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The Russian Minority in Post-Communist Politics: a Case Study of Ukraine, Moldova and Chechnya[1]

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Introduction

From the moment the republics of the Soviet Union proclaimed their independence in 1991, the face of the Soviet ethno-cultural demographic changed significantly. Soviet dissolution was the primary expedient for the creation of the Russian diaspora, as twenty-five million Russians found themselves located in freshly created states that were re-designed as their new political homelands.[3] In due course, displaced Russians were forced to either return to the newly created Russian Federation, or assume a fresh political identity that ultimately distinguished them as the new Russian diaspora of the former Soviet Socialist Republics. The most acute problem that arose from Soviet dissolution was to determine the nature of the relationship that ethnic Russians would share with their new ethno-cultural counterparts in the former republics as well as with the new Russian nation and the post-Communist Russian state.

This article examines the minority factor resulting from Soviet dissolution by focusing on the identity 'transformation' of millions of ethnic Russians and the historical context behind Russian self-expression, the framework for conceptualizing diasporas and ethnic minorities, the inter-ethnic relationship

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[1] This paper was presented at the Canadian Association of Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) 2007 International Conference at Calgary, Canada, 28–30 September.

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[3] Graham Smith. Transnational Politics and the Politics of the Russian Diaspora, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, issue 3 (May 1999), 500. <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/subject/politicalscience/index.cfm> (accessed 29 January 2007).

between Russians and indigenes of Ukraine, Russians and Russia, and how Russians are viewed and view themselves. Additionally, this article examines how socio-political orientations of displaced Russian minorities and secessionism has been presented as issues of regional security by addressing Ukraine, Moldova and Chechnya as examples. Ukraine serves as a case in point of a former Soviet Socialist Republic that has become fully independent of Russian authority that still shares many political disputes with its neighbour, while both Moldova and Chechnya are used as examples of territorial entities that currently seek independence – Chechnya from Russia and the enclave of Trans-Dniestria from Moldova. The term 'post-Soviet space' refers to how the collapse of the Soviet Empire has seen a strong assertion of national identity together with an affirmation of national boundaries. Since the collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), still have a colonial relationship with Russia. Commonly known as the Post-Soviet States, these states are also regularly termed the former Soviet Republics, and were referred to as the New Independent States (NIS) in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's 1991 breakup.

An exploration of the relationship between Russian and non-Russian residents in Ukraine will observe the boundaries of minority identity in post-Soviet space. Additionally, I will discuss the fluidity of the Russian diaspora, presenting models of cultural, ethnic and linguistic overlap between Russians and Ukrainians in parts of the former Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR). Should the Russian government have the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of sovereign nations in order to overturn unfavourable outcomes that do not respect the political equality of resident Russian minorities? Do less-defined Russian ethnic minorities create contention between the Russian state and states where Russian minorities reside? Has the ambiguous linkage between Russian 'settler' (*russkii* - Русский) and 'Russian' (*Rossiia* - Россия) been concluded or has it remained a driving force in Russian politics and foreign policy? How does the traditional understanding and nuance of nationalism and nationhood relate to the principles and assumption behind the re-emergence of ethnocratic state? The former have created the basis of a renewed sense of Russian chauvinism that, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, illustrates the Russian Federation's search for renewed power and prestige both regionally and internationally.

The gradual process of Russian minorities in the former Soviet Republics turning from an Imperial minority to an ordinary one has been a process in motion since 1991. In most cases, the formation of the Russian diaspora in neighbouring countries was a result of state-organized colonization, and forms the basis for local nationalism and national movements as well as the

development of policy in Moscow based on ethnodemographic proportions. The future of Russian's living outside the Russian Federation, as well as the future of national and cultural policies will depend on the resolution of differences between the concepts of Russian as an ethnicity and language, *russkii*, and Russian as in the nation state, *Rossiia*.[4] Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the issue of *russkii* and *Rossiia* has not been reconciled and provides a crucible that has been given political significance within the Russian state and among neighbouring states. Integration of Russian minorities into the 'near abroad' following the fall of communism has been unsuccessful and serves as an expedient to renewed polarization within the former Soviet Socialist Republics of Ukraine. Russian foreign policy serves as poignant exemplification that the Russian Federation has assumed the responsibility of protecting displaced Russian minorities in contiguous regions, and uses Russian 'compatriots abroad' as a mechanism with which it can re-exert political influence and power throughout Eurasia. As the Soviet Union dissolved, Ukraine exemplified one of the largest concentrations of Russian migrants of all the former republics. To accommodate the scope of this article, a focus will be maintained on Russian minorities within the former Ukraine, and will include issues of Russian ethnic minority in Moldova and Chechnya. I will showcase the events that center on this state in the early 1990's as a model for issues of regional security and ethnic protectionism.

Historical Identity

In the Soviet Union, the country in which people lived characterized their nationality. The recognition of national identities was relatively easy, but the boundaries of ethnic identification were comparatively ambiguous along the Soviet Union's internal borders. Since the Russification of non-Russians was encouraged during the Soviet-era, identifying individuals as 'Russian' became a difficult process. Exploring the relationship between creating a Russian diaspora and the disintegration of the USSR invariably entangles itself with elements of state expansion and the idea of Russian migration yet the term "Soviet" remained absolutely vital in conglomerating the multi-ethnic empire.[5]

With the break-up of the Soviet Union came the moving idea of "sovereignization" that challenged the old idea of ethnic bonding under the

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[4] *See* Pål Kolstø states in his article *Territorialising Diasporas: The Case of Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* that "while the distinction between *rossiiskii*, referring to the state, and *russkii* referring to the language, culture, and ethnicity, is blurred in English and most other languages, it is unambiguously clear in Russian."

[5] *See* Pål Kolstø, Territorialising Diasporas: The Case of Russians in the Former Soviet Republics, *Millennium*, vol. 28, issue 3 (1999). <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/subject/politicalscience/index.cfm> (accessed 28 January 2007)

guise of "Sovietization", and led to the discovery and recognition of new political identities in an entirely fresh dimension.[6] Russian historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii drew upon the close inter-relationship between state expansion and migration as a major feature that Russia simply colonized itself.[7] Explaining that the scope for colonization expanded simultaneously with the expansion of state territory invariably implies a fundamental linkage between Russians and the people living in the Russian colonies. Conversely, Richard Pipes, in asserting that Kliuchevskii ignored the fact that the areas being colonized were already inhabited, holds that Russia was merely colonizing the lands of others and in doing so, Russians were being incorporated into a unique relationship with imperial minorities in the colonies.[8] Russian state expansion in a long history, beginning in 1552 with the conquest of Kazan, which marked the beginning of the multinational Russian empire, and ending as recently as 1945, when the last new territories were added to the Russian Empire in the aftermath of the Second World War. Over the course of those four centuries, history witnessed a constant diffusion of Russian migrants from the core of the Russian empire to its outskirts. With this time-line in mind, it may be argued that the creation of the Russian Empire is the product of three intersecting phases of expansion – Russian expansion east after the fall of Kazan, westward expansion, and then southern expansion.[9] What was once perceived as an imperial minority has thence become an ordinary minority, although Russian movements were indeed elements of co-colonization. Such imperial minority has moved more so toward being an ordinary minority with the collapse of the Soviet Russia. The creation of the Soviet Union in 1921, exemplified a continued blending of minorities in the borderlands, whether they were imperial minorities, or not, the policy of "Sovietization" blanketed the recognition of many of the distinct minorities throughout the USSR. Such an effect is best depicted as a process of excessive spread of inter-ethnic contact or relations in the Soviet Union, which largely provoked accusations of assimilation and erosion of the very foundation of the existence of pre-existing ethnos.[10]

The blanketing perspective has come to be seen as a Russian myth, or the Russian perception of an 'imagined community' according to Graham Smith

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6 Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich and Emil Payin, *The New Russian Diaspora, Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 40 and 41.

7 Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IL: Indiana University Press, 1995), 18 and 19.

8 Richard Pipes, Reflections on the Nationality Problems in the Soviet Union, in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience,* Cambridge, MA, 1975, pp. 453-65, p. 455.

9 Paul Kolstoe, Russians in the Former Soviet Republics, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IL: Indiana University Press, 1995), 18 and 19.

10 Ibid., 160 and 161.

in *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands*.[11] In turn, this mythic view resonates in the Russian understanding of present-day Russian state neighbours, especially those that comprise the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russian elites in Moscow have been heavily influenced by mythic "Sovietization", and sought to prove that there is no sensible alternative to effectively maintaining power and prestige in post-Soviet Russia other than re-enacting the systemic Soviet relationship, except it would be done along Russo-lines as opposed to one of a Soviet nature.

Reification of the systematic relationship is a resolute indication of the political leverage that Russian minorities in the 'near abroad' can play in reasserting Russian power and prestige in the post-Soviet world. Russophile myths have demonstrated their power and persistence, replacing the former "Soviet" identity with the new monolithic Russian identity where the Slavic factor was a very important aspect of the relationship that would develop between Russian and the non-Russian republics, including Belarus and Ukraine. It was a factor that was advocated by Russian historian Ruslan Khasbulatov for bringing the former Soviet states closer together in terms of the communities of the nation; the dissipation of the ethnic heterogeneity of the Soviet Union.[12]

Among the many factors that contribute to the current problems of national identity in the former republics, the artificial minority plantation has contributed most to the perception of displaced Russians. Communist cessation simply augmented this problem given how political frame-work of the USSR held the various minorities together under a single Soviet identity, which preserved a distinctiveness of its own. Upon disintegration of the USSR, the Soviet nationality[13] vanished and became obsolete in terms of an intrinsic political identifier. The status of Russians living outside the Russian homeland is explained by Timothy Heleniak:

> […] Russians became part of a large Diaspora population "without moving an inch or leaving their homes." They went from being members of a

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[11] Graham Smith, *et al., Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identity*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23.

[12] *See* Ruslan Khasbulatov, *The Struggle for Russia, Power and Change in the Democratic Revolution*. (London, UK: Routledge, 1993).

[13] Many contributions to the study of Soviet nationalism began to appear immediately following the Second World War, and the numbers have peaked in recent years. Such accounts to the question of Soviet nationality included elements of Russian ethnocentrism, as Edward Allworth describes, in the Soviet nationality's drive to sweep away smaller identities and implant Russia's image everywhere in the USSR. In his work, he explains that explanations and descriptions of Soviet nationality have been burdened by (1) the notion that the Soviet nationality questions is a matter of the continuation or cessation of the state structure; (2) the idea of inter-group relations; (3) the concept is transcendent of individual nationality group interests or internal developments; (4) the concepts embodiment in the growth or decline of individual group identity and how those groups respond to the meaning of identity.

> privileged majority who arguably saw their homeland as the entire Soviet Union to minority members of 14 newly independent nation states. Some of these states were experiencing sovereignty for the first time in decades and others for the first time in history. All sought to elevate the status of the titular group to some degree, and many were quite hostile to the existence of a Russian minority that ranged from two to 38 % of their populations.[14]

Soviet identity had lost its ability to bring and hold ethnic groups together while former Soviet territories have become the stage of re-emerging contestation over whether Russians living in the former republics have created the new Russian diaspora or simply exemplify themselves as an ethnic minority. In the aftermath of Soviet collapse, the Russian diaspora populations were ultimately confronted with two very difficult choices in such a way that a contentions political massif had emerged in the centre of Ukrainian society. Russian diaspora reactions included the options of either remaining in the non-Russian states to form a political opposition minority in order to preserve their minority rights, or simply leaving the non-Russian states.[15] As a result of minority reaction, Russia has sought to fill the void left by the faded "Soviet" identity and the emergence of irredentism has occurred, especially where geographically large concentrations of Russians live in geographical locales contiguous Russia.

The Russian diaspora issue played a less significant role when Boris Yeltsin was in office, but since then, Vladimir Putin emphasized his intentions of restoring Russian power and prestige in Eastern Europe. Russian nationalism has become a stronger force in domestic affairs and foreign policy than it had since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Terry Martin's work titled *Affirmative Action Empire,* offers an historical anchor for Russia's re-affirming identity in the former Soviet Union. Martin draws parallels between the matters presiding over Russian concentrations in Ukraine and irredentist concerns that surfaced in late 1991. The re-emergence of Russian dominance in the 1930's is comparable to the re-assertion of Russia's right to national self-expression through Russian ethnic minorities that are spread throughout the former Soviet republics. Russia's present-day position on Russian self-awareness and the period between 1933 and 1938 serves as another point for comparison, as well as the status of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

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[14] *See* Timothy Heleniak, Migration of the Russian Diaspora after the Breakup of the Soviet Union, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 57, issue 2 (Spring 2004): 99-117. <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/subject/politicalscience/index.cfm> (accessed 29 January 2007).

[15] *See* Timothy Heleniak, Migration of the Russian Diaspora after the Breakup of the Soviet Union, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 57, issue 2 (Spring 2004): 99-117. <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/subject/politicalscience/index.cfm> (accessed 29 January 2007).

Developments from 1933-1938 threatened the foundations of the Affirmative Action Empire because they demanded that the significance of Russian national self-expression be minimized in order to avoid provoking so-called defensive nationalism by the formerly oppressed non-Russian communities.[16] Now the non-Russian communities are stigmatized and perceived as potential oppressors of Russian minorities, surfacing renewed tension in terms of co-colonization and potential territorial competition. Such minorities have been used as a mechanism by which Russian expression in terms of power and prestige can be made in the post-Soviet period.

Conceptualizing Diasporas

Traditional approaches to diaspora-minority binaries have been concerned with discussing the subject along a 'majority/minority' axis where any minority population is subsequently treated as a foreign diaspora that saw its transposition take place at a specific point in history. The diaspora-minority binary precipitates an over simplification in the understanding of which groups are dominant and which merely fall among the minority, especially along quantitative lines. Thus, demographics should not authoritatively determine which community is diasporic and which is not. Rather, there is a considerable breadth to the nature of relations between the majority and minority communities, and poses several critical questions that need to be addressed before the nature of the diaspora can be further understood.

The first question is how the minority community came into existence in the host nation–was it a migratory policy of the homeland, a voluntary movement or a result of past colonization? The second question should address the relationship between the diasporic community and the homeland as well as the host nation. The third question considers the relationship between the host country and the homeland and should gauge whether or not these two are on friendly terms or if the relationship is characterized by historical enmity or hostility that has surfaced more recently. The third question serves as a springboard to exploring a mutual history between the homeland and host nation, the roots of hostility if it hostility does has or does exist, and whether there is any real need for the home nation to "protect" or "defend" the minority population living in the host nation.

While substantial limitations exist in understanding diasporas along previous models, Avtar Brah presents a methodological approach to diasporic climates whereby he refers to the 'diasporic space' as:

> the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them' are contested". Diaspora space is thus

[16] Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2001), 394.

> envisaged as 'inhabited' not only by those migrants and their descendents who have settled in a 'foreign' homeland but equally by those who are viewed as indigenous.[17]

This model largely helps to identify the diasporic space itself, but fails to help understand the special relationship that is created in this space between the "us" and "them." Accordingly, Brah explains the diasporic space called 'England' where African, Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as 'Englishness.'[18]

Brah's example of England helps to explain how the various minority communities come together under the unifying identity of "English" just as the various ethnic groups of the Soviet Union become unified under the political identity of "Soviet." In Ukraine, both Russian migrants and indigenous Ukrainians experienced the effects of "Sovietization", whether they were negative effects of not, but in 1991, this political characterization ceased to exist. The departure of Sovietism essentially left communities stranded, not necessarily abandoned, but those that were left to drift are yet to be understood as minority groups or diasporic Russians.

Neil Melvin echoes precarious dynamics of the stranded diaspora where the creation of independent states from the Soviet Union fostered the misleading impression that the inter-ethnic relations, especially those between Russians and indigenes, were largely harmonious.[19] This harmony disguised a series of sharp conflict that existed since Soviet dissolution; conflict continues to have a toxic effect on ethnic relations in the 'near abroad' to the present day. The Soviet shell demonstrated a blanketing effect, after which the toxic effect that has taken hold of Ukrainian society has facilitated the re-emergence of the ethnocratic state and is a focus in many other former Soviet Republics, most notably Ukraine.

Russian Identity in Ukraine

One of the strongest issues that facilitated the societal rift within Ukraine since the break-up of the Soviet Union is the three-way socio-cultural division that includes Ukrainophone Ukrainians, Russofone Ukrainians and ethnic Russians.[20] Such a division has mitigated Ukrainian national agenda, foreign

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17 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities*, (London, UK: Routledge, 1996), 208 and 209.

18 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities*, (London, UK: Routledge, 1996), 208 and 209.

19 *See* Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia, The Politics of National Identity*, (London, UK: Chatham House Papers, 1995).

20 Graham Smith, *et al. Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identity*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119.

policy and has impacted international affairs. This section will briefly explore the socio-cultural issues as national elements of Ukraine that have contributed to ethnic stratification since the advent of the Communist era in terms of the three-way socio-cultural division in the former UkrSSR.

A particularly deterministic attempt to sort the ambiguous nature of these divisional classifications has been to approach each group in terms of 'native tongue' as an ancestral anchor. In sociological survey conducted in 1989, 64 % of the Ukrainian population classified as 'native tongue' Ukrainians, 9 % as of ethnic Ukrainians identifying Russian as their 'native tongue' and 22 % as Russian in terms of both ethnicity and language.[21] Challenging the ancestral methodology is the reality of ethnic boundaries in Ukraine still being extremely fluid and retaining deep historical roots. Ukraine has undergone nearly seventy years of linguistic and ethnic merging during the Soviet era alone–a period in which Russians and Ukrainians mingled in every-day life. Many individuals in Ukrainian society accepted and utilized both Russian and Ukrainian as their native languages; since, many Russians have certainly considered Ukraine as their primary homeland, if not, then their only homeland.[22] Therefore, an even greater ambiguity has been created by way of the very evident ethnic fluidity in Ukraine. For the Russian diaspora living there, they are a national minority whose language, culture and socio-political status are being continually shifted toward the periphery of national and state interests.[23]

Ukrainophone Ukrainians are the focal group of Ukraine whose ethno-political discourse focuses on their unique and genuine rights as indigenes of the country, and creates a political precedent for what has been termed Ukrainian 'space'. The Ukrainophone Ukrainians exude a dismissive attitude toward Russofone Ukrainians and Ethnic Russians, and advocates a profound discourse of indigenous rights. As the main structural language of Ukrainophones often centers on such concepts as 'indigenous', 'colonialism', and 'Russification', that this group will always stand behind a nationalist argument for the rights as a distinguished people who are set aside from the Russians through their traditional European distinctiveness has become a solid principle in Ukrainian national discourse.

Russofone Ukrainians are the unique group in Ukraine, because they split commonalities with their Ukrainophone counterpart. Russofone Ukrainians facilitate the principles behind "sovereignization", which emerged after the break-up of the Soviet Union, precipitating an expression of neo-political

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[21] Graham Smith, *et al. Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identity*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119.

[22] Susanne Michel Birgerson, *After the Breakup of Multi-Ethnic Empire: Russia, Successor States, and Eurasian Security*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 102-104.

[23] Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich and Emil Payin, *The New Russian Diaspora, Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 59.

identity.[24] Russofones claim their territorial rights in Ukraine in terms of traditional Russian 'space' that was brought about by forcible *Russification*, particularly through Brezhnev's projects of Russification.[25] Thus, while Russofone's do not deny the nationalist vision of Ukrainians, or the existence of the Ukrainian 'self', their own autonomist apparitions run parallel to those of Ukrainophones, claiming that theirs is also a genuine indigenous tradition with deep and firm historical roots.[26]

For Ukraine's ethnic Russian minority, the situation is peculiar due to differing policies of both Russia and Ukraine that concern the rate of social transformation within each country.[27] Both have formed social objectives and expectations that do not necessarily line in congruency with each others'. Ukrainophone Ukrainians maintain a distinct ethnopolitical discourse that focuses their perceived rights as a so-called 'indigenous' people, which subsequently portrays Russians as outsiders, or in a more traditionally colonial perspective, as 'settlers'. The effects of this ethnopolitical discourse is twofold, first it disenfranchises the Russian diaspora's long-term moral claim to the rights what were officially granted to them by the Ukrainian government in 1991; second, it implies the potentiality of Ukrainian reclamation of those territorial sections of Ukraine that are inhabited by ethnic Russians. The second effect is a sub-set of the first, and operates on a potentially dangerous premise of re-emerging ethnocratic reproach.

In fact a Russo-centric counter claim may attempt to point-out that any nationalist Ukrainophone who supports these discourses are in fact themselves the ethnopolitical 'aliens' of Ukraine–the product of Habsburg, Polish or even German ruse, and an artificial implant into Ukrainian society preventing Ukrainians and Russians from living in a natural state of harmony.[28] Present-day discourse on the ethnic issues of Ukraine often center on 'group identity', 'national revival' and 'Ukrainian people' with the clear understanding that these terms refer to those [people] from Ukraine, but could it refer to people merely living in Ukraine? Ukraine is a complex ethnic structure, representing a single piece that once played a role in the breadth of Russia before Soviet collapse, often presented as a model civic state after the in the post-Soviet era.[29]

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[24] Nadia Diuk and Adrian Karatnycky, *New Nations Rising: The Fall of the Soviets and the Challenge of Independence*. (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sonse, Inc., 1993), 73, 74 and 75.

[25] Ibid., 73.

[26] Graham Smith, *et al. Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identity*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 121 and 122.

[27] Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich and Emil Payin, *The New Russian Diaspora, Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 59.

[28] Graham Smith, *et al. Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identity*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 120 and 121.

[29] *See* James H. Billington, *Russian Transformed: Breakthrough to Hope*. New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992.

Particular ethnic groups within Ukraine have recently demonstrated signs of trying to turn Ukraine into a ostensible 'ethnic democracy' where political rights should be confined to people believed to be or perceive themselves to be true Ukrainians.[30] If so, then does the previously discusses ethno-social confrontation as well as the alienation of minorities within Ukraine, particularly the Russian diaspora, simultaneously promulgate Russian claim to diasporic "protection"? How dangerous is the president that is set by the conceptualization of such a professed 'ethnic democracy' and how strongly does it impact regional relations and security?

Ultimately, the current relationship between the Ukrainophones and Russofones is one of contesting ideals that retain a repressionist undercurrent; in which Russofones still perceive Ukraine as a mere appendage of the Russian state, inextricably linked through what has historically been viewed as a common faith and language. Therefore, therein rests a potential threat in gauging the interrelation of Ukrainians and Ethnic Russians living in Ukraine as members of an 'ethnic Democracy' because it represents elements of ethno-repressionism. Nadia Diuk and Adrian Karatnycky describe the historic system of totalitarian repression as one that "combined with widespread national oppression [that] kept the abiding force of Ukrainian national identity hidden for more than sixty years, creating a burden that made the Ukrainians a quintessentially hidden nation."[31] Investigating the ethnic climate of Ukraine shows that hidden subdivisions not only exist, especially in regions that are geographically contiguous with Russia, but both defined and lesser defined Russian ethnic minorities create contention between the Russian homeland and ethnocratic states where Russian minorities reside

Russian's and the 'Homeland'

With an increased reference to Russians living outside of the Russian state, an important change has occurred in Moscow's perception on citizenship.[32] An inclusion of such terms as 'compatriots abroad', Russian minorities, diaspora communities and 'near abroad' Russians, a shift has also occurred in Russia's perceived role as an ethnocratic *protecteur*.[33] In the midst of Russian identity being re-defined, there has been no formal agreement among Russians whether Russia's future should include formal and/or in-formal control Russians living

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30 Graham Smith, *et al. Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identity*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 120, 121 and 122.

31 Nadia Diuk and Adrian Karatnycky, *New Nations Rising: The Fall of the Soviets and the Challenge of Independence*. (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sonse, Inc., 1993), 78.

32 Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States, Mapping the Politics of Transition*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 67.

33 Ibid., 67.

in the former republics in the post-Soviet periphery.[34] National identity therefore finds a place in the confusion regarding the relationship between Russia and Russians abroad, and is an element described as seldom a perfect "fit" between nation and state by Susanne Michele Birgerson in *After the Breakup of a Multi-Ethnic Empire.*[35] For those who left Russia (*vykhodtsy*), Russia was a natural 'homeland' (*otechestvo*). Acknowledging the significance of *vykhodtsy* brings about a focus on the implications of *otechestvo* for those who do not fall into any of the three categories of minority existence–migratory policy, voluntary movement or colonization. So how does the re-definition of homeland affect Russians who were either born into any of the borderlands or resided outside of Russia long enough to identify with a new homeland?

Since the early 1990's, Russia has expressed concern that among the former Soviet Republics, we are observing a restoration of ethnocracy as well as a move, or at least increased political dialogue over the re-emergence of ethnocratic states.[36] Two parties, those of the Russian government and the various diaspora communities throughout the former Soviet republics–Ukraine, are spearheading the sentiment in this case. However, this ethnocratic tendency is evident throughout post-Soviet territory, from the Baltic States to those of Central Asia.

In recent years Russians in Ukraine have been calling for Moscow to play a more direct and effectual role in "supporting" Russians who may perceive themselves as having essentially been abandoned by Moscow.[37] Further, Russian foreign policy makers have increasingly thought about their perceived ethnic brethren living outside the Russian state, and concern for Russians in the 'near abroad' has become integral in contemporary Russian politics.[38] Disintegration of the Soviet Union ushered in a particularly unstable era for Russian ethnics to the extent that Boris Yeltin felt it necessary to proclaim the protection of Russian Compatriots, making a priority of Moscow's foreign policy, although the Yeltsin administration devoted neither attention nor resources for the protection of Russian compatriots living in neighbouring countries.[39] Russia failed to act on the laudable rhetoric of such foreign policy proclamations, but the consolidation of Russia and the Russian diaspora as

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[34] *See* Susanne Michel Birgerson, *After the Breakup of Multi-Ethnic Empire: Russia, Successor States, and Eurasian Security*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

[35] Ibid., 45 and 62.

[36] Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States, Mapping the Politics of Transition*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 66 and 67.

[37] *See* Charles E. Ziegler, The Russian Diaspora in Central Asia: Russian Compatriots and Moscow's Foreign Policy. *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 14, issue 1 (Winter 2006): 103-126.

[38] Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States, Mapping the Politics of Transition*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 67.

[39] Charles E. Ziegler, The Russian Diaspora in Central Asia: Russian Compatriots and Moscow's Foreign Policy. *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 14, issue 1 (Winter 2006): 103-126. <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/subject/politicalscience/index.cfm> (accessed 08 August 2008).

well as the subsequent formation of a unified "Russian world" became a priority of the June 2002 Congress of Russian compatriots.[40] During Putin's tenure, Moscow has demonstrated four sources of leverage in the former republics for the protection of Russian diaspora communities. The first is the use of the Russian military, which has been apparent in Central Asia. The second source of Russian leverage is energy and economics, which has given Moscow a powerful hand in Eastern European politics over the past several years.[41] Third, Russia's participation in regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as the re-surfacing idea of a shift toward economic unity among Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, demonstrates Russia's interest in procuring a greater degree of diplomatic strength.[42] The fact that millions of expatriates with ties to the motherland currently reside in Ukraine, and other Soviet successor states, lends substance to Russia's ethnic lever when dealing with ethno-political issues of the former Soviet republics.

Ethnocracy is used to exemplify a situation where a state acts as the authoritative agency of the ethnic majority. State agency acts as authoritative ideologues, policy maker and resource distributor, all three of which were historic roles for the Russian state within the Soviet Union and perceptually, the Russian people as direct derivatives of the Russian state. Sub-dimensions of ethnocratic agency exist in the following three ways. First, the ethnocratic states exhibits a disproportionate recruitment to elite posts and civil service and government that is overwhelmingly in favour of the majority ethnic group, or in this case Russians. Second, the ethnocratic state asserts its cultural qualities on all other ethnic segments as the core ideals of national ideology, hence former policies of Russification. David Brown explains that "…the national identity which is employed to define the ethnic society is neither ethnically neutral nor -ethnic, but rather it is mono-ethnic...clothed in the language of universalism…" which is evident through "Sovietization".[43] The third attribute of the ethnocratic state is the unequivocal maintenance of the monopolization of power by the ethnic majority. These arguments are very useful for the concern of the Soviet Union, but are equally applicable to post-Soviet space as well.

Limitations typically associate with the concept of ethnocracy is that it is more easily perceived external to the state in question; therefore internal

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[40] Ibid.

[41] *See* Roland Dannreuther, Can Russia Sustain Its Dominance in Central Asia? *Security Dialogue*, vol. 32, (2001): 245–58; and Jeronim Perovic, From Disengagement to Active Economic Competition: Russia's Return to the South Caucasus and Central Asia, *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 13, issue 1 (2005): 61–85.

[42] *See* Igor S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 26–28.

[43] *See* David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in South-East Asia*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996).

domination patterns are difficult to recognize. The possibility exists that Russia still sees its actions and "protection" of Russians in the post-Soviet states as representative or "good" for the country. In turn, the central question that arises from the discussion of re-emerging ethnocracy is that if Russian ethnocratic politics led to state break-up, can the same political cleavage lead to Russian diaspora mergence?

Political Crucible

The multi-dimensional nature of ethnicity in Ukraine makes the issue of Russian community integration problematic, especially since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, the implications of Russian ethnic distribution in Ukraine are far more significant and political in dimension than prior to Soviet dissolution. The concentration of Russians in Ukraine illustrates an even gradation of Russians towards eastern Ukraine. The highest concentration of Russian minorities exists in the territory furthest east and is strongest in the immediate vicinity of Crimea, Kharkiv and Donetsk.

An internal perspective of Russian minorities shows that in addition to Russians reinforcing their traditional dominance in industry, administration and education in the urban areas, of roughly eleven million Russians living in Ukraine, three-quarters, and the following Russian populations as a percent of the national total are concentrated in the five industrially developed regions of Ukraine: Donetsk (43.6%), Luhansk (44.8%), Kharkiv (33.2%), Dnipropetrovsk (24.2%), Zaporozhzhia (32%), and Odessa (27.4%).[44] Overall, Russians accounted for 17.3% of significant ethnic groups in Ukraine in 2001, and Russian settlement in Ukraine has created a complex set of overlapping identities in the Russian communities.[45] Does this overlap pose a threat to the identity of Russians in Ukraine? If Russian state prestige and power increasingly identifies with Russian populations in the 'near abroad' how might Russia be expected to "protect" or "defend" these minorities? Bearing in mind that in the Southern regions of Ukraine, including Nikolaev, Odessa and Kherson, the concentration of Russians is potent, certain political circles in Russia considers the Crimea and the Eastern regions of Ukraine as the subject of territorial claims.[46] Russian advocates of the neo-imperial idea also support the restoration of *Novorossiia*, or 'New Russia' within the borders that existed prior to the 1917 Revolution.[47]

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[44] Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia, The Politics of National Identity*, (London, UK: Chatham House Papers, 1995), 86 and 87.

[45] Ibid., 86 and 87.

[46] Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich and Emil Payin, *The New Russian Diaspora, Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 59.

[47] Ibid., 59.

Fundamental hardening of Russian identity has been an integral component in pressuring the Russian government to "defend" Russians abroad; but in practical terms, this was observed in the western periphery of Ukraine. Russia enacted protectionist measures by undertaking full-scale military operations in the 1990's in the breakaway Russian-speaking enclave of Trans-Dniestria, which declared its secession from Moldova in 1991.[48] Through a renewed sense of Russian chauvinism, Russia adopted a special relationship with its own ethnic minorities in this region that saw Russia accepting responsibility for the geo-political security of its diaspora abroad.

As a cease-fire maintains the peace in the region to the present day, Russian forces maintain a security presence exceeding 2,500 troops and large-scale ammunition stockpiles.[49] As recently as December 2002, the Russian military launched the creation of the Trans-Dniester military force to maintain control of stockpiles of ammunition and to ensure the security of the Russian diaspora community in the region.[50]

Difficulty in managing multi-cultural space has been apparent since the early 1990's and Trans-Dniestrian secessionism is one of two examples of secessionist demands by ethnoregional groups, and the political leverage they have obtained through Russian foreign policy. Since 1990, over fifteen major occurrences and present status acts of inter-ethnic violence have been initiated in post-Soviet space.[51] Both Trans-Dniestria and Chechnya, where Russian forces fought for two long years to keep the region within Russian political space, exemplify extreme measures assumed by Moscow to manage and protect Russians in the 'near abroad'. As Barnett Rubin concludes from his analysis of inter-communal tensions in the post-Soviet space, "…while most of the conflicts of the post-Soviet transition are no longer violent, few have actually been resolved to the satisfaction of the parties [involved], and tensions could reignite."[52] Since the Russian minority populations in both Trans-Dniestria and Chechnya represented less than 10 % of the total population, how might Russia orchestrate ethnic minority management in such regions Eastern and Southern Ukraine and Crimea?

Security issues were the most acute reasons for Moscow's military intervention in Moldova, but issues of security were not the only reasons for Moscow to assume a more active role in relation to the post-Soviet republics. In the

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48 Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States, Mapping the Politics of Transition*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 67.

49 Vladimir Socor, *September 11 and the Geopolitical Revolution of our Time*. (Bucharest, Romania: SNSPA, 2003), 242.

50 Ibid., 243.

51 Smith, Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States, Mapping the Politics of Transition*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 228 and 229.

52 Barnett Rubin, Managing normal stability, in B. Rubin and J. Snyder, *Post-Soviet Political Order. Conflict and State-Building*. (London, UK: Routledge, 1998), 170 and 171.

aftermath of Soviet collapse in 1991, the security of the twenty-five million Russians living in the borderlands has become a major source of anxiety for political elites in Moscow, who were concerned about the territorial losses incurred from dissolution.

Following the Soviet collapse, the preservation of the territorial integrity of Russia was a vital element in Russia's position as a great power in international affairs, but this position was seriously threatened when Chechnya declared its independence from the Russian Federation. Russia's re-assertion of power and prestige are fundamentally linked with diaspora communities in the borderlands, and therefore these communities have come to play an increasingly significant role in Russian foreign policy and international relations. Soviet dissolution and Chechnya both represented a severe challenge to Russia's territorial integrity; the existence of sizeable Russian minorities represents a tangible constituent that may compel Moscow to "protect" them, especially since Russian prestige and power are as closely connected to population as they are with territory. In 1980, fifty years after the formation of the Soviet Union, Viacheslav Molotov professed to a great failing of the Soviet government, that the Communist Party had never effectively resolved the Russian national question: the problem of what status the massive RSFSR and the Russian nation should have within the Soviet Union, and this is a predicament that has been carried forward into the new relationship that Russians have with their homeland.[53]

Although Russia still retained the largest area of land in the 1990's, Russia's post-Soviet population of roughly 148 million, barely half of the population of the former Soviet Union, ranked well behind China, India, United States, Indonesia, and Brazil.[54] Since tension within the Russian elites has been directed to fears that culminate over the loss of the borderlands and its subsequent effect on territorial capacity, equitable focus should be given to its consequent mitigation of Russian ethnic representation, which directly equates the loss of Russian prestige and power. As Molotov explained in 1980, there was never really any place for the Russian nation. The USSR's nationality was rather ambiguous and posed domestic policy problem for Moscow, just as the meaning behind Russian nationality – in terms of being Russian and being from the Russian Federation – remains contentious and unclear in the contemporary period. The size of the Russian population made it too large to ignore while simultaneously, it was too important to be given equal status as the Soviet Union's other nationalities.[55] We have seen that the same issue is mirrored in post-Soviet republics

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53 Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2001), 395.

54 *See* Roman Szporluk, *Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe*. (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, 2000).

55 Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2001), 395.

today, but this issue is augmented by Russia's attempts to re-affirm its prestige and power through territory and population management.

Conclusions

Although nationalizing movements have sought to tackle some of the issues surrounding the integration of Russian diaspora, the existence of such communities is more regular than is the existence of diasporic identity. Despite the various sources of leverage available to the Russian government, all of which have been employed to varying extents, the Russian diaspora in Ukraine remains largely symbolic as opposed to a serious threat to national security for both Ukraine and the Russian Federation. In the case of Ukraine, diasporic identity remains a fluid concept, and one that is readily influenced by socio-cultural and linguistic elements within the host nation. The same points, however, are less commensurately applied to Moldova as an autonomous nation in the post-Soviet periphery, and to Chechnya as a federal subject of Russia. Moscow has demonstrated a greater extent of involvement in Moldova, largely distinguished by the presence of Russian forces there, and has been significantly demonstrated by military operations that have devastated Chechnya.

Boris Yeltsin's policies in the 1990's, which called for the protection of Russian compatriots, was no more than a slightly modified edition of what the Soviet government had regarded as necessary action for the promotion of ethnic Russians in various republics prior to the post-Soviet period. Yeltin's policies were endowed with nothing more than rhetoric over the issue of Russian compatriots whereas Vladimir Putin and Russian elites, on the other hand, have invested far more attention to defending the interests of Russian compatriots, and have proven themselves to be far more aware of the effectiveness of both soft and hard power applications.

Initial characterization of the existence of ethnic minorities in the former republics seemed easy to do along such lines as either a product of a migratory policy of the homeland, a voluntary movement or a result of past colonization, but how Moscow has attempted to characterize, or rather re-characterize these minorities in the borderlands remains a difficult question to address. Have Russian ethnic communities inadvertently become Russian 'compatriots abroad', the vanguard of neo-nationalizing groups that have brought about a renewed sense of ethnocracy in Eastern Europe? What is further perplexing is with the collapse of communism and the dissolution of the entire Soviet empire, how the *raison d'être* for Russian diasporic sentiments in the borderlands has not faded in kind.

If the present obstacles facing Russia today are those of territorial and population re-acquisition, then it would seem that in the present day, Russian diaspora management has become a vehicle by which Moscow seeks to

avoid the creation of dual centers of power in Eastern Europe. The relationship between the Russian diaspora and Russian foreign policy is comprised of the diasporic community, the host nation and the original or national homeland. Within Russian foreign policy, Moscow still sees the Russian diaspora in host nations as too important to be given 'b'-class status among other nationalities in the region, or at least too critical a commodity to share 'a'-class status between national forces in Eastern Europe. How Russia responds to the difficulties of diaspora identity among Russian ethnic communities in these regions will confirm the self and international perceptions of post-Soviet Russia. Will Russia seek to "protect" or "defend" its populations in the 'near abroad' as it has previously, and what does this mean for the ethno-political security of the former Soviet republics?

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