungarian government focused its efforts on regaining lost territories and population. Wary of this Hungarian policy of irredentism, neighboring governments that had gained significant territories from historic Hungary designed aggressive economic and cultural policies to achieve more effective control over those territories and their inhabitants. Greater Romania, for example, based its institutional policies primarily on reordering the ethnic hierarchy in Transylvania in favor of Romanian dominance.¹³ Hungarian organizations forcefully challenged these policies. Similarly, in Czechoslovakia, many Germans and Hungarians joined political parties that challenged the legitimacy of the state. These groups felt vindicated when Adolf Hitler dismembered Czechoslovakia in 1938, occupied the Czech Lands, and helped to redraw contested political borders throughout the region. The supposed right of the sizable German-speaking population of interwar Czechoslovakia, the Sudeten Germans, to belong to a common German nation-state served as a pretext for Hitler’s destruction of the Czechoslovak state. After Germany’s show of military might, the governments of Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (a state that Hitler helped create) each became Hitler’s allies at various times of the war, trusting that

their participation on the victor's side would help them establish, reclaim, or maintain sovereignty over mutually claimed "national" territories and peoples. As a result of Hitler's policies, the Hungarian government was able to reannex two regions with majority Hungarian populations (the southern region of Czechoslovakia in November 1938 and northern Transylvania between 1940 and 1944). These sudden reversals of fortune were as traumatic to the Slovak and Romanian inhabitants of these territories as they had been for Hungarians after World War I. After the defeat of the Axis powers at the end of World War II, the post-World War I borders were reestablished, and the conditions for nationalist policies changed significantly.

The evolution of Polish state- and nation-building provides another example of traumatic shifts in territorial and ethno-cultural boundaries in the context of great power politics. By the end of the eighteenth century, the territories that had once been part of the medieval Polish kingdom were split among the Russian, German, and Austrian empires. When an independent Polish state was created at the end of World War I, that state incorporated an ethnically diverse population with complex histories of competition that provided significant sources of conflict during the interwar period. This multiethnic society was devastated during World War II. After the division of Poland by the Soviet Union and Germany in 1941, the violence perpetuated on that territory (primarily through state-designed strategies of ethnic cleansing but also through violence committed by social actors) annihilated one-third of the population—including almost the entire population of Polish Jews and large numbers of Poles, Ukrainians, and other ethnicities.¹⁴ The peace agreements at the end of World War II re-created a Polish state but within territorial boundaries that were moved significantly to the west. The boundary shift was coupled with ethnic cleansing ("unmixing") of a different kind: millions of ethnic Germans from the western part of the new Polish state were forced out of their homes and moved to postwar Germany, and large numbers of Poles and Ukrainians were forced to resettle in the west.¹⁵ As a result of these traumatic territorial and demographic changes, the Polish state turned from a long history of ethnic diversity to significant ethnic homogeneity.

Nationalist competition contributed also to the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1941, when Hitler and Benito Mussolini divided the state among Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria and established, in the center of the former federation, a Croatian state ruled by the fascist Ustaša. In the bloody civil wars that engulfed Yugoslavia in subsequent years, the Ustaša government led a violent campaign against Jews, Roma, Serbs, and other groups; Yugoslav Partisans fought to defend villagers against terror; and the extreme nationalists among Serbian Četniks engaged in revenge attacks against ethnic Croats, Muslims, and Partisans. By the end of the war, over one million people were killed, including Serbs, Croats, Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, Danube Swabians (a German-speaking ethnic group), Jews, Slovenes, and Roma.

Against the backdrop of such violence, many communist leaders in the region, among whom ethnic minorities were represented in disproportionately high numbers, viewed internationalism as an appealing alternative to nationalism. Although communism provided leaders with unprecedented power to conduct "social engineering," none of these regimes succeeded in creating homogeneity in societies where multiple groups had earlier competed for national rights. There emerged no sizable "non-national" Yugoslav population in Yugoslavia, or Czechoslovak population in Czechoslovakia, capable of holding



Photo 5.1. Roma refugee camp in Zvecan, north of Kosovo, November 1999. Although the exact figure is unknown, millions of Roma live in often substandard conditions throughout Central and Eastern Europe and often have disproportionately high unemployment rates. (Lubomir Kotek/OSCE)

these federations together when the communist regimes began collapsing in 1989. The Soviet state was similarly unable to engender nonnational identities and loyalties.

Despite an initial emphasis on internationalism, in practice, nationalism remained a key organizing principle during the communist period.¹⁶ In Yugoslavia, communist leader Josip Broz Tito made the eradication of national antagonisms his primary goal in 1945 and suppressed all overt manifestations of ethnic sentiment. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1960s, Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, and other national identities were reasserting themselves in literature and the arts, and by the mid-1970s these groups had achieved self-government in the constituent republics of the Yugoslav federation. In the other part of the region that fell under Moscow's dominance, each of the "brotherly states" of Central and Eastern Europe pursued its own brand of nationalism in domestic politics.¹⁷ The postwar Czechoslovak government, for instance, declared ethnic Germans and Hungarians collectively guilty of having contributed to Hitler's destruction of Czechoslovakia and gained Soviet approval for the expulsion of these ethnic groups from the country. Based on the so-called Beneš Decrees (named for the state's president, Eduard Beneš), Czechoslovakia expelled the overwhelming majority of ethnic Germans to Germany and a large percentage of the Hungarian population, including much of the Hungarian educated class, to Hungary.¹⁸ Those who remained in the state were denied citizenship rights until 1948. Despite such a drastic policy to achieve an ethnic balance favoring the state's two titular groups, the Czechs and the Slovaks, a significant number of Hungarians remained in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia. Throughout the communist decades, they were subject to economic, cultural, and educational policies that severely restricted their ability to reproduce their culture and improve their socioeconomic status. The relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks was also tense from the beginning of cohabitation. Initial notions of a unified Czechoslovak identity were soon replaced by efforts to loosen Prague's control over the Slovak part of the land in a federative structure that better represented national interests.

Compared to Czechoslovakia, the postwar Romanian communist government adopted more minority-friendly policies. Because the ethnic Hungarian party was instrumental in the communist takeover in Romania, Hungarian minority leaders gained Moscow's support in achieving full citizenship rights, participation in the government, and the right to maintain cultural and educational institutions. The same Soviet government that in Czechoslovakia gave its full support to President Beneš's policies to expel the German and Hungarian minorities, in Romania facilitated the establishment of regional autonomy for Hungarians in Transylvania in 1952. Although this autonomous region was short-lived, the first communist-dominated Romanian government was much better disposed toward minorities overall than was the Beneš government in Czechoslovakia.¹⁹ As the influence of ethnic Hungarian leaders in the Communist Party weakened, however, the government launched a nationalizing strategy that severely weakened the political status and social structure of the Hungarian community in Transylvania. Beginning in the mid-1960s, the government of Nicolae Ceaușescu launched a ruthless strategy to consolidate a centralized unitary national state. Ethnic Germans were offered incentives to immigrate to West Germany, and Hungarians were subjected to administrative, economic, and educational policies aimed at their assimilation. Against such a backdrop, ethnic Hungarians unsurprisingly played a significant role in the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989.²⁰

Of the unitary communist states in the region, Poland and Hungary were the only two that did not have sizable national minority groups. The small ethnic communities that existed in these states presented no systematic challenge to majority cultural dominance. Within the framework of the Moscow-led communist camp, the Hungarian government also indicated little interest in influencing the conditions of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighboring states. Under such circumstances, the significance of the national principle appeared less prominent in either case than it did in the region's multinational states. Yet the absence of internal national minorities did not make nationalist motivations irrelevant in these countries. In Poland, national aspirations contributed to the emergence of Solidarity, the most powerful anti-communist movement in the region in the 1980s. In Hungary, interest in the national principle strengthened by the end of the 1980s, especially with regard to Hungarian minorities living in the neighboring states.

Democratization and Nationalist Competition

With the collapse of communism came the promise of change, and for majorities and minorities alike, change brought a chance to redefine old ideas of citizenship and self-government. At the beginning of the process, most societies in the region experienced a unifying spirit of euphoria over the collapse of repressive regimes.²¹ Democratization offered unprecedented opportunities for these societies to articulate differences through competitive elections, political parties, and parliamentary debates. The EU offered a model of political integration and a way of transcending the nationalist competitions of the past. Yet the most influential political actors throughout the region articulated their intentions to achieve both stronger national sovereignty and European integration.

The international institutions that most of the newly elected governments aspired to join—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the EU—insisted on peaceful negotiations about sovereignty issues. As various majority and minority groups in the region asserted claims to “national” self-government, Western international institutions reasserted the principle of individual rights, but they also began adopting an impressive number of documents calling for the protection of the rights of minority cultures. These documents signaled increased international awareness that many states incorporate multiple nation-building processes and that tensions arising from these situations must find lasting solutions acceptable to all parties involved.²²

Despite the relative consistency of international expectations and the shared objective of Central and East Europeans to return to a “common European home,” the conditions under which this goal could be harmonized with nationalist aspirations varied. Consequently, there were significant variations in the way nationalism manifested itself throughout the region. The differences revealed themselves in the goals that leaders and groups articulated and the strategies they designed to achieve those goals. An overwhelming nationalist goal in the region was to establish national entities by creating new states (e.g., in former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia) or to reestablish precommunist state borders (in the Baltic region). Another form of nationalism pursued national dominance in existing states, despite minority opposition to this strategy (Romania and Bulgaria).

A third form aimed at strengthening a common sense of nationhood beyond state borders (Hungary). The pages that follow offer explanations for these differences in nationalist strategy, emphasizing the influence of preexisting state structure (federal or unitary), national composition (whether national strategies involved internal or external national minorities), and the choices of national elites (to what extent majority and minority elites were willing to negotiate their claims within the emerging democratic institutions, employing the prospects of NATO and European integration in the process).

FROM MULTINATIONAL FEDERATIONS TO NATIONAL STATES

The nationalist movements that pursued state formation emerged in the three multinational federations: Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Although each of the three dissolving federal states was ethnically diverse, only a limited number of groups defined themselves in national terms and claimed rights to national self-government. In each case, the titular groups of substate administrative units were most likely to claim such rights. These were the Serbs, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Croats in former Yugoslavia; the Czechs and Slovaks in former Czechoslovakia; and the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians in the former Soviet Union. In each case, those engaged in state formation had to answer the following questions: What would be the physical boundaries of the successor states? What would “the nation” mean within those boundaries? Who belonged to the new political community and under what terms? And what should happen to those who did not belong? In all cases, the political elites who led the movements for national independence played a very important role in shaping the debates about these questions. In the great majority of cases, nationalist claims were negotiated peacefully, within the channels of democratic political competition. In other cases, however, democratic forms of parliamentary debate and party competition were unable to contain national conflicts, and these conflicts escalated into devastating wars.

DEMOCRATIZATION DERAILED: NATIONALISM IN THE BALKANS

In former Yugoslavia, the substate borders of the republics did not coincide with people’s mental maps of “historic homelands.” Consequently, national self-determination became a vehemently contested idea in the Balkans, as multiple national groups living in a mixed demographic pattern claimed the same territory as “their own,” and each group turned to a different national myth and conflicting interpretation of past relations of dominance and subordination, sacrifice and victimization.

Serbs and Croats composed the majority of the state’s population as well as the overwhelming majority in the three largest republics—Serbia (and its autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina), Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Approximately 24 percent of Serbs lived outside the Republic of Serbia and 22 percent of Croats lived outside Croatia. Tensions between these two groups influenced interethnic relations throughout Yugoslavia. Montenegrins generally identified with Serbs, and Muslims lived intermixed with Serbs and Croats. Only Slovenia and Macedonia, with their very small Serbian and

Croatian populations, were not drawn into Serbian-Croatian competition.²³ In such a context, successive unilateral declarations of independence by nationalist elites contributed to a cycle of conflict that marked the entire decade of the 1990s and caused devastation and horror not seen in Europe since World War II.

The unilateral declaration of independence triggered military intervention even in Slovenia, where no other groups had articulated competing national claims for the same territory. The fight for independent Slovenia, however, was relatively uneventful compared to the brutal wars that followed in other parts of the disintegrating state. The Yugoslav army, by late 1991, had evolved into primarily a Serbian army. In the absence of Serbian claims for Slovenia as a “national homeland,” European mediation quickly convinced the Yugoslav army to withdraw and hand over sovereignty to the Slovenian state in October 1991.

In other Yugoslav republics, where majority and minority political elites advanced competing and mutually incompatible claims for the same “national homeland,” these claims mobilized large-scale ethnic support that led to violent conflict. The Serb Democratic Party in the Krajina region of Croatia, for instance, immediately challenged the emerging Croatian movement for an independent state by demanding administrative and cultural autonomy for the Serb-majority region. Unable to achieve this goal immediately, the leaders of the four Serb-controlled areas declared the formation of the Serb Autonomous Region of Krajina in January 1991 and added in March the same year that this region would “dissociate” from an independent Croatia and remain within Yugoslavia.

This sequence of unilateral declarations of national sovereignty exacerbated an already existing distrust and hostility among these groups and helped trigger a devastating war in Croatia. The government of Croatia on one side and the Yugoslav state presidency, as well as local Serbian authorities, on the other employed armed forces to resolve the crisis. The war ended in 1995 with the help of US and European mediation, after brutal destruction in Croatian cities and villages, great suffering among the civilian population, and “ethnic cleansing” on both sides that resulted in the displacement of more than a half-million refugees. Today, the Serbian minority represents only slightly more than 4 percent of Croatia’s population.

Competition over national sovereignty became particularly vicious in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a republic in which three groups began their armed fight for an acceptable state design in April 1992. The Party of Democratic Action, representing the majority Muslim population, advocated an independent and unitary Bosnia-Herzegovina, with no internal territorial division along national lines. The Serb Democratic Party first rejected separation from Yugoslavia and fought for a separate state in the Serb-populated areas—in the hope of future reunification with other Serbian-inhabited territories of (former) Yugoslavia. The Croatian Democratic Union allied itself with the Muslim party against the Bosnian Serbs but also staged its own secessionist attempt in Herzegovina from 1993 to 1994—a conflict resolved only through strong international pressure, which led to the formation of a Muslim-Croat federation. The war over the fate of Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted from 1992 to 1995 and involved the engagement of the Serbian and Croatian militaries as well as NATO forces. Although all three groups committed atrocities, Serbian troops were responsible for more crimes than their counterparts, and the Muslim population suffered most grievously.²⁴



Photo 5.2. Croatian refugees fleeing from Bosnian forces in June 1993 near Travnik, when the Herzegovinian Croats turned on the Bosnians, creating an internal disaster. The Serbs reportedly sat in the hills laughing. (Jim Bartlett)

The Dayton Peace Accords, reached through international mediation in 1995, created a loose confederation that holds the Muslim-Croat federation and the Serb republic in the common state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dividing the Muslim-Croat federation into separate national cantons and allowing the Bosnian Croats to maintain a close link with the Croatian state. Although the Serb Democratic Party no longer dominates politics in the Republika Srpska of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the main political parties representing the Serb population have continued to articulate desires for an independent state.

The other territory over which some of the most violent nationalist conflicts emerged outside Bosnia-Herzegovina was Kosovo, a region that features prominently in the Serbian national myth. Before 1990, Kosovo was part of the Serbian republic of Yugoslavia but had a majority ethnic Albanian population. In 1990, Kosovo lost its autonomy under the emerging rule of Slobodan Milošević. As a result, the Albanians in this province were systematically excluded from institutions of political and economic power, and their means of cultural reproduction (such as education in the Albanian language) were virtually eliminated from state-sponsored institutions. When the opportunity for democratization presented itself, Albanian members of the Kosovo Assembly articulated the Kosovar Albanians' right to national self-determination as early as 1990. In September 1991, they organized a referendum in which an overwhelming majority of Kosovars (99.8 percent) voted for independence. After significant efforts to achieve independence through peaceful civil disobedience and the gradual construction of a "parallel

state” (e.g., parallel institutions of education and health care), the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (KLA) became impatient with this strategy and began a series of violent attacks against Serbs (police officers and civilians) in Kosovo. Serbian authorities responded with a massive offensive in July 1998, forcing the KLA to withdraw into the hills. The Serbs then began a ruthless and systematic process of ethnic cleansing, which resulted in approximately seven hundred thousand ethnic Albanian civilians from Kosovo being expelled from their villages and forced to flee to Albania or Macedonia. Despite international intervention, including two months of massive NATO bombings against military and industrial targets also in Serbia, the Serbian government refused to agree to an independent Kosovo. When Serb forces finally agreed in a June 1999 peace agreement to withdraw from Kosovo, the agreement guaranteed the continued territorial integrity of Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro), including the province of Kosovo, which has been under UN administration since 1999. However, following the collapse of negotiations over the final status of Kosovo between local and international actors and the publication of a UN report calling for the independence of the former Serbian province²⁵ (albeit under international supervision), the Kosovo Assembly adopted a unilateral proclamation of independence on February 17, 2008. Swiftly recognized by the United States and some (though not all) EU member states, Kosovo’s independence remains challenged by Serbia. Tensions over the border have decreased after an EU-brokered deal in April 2013 recognized Serb majority areas of Kosovo as autonomous at the municipal level; yet, Kosovo suffers from weak state capacity and remains under considerable international supervision.²⁶

INDEPENDENCE AND EU INTEGRATION: THE BALTIC STATES

The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were reestablished without significant border disputes within the territorial boundaries that these states had before their forcible annexation to the Soviet Union in 1940. Although Russians had dominated the institutions of power at both the federal and republic levels and ethnic Russians had settled in these republics in significant numbers, there were no significant disputes over national territorial borders between Russian nationalist politicians and the leaders of independence movements in the Baltics.

An important factor in the absence of territorial disputes was that, although Russians were the ethnic group closely associated with Soviet federal power structures, the ethnic Russian population in the Baltic republics overwhelmingly comprised relatively recent settlers whom the native population viewed as colonizers. As the formerly dominant ethnic group in the Soviet Union, the Russians remaining in the Baltic states stood to lose the most at independence. Yet ethnic Russians articulated no systematic challenge to nationalist aspirations in the Baltics. The new states, with their prospects for European integration, offered better socioeconomic conditions than neighboring Russia. Rather than demanding self-government, let alone secession and unification with Russia, ethnic Russian political organizations contested the exclusionary aspects of citizenship and language laws and lobbied European institutions to pressure these governments to adopt more minority-friendly policies. At least at the beginning of the 1990s, speaking the

Russian language did not signify ethnic or national identity in these states in the same way that language was the primary marker of Latvian, Estonian, or Lithuanian identity. The Russian-speaking population included people of different ethnicities who had switched to Russian as the language of advancement to higher status. Consequently, no commonly shared national myth existed among Russian speakers in the Baltic states that could have become the grounds for national sovereignty claims.²⁷ The only sizable historical minority in the Baltic region was the Polish minority in Lithuania. Although of roughly the same size as the state's Russian minority (at the time, each made up roughly 10 percent of the population), the Polish minority articulated a stronger challenge to majority nation-building than Russians in any of the three states—including Estonia and Latvia, where Russians made up a much higher proportion of the population.

The policies of the Russian government in Moscow constituted another significant factor accounting for differences between nation-building processes in the Yugoslav and Baltic regions. With over one hundred thousand Red Army troops stationed in the Baltic republics when the Soviet Union collapsed, many had feared violent Russian opposition to independence. Nevertheless, the Russian government agreed to withdraw these troops relatively quickly. In contrast to the Serbian leadership's involvement in mobilizing Serbian minorities in the secessionist republics and providing them with military resources, the Russian government aimed instead to eliminate discriminatory citizenship and language legislation in these countries through indirect pressure on their governments and complaints brought to European institutions.

In pursuit of national states, Baltic governments adopted policies to establish national dominance over the institutions of the new state. After 1990, there was a strong sense among these populations that democratization should bring national justice. Even though they were formally titular ethnicities in their republics during Soviet occupation, the share and status of indigenous ethnic groups had decreased dramatically due to large-scale deportation campaigns against the native population, the emigration of great numbers of Balts to the West, and the massive influx of Russians (see [table 5.1](#)).

As a result of these changes, Russian became the predominant language in the public domain, especially in the urban centers. The relationship between Russian and the titular national languages during the Soviet era remained that of one-sided bilingualism despite language legislation adopted in the final years of Soviet political reform that aimed at “emancipating” the Baltic languages. Non-Russians had to be fluent in Russian in order to function fully and advance socioeconomically, but Russian speakers were not learning the languages of the republics in which they resided.²⁸

Decades of aggressive linguistic Russification, however, seemed only to reinforce the Balts' national aspirations, and the notion that Russian presence represented “illegal occupation” became a significant building block in strategies of state reconstruction. After achieving independence in 1991, each of the three governments adopted citizenship and language policies that established the dominance of the titular language in the state. The policies of nationalist state-building were most aggressive in Latvia, where the ratio of the native population compared to the Russian-speaking population was the highest, and most moderate in Lithuania, where the ratio of the Russian minority was the lowest. In Lithuania, all residents who had lived in the republic before independence obtained citizenship simply by applying. In Estonia and Latvia, only citizens of the interwar

Table 5.1. Ethnic Composition of the Baltic States

| <i>Nationality</i> | <i>Percentage of Population</i> |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Ethnic Composition of Estonia (2008 Census) | |
| Estonian | 68.7 |
| Russian | 25.6 |
| Ukrainian | 2.1 |
| Belarusian | 1.2 |
| Finn | 0.8 |
| Other | 1.6 |
| Ethnic Composition of Latvia (2009 Census) | |
| Latvian | 59.3 |
| Russian | 27.8 |
| Belarusian | 3.6 |
| Ukrainian | 2.5 |
| Polish | 2.4 |
| Lithuanian | 1.3 |
| Other | 3.1 |
| Ethnic Composition of Lithuania (2009 Census) | |
| Lithuanian | 84.0 |
| Polish | 6.1 |
| Russian | 4.9 |
| Other or unspecified | 3.9 |

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook 2013*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>.

Estonian and Latvian states before Soviet annexation in 1940 and their descendants had an automatic right to citizenship. Citizenship laws required other residents to pass a language-proficiency test in order to become citizens of the reestablished states, even though during the Soviet era hardly any Russian school taught Latvian. As a result, roughly a third of the population of Estonia and Latvia was excluded from citizenship.²⁹ Citizenship laws also disadvantaged ethnic Russians in the distribution of resources. The 1991 Latvian privatization law, for instance, excluded noncitizens. In Estonia, property restitution similarly discriminated against Russians.³⁰

In general, the story of state- and nation-building in the Baltic region is about harmonizing national sovereignty with European integration. “Returning to Europe” and obtaining protection from future Russian reannexation by joining the EU were inextricable parts of the pursuit of national sovereignty in this region.³¹ Employing the powerful leverage that these motivations provided, European institutions—especially the OSCE’s High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Council of Europe, and the EU—applied strong pressure on the Baltic governments to adopt more inclusive citizenship laws and more pluralistic educational and language policies that complied with “European norms.”³² After 1998, the governments of Estonia and Latvia began adopting amendments to their citizenship laws that made the naturalization of “nonhistoric” minorities easier. International pressure has been less successful in influencing them to liberalize their language policies. Language legislation in both states also continues to reflect a nationalist state-building strategy, although in most cases restrictive language legislation was only moderately implemented.³³ Tensions over language use continue. In Latvia,

a new bilingual curriculum introduced in 2002 and 2003 required that minority-language schools teach certain subjects exclusively in Latvian. In Estonia, a 2007 education reform introduced similar requirements. In both states, policies that mandate the exclusive use of the majority language in subjects considered significant for the reproduction of national cultures, such as history and music, have reinforced fears among Russian speakers that majorities intend to erase Russian culture from these states.³⁴ Still, state-minority relations remained peaceful, and Russophone minority actors continued to pursue claims for minority integration through electoral politics, relying particularly on strength in local government in major cities.³⁵

In successor states of the Soviet Union, the parallel processes of democratization and EU integration described in this section unfolded only in the Baltic states. A brief account of developments in Ukraine helps to highlight how internal divisions over EU membership and national identity can contribute to a major state crisis in a post-Soviet European successor state where political elites failed to establish credible democratic institutions. Although the appeal of democratization is strong in Ukrainian society, the idea of EU membership remains deeply divisive. Given Ukraine's geographic position between the EU and Russia, the ambivalence about European integration has implications beyond the "Euroskepticism" found in current EU member states. A significant segment of Ukraine's political elite and public favors the pursuit of EU membership, but a sizable portion of the state's Russian speakers, especially in the eastern region close to the Russian border, is more interested in maintaining close ties with Russia. The Russian government, meanwhile, strongly opposes the idea of Ukraine's incorporation into Western political and security institutions. The combination of these conditions reinforced skepticism also among EU leaders about the prospects for Ukraine's inclusion in the European integration project. Given the large size of the Ukrainian territory and population in comparison with the Baltic states and the magnitude of Ukraine's socioeconomic problems, the prospects for Ukraine's EU integration remain weak, especially after the 2008 financial crisis. Although Ukraine became part of the EU's "Eastern Partnership" initiative,³⁶ this framework provides European institutions with no leverage to influence policies affecting interethnic relations in a partner state or to shape bilateral relations between Ukraine and Russia.

Ukraine includes a large Russian-speaking population with ambivalent attitudes toward the Ukrainian national identity pursued through policies designed in the state center. Under such conditions, a significant crisis of trust in the government can lead to a major state crisis in which even the political borders of the state become contested.³⁷ The evolution of the 2013–2014 Ukrainian state crisis manifests this logic. Ukraine's political elites failed to establish credible democratic institutions for the state created after 1991. President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to violently repress antigovernment demonstrations, which began in Kiev in November 2013 in response to the government's refusal to sign an association agreement with the EU, led to a major state crisis. The escalation of this crisis—involving the aggressive intrusion of the Russian state through a military annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, followed by secessionist mobilization in Eastern Ukraine, all in the name of protecting Ukraine's Russian-speaking population—highlights not only the failure of democratization in Ukraine but also the continued salience of ethnicity in the politics of sovereignty and legitimacy in the region.

Russian support for secessionism in Ukraine heightened concerns about state sovereignty and regional security in the Baltic states, where the integration of large Russophone minorities remained a major challenge of democratic consolidation. Concerns about the future of the EU—which gained significance in this region after the 2008 “Euro crisis” and became magnified by the Syrian refugee crisis and Brexit in 2015–2016—reinforced fears among national majority populations that the Putin government would successfully mobilize Russophone “kin” majorities against the states in which they live.³⁸

THE “VELVET DIVORCE” AND ITS AFTERMATH: THE CZECH AND SLOVAK STATES

In contrast with the violent conflicts over national sovereignty in former Yugoslavia and the powerful support for independence in the Baltic republics, the independent Czech Republic and Slovakia were created after the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992. Some accounts of the separation emphasized cultural differences between Czechs and Slovaks and assigned a significant weight to Slovak aspirations for a national state.³⁹ Yet separation was not primarily the outcome of ethnic division between Slovaks and Czechs. Rather than the result of large-scale popular mobilization for independence, as in the Baltic states, the creation of independent Czech and Slovak states was an outcome negotiated among the political leaders of the two parts of the federation with only limited public support.⁴⁰ At the same time, each of these states was established democratically, by elected governing bodies, and in the absence of significant popular opposition.⁴¹

As with the separation of the Baltic states, a key reason for the absence of violent conflict over the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was that no disputes emerged between Czechs and Slovaks over state borders, as the two groups did not initiate mutually exclusive “national homeland” claims to the same territory. Before the first establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, Slovaks had lived within the Hungarian kingdom for ten centuries, and the old territorial border remained a substate boundary in Czechoslovakia. After decades of coexistence with the prospect of mobility within a common state—first in interwar Czechoslovakia and then in communist Czechoslovakia—no sizable Czech national minority developed in Slovak territory or Slovak historic minority in the Czech Lands that would articulate a substate national challenge to either of the new states. Another important reason why the Czech and Slovak divorce lacked significant controversy was that the Hungarian minority in the Slovak part of the state, a historic minority with competing homeland claims in the southern region of Slovakia, did not challenge the Slovaks’ right to independence.

For reasons described earlier in this chapter, at the time of independence, the Czech Republic was one of the least ethnically diverse states in the region (see [table 5.2](#)). Czech political leaders therefore faced few challenges to pursuing a single, dominant culture in the new state. Of all the ethnicities in the state, the Roma continue to constitute the largest and most distinct cultural group, with a share of the population estimated at between 2 and 3 percent. Official policies and popular attitudes toward this minority after the creation of the new state indicated that the national majority had little desire to accommodate Roma culture. Citizenship laws limited the rights of Roma to become

Table 5.2. Ethnic Composition of the Czech Republic (2011 Census)

| <i>Nationality</i> | <i>Percentage of Population</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Czech | 64.3 |
| Moravian | 5.0 |
| Slovak | 1.4 |
| Other or unspecified | 29.3 |

Source: The Czech Statistical Office (Český statistický úřad), Czech Demographic Handbook 2013. Available at: [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013ediciplan.nsf/engt/8E001797ED/\\$File/4032130116.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013ediciplan.nsf/engt/8E001797ED/$File/4032130116.pdf).

Table 5.3. Ethnic Composition of Slovakia (2011 Census)

| <i>Nationality</i> | <i>Percentage of Population</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Slovak | 80.7 |
| Hungarian | 8.5 |
| Roma | 2.0 |
| Czech | 0.6 |
| Ruthenian | 0.6 |
| Ukrainian | 0.1 |
| Other or unspecified | 0.5 |

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. *2011 Population and Housing Census*. Available at: <http://portal.statistics.sk/files/table-10.pdf>.

naturalized in the new state. On the level of local government, anti-Roma efforts included attempts to segregate swimming pools, construct walls separating Roma and Czech inhabitants, and provide subsidies for Roma willing to emigrate. The relatively small size and fragmentation of the Roma population, however, prevented these incidents from becoming a matter of broader debate about Czech national exclusivism.⁴²

National aspirations found a more complex social context in newly independent Slovakia.⁴³ Before 1993, the primary question of Slovak national sovereignty had been whether an independent Slovak state was necessary to fulfill national aspirations. After the creation of Slovakia, the key question became how a Slovak “nation-state” could materialize on a territory that incorporated a relatively large, geographically concentrated, and politically well-organized historic Hungarian community (see [table 5.3](#)). During the first period of independence, from 1992 to 1998, the Slovak political parties in power, under the leadership of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, opted for traditional nationalist policies.⁴⁴ In an attempt to suppress minority claims for substate institutional autonomy, these policies were aimed at establishing Slovak majority control over all institutions of government and cultural reproduction. Restrictive language legislation adopted in 1995 was designed to strengthen the status of the Slovak literary standard against dialects and to exclude minority languages from the spheres considered most important for the reproduction of national cultures: local government, territory markings, the media, and the educational system. Hungarian minority parties forcefully challenged these policies and pressed for a pluralist Slovak state. Employing the methods of party competition and parliamentary debate, Hungarian minority political elites asked that Slovakia’s historic Hungarian minority be recognized as a state-constituting entity. To guarantee the

reproduction of Hungarian minority culture in Slovakia, they demanded substate forms of autonomy, at various times emphasizing either the cultural, educational, or territorial aspects of self-government. Despite internal debates among Hungarian parties about the best institutional forms, they agreed on the importance of language rights and claimed the right to use the Hungarian language in the southern region of Slovakia in all public spheres and the educational system.

Majority–minority debates over these questions marked the first decade of democratization in Slovakia. The Mečiar government’s policies of increasing centralized control over society also created sharp divisions within the Slovak majority. Based on their agreement about the necessity of moving Slovakia away from a recentralizing authoritarian regime, the Slovak and Hungarian parties in opposition eventually formed a strategic electoral alliance that defeated the Mečiar government in the 1998 parliamentary elections. This Slovak-Hungarian electoral alliance was able to form a governing coalition that changed the course of Slovak nationalist policies in the following years. Even though debates about minority self-government and language equality continued and often reflected vehement disagreements, the prospect of European integration provided a significant incentive to both majority and minority moderate parties to negotiate peacefully. They managed to design policies that, while preserving the predominance of the majority language throughout the country, gradually included the minority language in ways that satisfied the main aspirations of minority parties articulated from the beginning of the 1990s. The return of national exclusivist parties to the government after 2006 raised questions about the future of minority accommodation in the country. The controversy over the June 2009 amendments to the Slovak language law restricting minority language use in official business reveals the limits of international pressure in the post-EU accession period, when the conditionality of prospective EU membership can no longer constrain majority policy makers. Still, the prospect of a more minority-friendly approach to nation-building in the future remains open. The coalition government formed after the 2010 parliamentary elections included a new Hungarian-Slovak party called “Bridge,” which placed particular emphasis on interethnic reconciliation. This party became part of coalition governments also after the 2012 and 2016 parliamentary elections. Although these changes in government had no significant impact on minority policy in Slovakia, electoral and party politics remains the primary form of majority–minority contestation also in Slovakia.

Consolidating National States: Nation-State or Pluralism?

The unitary states of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania continued their existence within unchanged state borders after the communist collapse. The absence of state collapse and new state creation, however, did not make nationalist ideology irrelevant in these countries. Wherever majority national elites chose to define the postcommunist state as the unitary “nation-state” of the majority national group, and the government engaged in aggressive policies to create majority dominance over sizable ethnic and national minority groups, nationalism became a deeply divisive political strategy.



Photo 5.3. With the expansion of the European Union, West European tourists have come in large numbers to places like this Hungarian village in Transylvania. Many buy “ethnic gifts” at new shops like this one. (Dana Stryk)

FROM NATIONALIST COMMUNISM TO DEMOCRATIC NATIONALISM: ROMANIA

As in other multiethnic societies in the region, the legacies of past relations of dominance and subordination between ethnic groups continued to influence majority and minority perspectives in Romania about what “national sovereignty” should mean. With the end of World War II, the contested borders of the state were redrawn again, largely along the same lines created after World War I, and Romania fell under the influence of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ Despite the ruthlessness of anti-Hungarian policies enacted during the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu, members of the Hungarian minority maintained a strong sense of national identity. Only days after the bloody December 1989 revolution that toppled perhaps the most repressive communist dictatorship in the region, ethnic Hungarians formed a political party that commanded the overwhelming majority of the votes of their population of 1.6 million in every subsequent election, and they became a significant force in the Romanian parliament (see [table 5.4](#)).

Rather than discarding the nationalist policies of the Ceaușescu period, however, the government of Ion Iliescu, after 1990, designed a new constitution that defined the state as a “nation-state” based on the unity of an ethnically determined Romanian nation. The regime based its power on alliances with ultranationalist Romanian parties of the left and right and instituted minority policies that in some ways were more restrictive than their counterparts during the Ceaușescu dictatorship. The new constitution

Table 5.4. Ethnic Composition of Romania (2011 est.)

| <i>Nationality</i> | <i>Percentage of Population</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Romanian | 83.4 |
| Hungarian | 6.1 |
| Roma | 3.1 |
| Ukrainian | 0.3 |
| German | 0.2 |
| Other | 0.7 |
| Unspecified | 6.1 |

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook 2017*. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/docs/profileguide.html>.

affirmed Romanian as the only official language in Romania. Laws adopted on public administration and public education also severely restricted the use of minority languages and became sources of intense controversy between the Romanian government and the Hungarian minority party. Like its counterpart in Slovakia, the Hungarian minority party demanded the right to Hungarian-language cultural and educational institutions and to use that language in local and regional government. The Hungarians pressed for these demands through bargaining and negotiations with majority parties willing to compromise on national issues. Although all Romanian parties rejected Hungarian claims to substate autonomy, moderate Romanian parties were willing to form an electoral alliance with the Hungarian party, and—much in keeping with events in Slovakia—this strategic alliance defeated the Iliescu government in 1996, formed a coalition government, and began to change Romanian nation-building policies. Even though the Iliescu government returned to power in the 2000 elections, the prospect of membership in NATO and the EU had become significant enough for the regime to expand the rights of language use in the spheres most important for minority cultural reproduction.⁴⁶ Although Romania was considered a “laggard” in democratic consolidation and EU accession (admitted together with Bulgaria in 2007, while eight other Central and East European states had become EU members in 2004), postaccession Romanian governments remained more supportive of minority-friendly policies (including language policies) than their Slovak counterparts. Hungarians in Romania have voted overwhelmingly for the same moderate umbrella minority party since 1990, which has been part of Romanian coalition governments since 1977, playing a key role in the relative stability of the Romanian political system. The question remains open, however, about the ability of this minority party to sustain its mobilizational capacity among an increasingly discontented minority electorate.⁴⁷ The challenges of minority inclusion remain significant also in Romania. The demand for substate territorial autonomy in a Hungarian-majority region is highly divisive, and the marginalization of Roma minorities remains a significant unresolved issue.

Nation Building across State Borders

Besides cohabitating with a national majority in the same state, most ethnic and national minorities in this region also have neighboring “kin-states”—that is, states in which

their ethnic kin compose a titular majority.⁴⁸ A growing interest emerged among the governments in such kin-states to adopt legislation that would grant preferential treatment to ethnic kin living in other states. The constitutions of several states, such as Albania, Croatia, Hungary, and Macedonia, contain commitments to care for the well-being of kin living abroad. Several governments, such as in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Slovakia, adopted legislation to provide benefits to ethnic kin living abroad. Although these constitutional clauses and benefit laws differ in their specific content, ranging from cultural and economic benefits to dual-citizenship rights, their common characteristic is that they support the preservation of national identity and aim to contribute to the fostering of relationships between a kin-state and those outside its borders who define themselves in some sense as conationals.⁴⁹

HUNGARY AND VIRTUAL NATIONALISM

The Hungarian state's nation-building strategy after 1990 is the clearest example of the trans-sovereign type of nationalism in the region. This type of nationalism does not pursue a traditional nation-state through territorial changes or the repatriation of ethnic kin within its borders. Instead, it aims to maintain a sense of common cultural "nationhood" across existing state borders.⁵⁰ Close to 3 million ethnic Hungarians live in Hungary's neighboring states. In an integrated Europe, they compose one of the largest historical minority groups. After the collapse of communist regimes, Hungarian political elites were aware that revisionism was an unacceptable proposition if they wanted to join an integrated Europe. Instead of pressing for border changes, they created a network of institutions that link Hungarians living in the neighboring countries to Hungary while encouraging them to remain "in their homeland" and, in effect, withstand assimilation where they reside. To complement these cross-border institutions, the Hungarian government expressed support both for EU membership for Hungary and its neighbors and for Hungarian minority demands for local and institutional autonomy in their home states. According to the logic of these policies, if Hungary and all of its neighbors became EU members, and the EU provided a supranational, decentralized structure for strong regional institutions, then Hungarians could live as though no political borders separated them.

Although the "virtualization of borders" appeared attractive to many Hungarians, the idea found little appeal among the majority political parties in neighboring countries. Seven states neighboring Hungary include ethnic Hungarian populations, and five of these states were newly established after the collapse of communist federations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the majority national elites in both newly created and consolidating national states were highly reluctant to weaken their sovereignty and accommodate multiple nation-building processes in their territories. Thus, Hungarian efforts unilaterally to "virtualize" borders in the region triggered tensions between Hungary and its neighbors.

The adoption in June 2001 of the Law Concerning Hungarians Living in Neighboring Countries (commonly known as the Hungarian Status Law)—which defined all ethnic Hungarians in the region as part of the same cultural nation and on this basis offered a number of educational, cultural, and even economic benefits to those living in neighboring

states—triggered significant attention from policy makers in the region, European institution officials, and scholars of nationalism.⁵¹ The competitive dynamics of nation-building in the region and its potentially large-scale regional impact made the Hungarian strategy particularly controversial. The governments of Romania and Slovakia, the two states with the largest Hungarian populations, expressed concern that the legislation weakened their exclusive sovereignty over ethnic Hungarian citizens and discriminated against majority nationals in neighboring countries. Although these neighboring governments themselves had adopted similar policies toward their own ethnic kin abroad, controversy over the Hungarian Status Law brought Hungary's relations with these neighbors to a dangerously low point. The fact that all of these governments were keenly interested in EU membership eventually helped them compromise. Hungary signed a bilateral agreement with Romania and altered the language of the law in response to European pressure in 2003. Yet the controversy over the Hungarian Status Law foreshadowed the challenges of reconciling European integration with the continuing power of divergent and competing national aspirations. The divisiveness of cross-border nationalism became particularly visible after 2010, when the newly elected Hungarian government began adopting legislation that made it easier for ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries to become Hungarian citizens and gain nonresident voting rights. These acts triggered strong resentment in Slovakia and also deepened political divisions in Hungary. The strong showing of the vehemently xenophobic Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) in the 2009 European Parliament elections, together with this party's increasing success among the Hungarian electorate—in obtaining parliamentary seats in the 2010 elections and gaining 20 percent of the votes in the 2014 parliamentary elections—reveals the salience of exclusivist nationalism despite the earlier successes of democratic consolidation. The new Hungarian constitution adopted in 2011 is also criticized for provisions that can indirectly sanction discrimination against Hungary's large Roma minority. The Fidesz government relied increasingly on nationalist populism to legitimize a shift to autocratization in Hungary. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán featured himself as a trailblazer of “illiberal democracy,” understood as a government based on ethnically conceived nationalism. After 2015, the government successfully instrumentalized the Syrian refugee crisis to brand itself as the defender of the nation and of European Christianity. In the same spirit, a set of laws was adopted in 2017 to undermine those nongovernmental organizations and institutions that represent and encourage critical attitudes about ethnic exclusivism and populist nationalism (e.g., the Central European University of Budapest and human rights nongovernmental organizations).⁵²

Nationalism and the Fragility of Democracy

Although European organizations uphold the principles of liberal democracy, respect for ethnic diversity, human rights, and dignity, democratization in the Central and East European societies that became EU member states did not lead to a broad acceptance of liberal-individualist understandings of citizenship. Nor did nationalism result in horror perpetuated in the name of ethnic kin throughout the region. Given the dramatic collapse of states and regimes during the 1990s, the relatively low occurrence of violent conflict

associated with these changes was remarkable. The promise of European integration altered the conditions under which nationalist interests could be articulated.

The specific goals that nationalist leaders and groups articulated in the 1990s and 2000s, as well as the means by which they pursued those goals, varied across the region. Most of the former titular groups of multinational federations sought national independence. Where substate boundaries within the disintegrating multinational federation had coincided with the territories that titular groups defined as their historic homelands and secession encountered no significant challenge from other groups, nationalist state-building unfolded without significant violence. In these cases, the prospects for integration into Western institutions helped reinforce initial interests in democratization. Examples of such nonviolent (or relatively nonviolent) state formation include the reestablishment of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; the secession of Slovenia and Macedonia; and the creation of independent Czech and Slovak states.

Where the state-building aspirations of a group encountered forceful challenge by another group claiming the same territory as a historic homeland within a dissolving federal state and the dominant political elites opted for unilateralism over sustained negotiation across ethnic lines, nationalist mobilization led to devastating wars. This was the situation in the former Yugoslav republics of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Serbian autonomous province of Kosovo. Competing national elites in these cases opted for national sovereignty or its violent denial even at the most horrific costs, and future prospects for European integration did not figure significantly in their calculations—despite the fact that, before the communist collapse, Yugoslavia had been better connected to international institutions than Soviet bloc countries. European integration gained primacy in nationalist strategy only in Slovenia, where belonging to Europe constituted a strong element of national identity, and with no significant national minority, the issue of national sovereignty was most easily resolved.

Lithuania provides an important lesson about the significance of the choices that majority and minority political elites make in nationalist competition. In the same period that Croatian and Serbian majority and minority elites were fighting a devastating war in the southeastern part of the continent, the leaders of the Lithuanian national majority and the Polish minority opted for a consensual resolution of the tension over mutually claimed homelands. Eager to satisfy European expectations, they engaged in a bilateral and peaceful negotiation over the issues of autonomy and minority rights.

Governments in Bulgaria, Romania, and all of the multiethnic successor states of dissolving federations had to determine whether the democratic state could pursue the traditional nationalist aim of the political-cultural congruence of the nation or accommodate minority cultures in a more pluralist state. Excepting Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in all of these states, majority and minority political parties remained committed to democratic means of negotiating their competing notions of sovereignty.

Complicating matters even further, many governments in the region juggle the dual roles of home state (in relation to their titular nation and national minorities living on their territory) and kin-state (in relation to ethnic kin populations living outside their territory). Such cases have prompted officials in European institutions to begin designing a common set of norms to assure minority protection and permit kin-states to build relations with external minorities while continuing to uphold the principle of state sovereignty.⁵³

Harmonizing the principles of state sovereignty and individualism with the practice of multiple nation-building within and across state borders will remain a continuing challenge. In this sense, postcommunist member states are no different from their West European counterparts, where the strengthening of nationalist sentiment is also revealed in electoral politics. Concerns about the impact of nationalism on democratic consolidation are no longer confined to the “new democracies” of Central and Eastern Europe. Rather, this region provides invaluable lessons about the sources of conflict as well as about the strategies of peaceful democratic contestation.

Study Questions

1. State borders have changed many times in Central and Eastern Europe following the awakening of national movements in the second half of the nineteenth century. What were the most significant border changes, and in what ways have they exacerbated the competitive logic of nationalism and the problem of noncongruence between state and national boundaries?
2. Explain the “Janus-faced” character of nationalism and the way it has influenced postcommunist democratic development in Central and East European countries. In what ways can we say that nation-building policies in this region have been both forward-looking and at the same time turned to the past?
3. Bearing in mind the significance of preexisting institutions, national composition, and the choices made by political elites, what seems to set apart the violent ethnic politics of the former Yugoslavia from the largely peaceful evolution of majority–minority conflicts in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe?
4. Most ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe have kin-states in the region, and most governments have enacted legislation to extend various kinds of benefits to ethnic kin living abroad. Discuss the reasons why kin-state nationalism is controversial in this region and how it affects the evolution of democratic government and European integration.
5. The enlargement of the EU to include democratized postcommunist states is commonly viewed as a source of success in democratic consolidation and interethnic peacemaking in significant parts of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the reassertion of Russian regional power under Vladimir Putin’s government is viewed as a factor that weakens the prospects for democratic consolidation and can even endanger state stability in the successor states of the Soviet Union. What is the role of these processes of regional influence in explaining the successes and failures of nation-building and minority inclusion throughout the postcommunist region?

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