Nationalism and democracy in the transition from communism in Eastern Europe

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In the relatively short space of time that has elapsed since the collapse of communism — first in Eastern Europe and then in the Soviet Union — the almost universal initial euphoria and optimism has begun to wear off. The early confidence, most famously articulated by Fukuyama in 1992, that the end of history was nigh, and that the state socialist system would sooner or later be replaced by the familiar structures of western capitalist liberal democracy, has given way to growing concerns about faltering economies, divided societies and insecure polities. In a number of countries, this insecurity has led to a resurgence of support for the former ruling parties now, to a greater or lesser extent, reborn as social democratic parties. Prospects in particular for a successful democratization of many states, if not the whole region, now look more complicated and less certain than they once did. One of the reasons for this, perhaps the most important of all, is the dramatic and seemingly irreversible rise of nationalism throughout the region, albeit in different forms and at different levels of intensity; a nationalism whose inner logic seems to us to be inherently divisive, exclusionary and in the most extreme cases murderous. In our view, nationalism continues to represent a major threat to democracy, as it threatens to undermine some of its most basic conditions. For notwithstanding the wide range of conceptions of democracy past and present, these must minimally include the right to reside as citizens securely within the polity, the right to participate as (at least) formal equals in the political process by voting for, or forming, or joining, or supporting political organizations, and the right to articulate and express political choices, opinions and interests, and the freedom of information and the free mass media which is necessary to underpin such expressions.

In Eastern Europe, we would argue, each or all of these rights, however insecure or non-existent they may have been for other reasons before, are threatened directly by nationalism. It is the framework of nationalist ideology or discourse which has excluded major issues from the political arena and both skewed and foreclosed political discussion and debate. It is the mobilization of nationalist forces which have effectively restricted participation in the political process, in various ways and at various levels. And it is nationalist organizations and politicians, most dangerously of all, who, by attempting to draw or redraw boundaries and to enforce their own criteria for citizenship, threaten the legal and even physical security of citizens. This is, in our view, inevitable. Nationalism always and everywhere involves categories of inclusion and exclusion, however these are articulated or constituted. In Eastern Europe
now, the deployment of these categories has a direct and acute political meaning, both for those groups included and excluded, and beyond them, for the nature of the polities that are thus refashioned and reshaped.

This is not, it must be said, to argue that all concerns about democracy can be reduced to nationalism. Of course other issues are highly salient. The problems posed by nationalism, however, seem to us to go deeper than any of these. To argue (ambivalently at best) that 'for good or ill, national constituencies have been the principal beneficiaries of democratisation', or more optimistically still that nationalism and democratization are mutually reinforcing, or that nationalism is a solidaristic force fostering the necessary development of civil society in a hitherto atomistic social landscape, seems to us to be severely mistaken. Rather we take seriously the warnings of those who have expressed fears that democracy may turn out to be at best a brief interlude between two kinds of dictatorship, that nationalism may become a new state religion, that it does indeed 'seriously threaten the fragile attempts at democracy' in many states in the region.

It needs to be stressed of course, although there is no space to discuss this at length here, that the upsurge of nationalism in this region is not simply, as many commentators have suggested, a return of the repressed, a resurgence, a revival, a recrudescence of some primary force that is now free to burst out (again). Rather, we would suggest, nationalism here owes much of its strength, vitality and force to the way in which the state socialist system, rather than simply repressing or treating it as a rival and antagonistic political force, also accommodated to it and fostered it from the outset, albeit in different ways at different times and places, and on terms set by the regime. Lenin's essentially pragmatic approach, with its 'national in form [but] socialist in content' formula ('no formula at all' in the view of one writer who has written extensively on the topic) was a hybrid of mutually incoherent elements, containing what Hutchinson accurately terms 'built-in contradictions'. Under Stalin, these 'dialectical' contradictions were intensified. Within the Soviet Union, one nation was clearly dominant, as what Lenin had termed 'Great Russian chauvinism came to the fore, particularly as a mobilizing force during the so-called Great Patriotic War with Nazi Germany. At the same time, Stalinism was also a modernizing project, articulated through the overtly nationalist ideology of 'Socialism in One Country'. Together this ideology and modernization then bred nationalism not just in the dominant, 'colonial' nation but in other parts first of the Soviet Union, then the Soviet 'empire', as other states and societies came under Red Army and Communist Party control after the second world war. As the state socialist system first stagnated and then decayed in the 1970s and 80s, stalinist regimes sought to accommodate still further to nationalism in an effort to defuse popular discontent, trying, as Szabo has noted, to 'integrate elements of national legitimation' in various ways. Beyond this, there are deeper structural senses in which the state socialist system can be seen to be at best not inimical to nationalism, and at worst offering it positive encouragement. Constitutional arrangements frequently acknowledged the importance of ethnicity; in particular through the system of titular nationalities in the republics of the Soviet Union and the symbolic importance of personal ethnicity as a component of an individual's citizenship. In a paradoxically complementary sense, the highly-centralized
command economy system in turn also encouraged the use of nationalism as
groups fought for the allocation of resources, particularly as shortages de-veloped.15

Beyond institutional and economic mechanisms lay something more
significant still, what Verdery has called the 'elective affinity' between national-
ist and state socialist discourses,

Both ... are communitarian, emphasising the collectivity and claiming to rep-
resent the interests of the whole, rather than of specific groups within it. Both
facilitate bounding a community — be it moral or ethnic — through the
expulsion of the undeserving (dissidents) or of polluting aliens.15a

The collapse of the state socialist system then allowed nationalism to move to
the centre stage of politics. In the political arena, the collapse of the single or
dominant political organization and the discrediting of existing political institu-
tions left an open field. The impact of economic crisis was also highly
destabilizing, as inflation and unemployment rocketed, hitting large sections of
the population without explanation or apparent end (White, 1993, Glenny,
1990).16 As Verdery summarizes it,

with the fall of communist party rule, ethno-national resentments [could] flare
up in an environment maximally unpropitious for managing them, an environ-
ment devoid of any intermediate institutions for channelling ethnic sentiments,
for settling disagreements peacefully, or for offering alternative means of ex-
pressing one's grievances.17

At the same time, this 'space' had to be used by nationalist forces for nationalist
purposes. For this, two further sets of factors were necessary and present:
ideas, frameworks and discourses on the one hand, political leaders and
organizations willing and able to develop programmes from them, on the
other.

Varieties of nationalist politics

At the risk of simplification, one can identify three sets of cases of the political
use of nationalism. There is the case of the ex-communists who have used
nationalism to hang on to political power on their own. Secondly, there are
former oppositionists, for whom nationalism has been the vehicle for their
access to power. Thirdly, there are cases where there has been a complex
relationship between the old elites and the oppositional movement, in which
nationalism has been deployed as a common discourse and means of political
exchange.

Perhaps the most ruthless instance of the first is the case of Slobodan
Milosevic in Serbia. As has been well-documented, Milosevic's adoption of
nationalist ideology and mobilization of nationalist forces was purely prag-
matic but highly effective.18 Deliberately breaking a fundamental taboo within
the Yugoslav Communist Party, Milosevic shamelessly invoked ethnic
nationalist myths, fears and hatreds, initially focused on the Albanian popu-
lation in Kossovo, in order to unseat his former political patron inside the
Serbian LCY. He then used this newly-mobilized force to destroy any indepen-
dent sources of power, not only in Kossovo but also in Vojvodina and
Montenegro, effectively annexing these latter two autonomous provinces. Thus enabled to use veto powers within the collective presidency, he proceeded to pursue an aggressive campaign against both any internal opposition within Serbia and, successively, forces and structures beyond his immediate control in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, all identified as historic and mortal enemies of the beleaguered Serbian people. The abruptly cancelled war against Slovenia, the bloody conflict with Tudjman's army in Croatia, and the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia, all resulted to a large extent (if by no means exclusively) from these deliberate and planned provocations. The combination of control over an unreconstructedly stalinist party and state apparatus with nationalist ideology enabled Milosevic to deploy with maximum effect both repressive forces (through the army and the police) and weapons of ideological manipulation (via newspapers, radio and television). Of course it may be the case that opposition to Milosevic was fatally weakened not only by disunity but perhaps more seriously by its own collusion to a greater or lesser extent with the same nationalist frame of reference. Nevertheless the prime mover in this mobilization of nationalist forces was Milosevic, effecting a smooth transition from late stalinism to authoritarian nationalism, both ideologically and organizationally. As Salecl has argued most convincingly, 'nationalism played a crucial role in the struggle for hegemony in Serbia', as Milosevic combined traditional stalinist, proto-fascist, etatist, totalitarian and mythological elements in a discourse which depended critically on the presentation of himself as a strong decisive leader capable of dealing with a clearly-defined enemy. This adoption of nationalist ideology and mobilization of nationalist forces was to deal ferocious blows to democracy, not only through the muzzling or elimination of opposition inside the Serbian part of the polity but also, in the form of war and ethnic cleansing, as we shall discuss later, through the expulsion and murder of large numbers of citizens of the larger polity of Yugoslavia itself.

In the second case, former oppositionists (again we shall use the case of the former Yugoslavia) have pursued political ends and purposes using similarly undemocratic means that can only have negative consequences for democracy. In Croatia, Tudjman and his allies learned fast from Milosevic's example. Tudjman, having undergone a gradual transformation from communist general to nationalist politician, won the 1990 elections for the Croatian Democratic Union with the aid of funding from Croatian émigrés and the luxury of being the uncontested nationalist party in the postcommunist vacuum. As Pusic has argued, there was a similar invocation of a clearly identifiable enemy and the construction of a state of emergency (not without foundation of course, as Serbia went to war), accompanied by the compelling argument that the new state could ill afford the luxury of democracy. With the survival of the state at stake, political debate had to be circumscribed, and internalized to the ruling party (which promptly moved to control the media). In the process, voters and citizens were marginalized and nationalism was directly proposed as the practical meaning and embodiment of democracy. The aspiration to democracy was redefined as the aspiration to nationhood; the nation was identified as the only force which could create democracy; political self-determination was identified and made synonymous with national self-determination. Ethnic and national minorities were at best marginalized, and at worst, as in the Krajina, driven out. These processes were further reinforced in the elections of October...
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1995, when, in the wake of Croatia's 'victory in its war to 'liberate the Krajina, Tudjman's party saw off more liberal and other oppositions, winning the elections on an intensely nationalist programme. The election was characterized not only by nationalist triumphalism, but was also underpinned by a drastic reduction in the number of seats guaranteed for Serbs, with twelve seats reserved for Croats living abroad, and the inclusion in the electorate of 291,000 Bosnian Croats.26

In the third case, best exemplified in the Soviet Union, there was what Beissinger has described as a significant 'degree of overlap between communist and emerging counter-elites'.27 Glasnost and perestroika had revealed the extent of inequalities in and across regions, ubiquitous imbalances and irrationalities, and disrupted already decaying mechanisms of integration.28 The processes of elite detachment (from the centre) and autonomization which then unfolded, produced a situation in which local and regional elites, casting around for an alternative source of legitimation, vied with prospective or emergent counter-elites for the nationalist mantle. The timing and precise contours of this process varied from place to place and such competition could lead to a variety of outcomes, as Suny has identified, ranging from outright defeat to elite refurbishment.29

In the Ukraine for instance, Kravchuk embarked on what even Motyl (who largely approves of his strategy) describes as a 'breathtaking transformation' from stalinist apparatchik to overt nationalist by more or less brazenly 'appropriating the nationalist agenda',30 enticing elements of the Rukh opposition into a coalition in which key elements of the old elite held and played most of the cards.31 As the leader of Rukh complained, when asked about the difference between his programme and Kravchuk's, '[there is] nothing. Except that my programme is 30 years old and Kravchuk's is 3 weeks'.32 Democratic mobilization from below was conspicuous by its absence, as key elements of the old state apparatus, with the vital collaboration of elements of the potential counter-elite, manipulated nationalism from above for their own purposes. As Kuzio and Wilson have argued, 'Ukrainian independence was the joint work of two elite groups [but] it was the national communists — those members of the apparat who embraced Ukrainian nationalism at a relatively late stage — who finally made the decisive contribution'.33 It is not clear that the subsequent removal of Kravchuk by Kuchma, arguing at least initially for a reforging of links with Russia, is evidence of a reaction to the nationalism of the former, or a continuation of it in other forms. There is however, interesting evidence of a decline in support for independent statehood — a June 1994 poll found 47% prepared to vote against this, with only 24% in favour. This suggests that support for nationalism may now have receded to pre-1991 levels. (In the 1990 elections, this was running at 25% and in the March 1991 referendum had still only reached 33%. The surge in between, to 90% in December 1991, might then be accounted for precisely in terms of the manipulation of nationalism from above by the two elite groups identified.34

Breuilly has argued that the best way to understand this complex manoeuvring between elites and counter-elites is in terms of a 'politics of inheritance'. As the old structures of power disintegrated, nationalism became the means by which state power could be reconstituted and power re-established. 'In most cases ... the breakdown of central power enabled forms of national
communism to take over and these in turn could combine with the rise of national oppositions to construct a new form of state power'.

In all of these cases, it seems to us, nationalist politics can be seen as undermining democracy from the outset. This is the case whether we are talking about the refashioning of personnel and ideology inside organizations that continue to operate as top-down monolithic bodies (Serbia); or the construction of new organizations that begin life aping the behaviour of those they have replaced (Croatia); or rivalrous or collusive relations between new and old elites, in which mass participation is either manipulated or (largely) absent.

The dangers for democracy go beyond, however, the particular practices of individual nationalist politicians or organizations. Nationalism as a form of politics is, it seems to us, a severe threat not just to the democratic conduct of politics but to the rights of citizens within states. This may take a variety of forms, as we shall seek to illustrate from the following four cases. In each of them however, it seems to us that, to adopt Stepan's term, nationalism and democracy do indeed form clearly 'competing logics'.

Nationalism as foreclosure of democracy — the German Democratic Republic

One way in which nationalism can be seen as antithetical to democracy is as a means of foreclosing the development of a fully democratizing process as occurred, we would argue, in the GDR. The latter was in many respects exceptional in the region, inasmuch as the state itself had initially been brought into being without any attempt at positive legitimation, as the object of Soviet imperial need (whether offensive or defensive may be debated), not to mention retribution. Nevertheless, the potential conflict between the logics of nationalism and democracy was in many respects most sharply articulated here. This was dramatically illustrated in the midst of the revolution itself, in the switch of slogans in the fateful month of November from *Wir sind das Volk* to *Wir sind ein Volk*. This was no trivially semantic change. Rather, as Stephen Brockmann has noted, 'the mere change from the definite to the indefinite article implied the move from a revolution based on democratic principles to a revolution based on ethnic togetherness, a shift from *demos* to *ethnos*'.

The democratic character of the process was undermined in a number of important respects. Firstly, the adoption of nationalist demands had in an important sense an implicitly demobilizing effect on the population of the GDR. The momentum that had brought growing masses onto the streets led by independently organized oppositional movements was cut short, as western political leaders intervened directly and openly. As one of the main opposition figures later put it, with some understandable bitterness, 'the West German political parties... with their huge political machines, effectively killed all attempts in the GDR to articulate independent political ideas and to build independent political structures'. The fragile space that had been opened up briefly by the independent democratic movement, shrank and narrowed. Rather than pursue a political project of democratization, the majority of the citizens of the GDR responded to the economic blandishments (not to say manipulation) of the western elite, wrapped within a nationalist flag, in what critics such as Habermas dubbed 'D-mark nationalism'. The very powerful and resonant warning articulated by the West German right against any further
so-called 'socialist' experiments was in a sense also a call to demobilize, to abandon participation in the democratization process. The East German population thus renounced their (developing) sovereignty by entering wholesale (in more than one sense) into the intact unmodified structures of the West German system, without having to exhaust themselves in independent activity. As Philipsen puts it, this transformed 'the exhilarating search for a new democratic beginning into a muted turn [Wende] directed largely by others' (our emphasis). The constitutional mechanism through which unification was accomplished furthered this process of demobilization in both the East and the West. The GDR was effectively absorbed via article 23 of the Basic Law into the existing political structures of the Federal Republic stymieing the call, if unification was now inevitable, for the use of article 146, which would have necessitated a debate not just about the future of the GDR but also about the nature of the democratic basis for a new, unified Germany. As Habermas has argued, this was no merely procedural issue. Rather it closed off, in both the East and the West, any discussion about the character of a united Germany as a democratic polity, both in relation to the past and in the present. In the former case, the citizens of the ex-GDR thus arguably lost the opportunity to proceed autonomously with a democratic reckoning with their own past, as the communist period somehow merged with Nazism, as an equivalent (or worse, effectively more significant) experience of domination by totalitarianism. Both the Nazi and communist periods were thus constructed predominantly as exceptions, implying that West Germany as a democratic state was connected umbilically not only to the democratic West but also to Germany's pre-Nazi history. This connection is not an innocent academic matter for debate. For the invocation of a historic national identity, in the call for re-unification, was predicated on assumptions about the nation across time, both historically and in the present, that had profound implications for residents within the borders of both old and new German states. This discourse, as Torpey has put it, 'consecrated a primordial, trans-historical concept of the nation that places that entity utterly beyond the power of a state's citizens to alter' (our emphasis). It was, critically, ethnically exclusive, in a tradition self-consciously stretching back, as Brubaker has shown, to the Wilhelmine imperial legislation of 1913, premised on notions of national identity rooted in birth and ties of blood. Thus, however 'popular' the demand for unification, there were inevitably those (particularly in the West) who were excluded by these fundamentally ethnic assumptions. Whilst ethnic Germans could now claim and be welcomed into full citizenship by virtue of their biological descent, millions of 'foreigners' who have lived, worked and raised children within the country for decades remained excluded, revealing the deep-seated racism that underpins the absurd official refrain that 'Germany is not a country of immigration'. Rathzel has pointed out the profound differences in discourses concerning the two groups of immigrants — aussiedler (incoming ethnic Germans) and auslander (incoming foreigners). In the first case initially every allowance was made, in the second suspicion and hostility was the order of the day. However, difficulties in assimilating what was in fact a culturally distinct minority has led to the growth of hostility even to this group. This has in its turn led to a curious development. On the one hand, we have those who welcome the aussiedler because of a racialized conception of the nation based on blood; on the other,
we have those who have a racialized conception of the nation based on culture, language and behaviour. 'In other words, what could be observed was a struggle between an old genetic racism and a new so-called cultural racism, and the latter was more exclusionary than the first.' Thus, as Wilpert has tellingly noted it was,

most remarkable... that a country which opened its arms to hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans during the disintegration of the east and which was willing to unify and take on responsibility for another 17 million persons at a record pace did not consider that the unification of Germany might be the opportunity to offer full, unambiguous membership to the 4.5 million foreigners (less than half are Turks and Yugoslavs) who had been over a decade or two working, paying taxes, increasingly born and schooled in the country.

There is thus a clear and direct ideological link to the subsequent attacks on such ‘foreigners’ and on asylum-seekers, caught up in an orchestrated moral panic, and subjected to a ferocious campaign of restriction and humiliation (involving a revision to the same inviolable Basic Law that guaranteed citizenship to ethnic Germans in the first place). The violent attacks on both asylum seekers and non-ethnic immigrants that followed in both East and West (in Hoyerswerda, Rostock, Molln, Solingen there were 2,000 attacks in 1992 alone) occurred in a political context in which nationalist ideology dictated and structured the terms of debate, marginalizing democratic arguments in favour of equal rights for all within a multicultural society, as some had feared from the outset. In the long run, it may be argued that the categories of inclusion and exclusion deployed in this case, which were inherent in the nationalist demands that overtook democratic ones in 1989, hold serious dangers for democracy in the now unified state. The rights of citizens who cannot claim the security of ethnic descent must be more fragile than those who can.

Nationalism and the democratic process: the break-up of Czechoslovakia

A second instance of a democratic deficit, linked in a different way to the emergence of nationalism as an alternative political force, may be found in the case of the break up of Czechoslovakia. Here, rather than nationalism directly replacing democracy as the dominant political logic of the political process, the use of nationalism may be seen to have undermined the conduct of democracy as such. Indeed one might argue that, if this were not to some extent the case, the abrupt break up of the state, arranged without any direct canvassing of the popular will, would remain very hard to explain. For, as Gordon Wightman has written, the decision to break up Czechoslovakia was particularly ‘surprising, in so far as it had appeared in 1989 to be the country in the Soviet bloc with the best prospects of achieving a relatively smooth transition to democracy’. Any serious attempt to explain this break up seems to point clearly away from democratic factors towards the kinds of factors we have identified above, involving the ways in which state socialism fostered ethnic nationalism institutionally and discursively, and in which particular political forces sought to manipulate these structures and discourses for their own purposes. As Sharon Wolchik has noted, the way ‘the federal system ... institutionalised ethnicity’, with its ‘formal recognition of ethnic difference in a federated
political structure ... provided a framework for defining and raising ethnic issues once the communist system ended'.

The economic hardship (unevenly experienced), and social dislocation which followed the euphoria of the Velvet Revolution 'provided incentives for most political leaders to use nationalism as a tool to gain and keep power'. This was particularly clear in the case of Meciar in Slovakia who embraced nationalism relatively late in the day once he saw its potential in these terms. Even then, neither he nor his opposite number Klaus commanded an absolute majority in their own backyards, so to speak. Neither of them had directly consulted their voters on the issue of separation in electoral campaigns, before they then organized and agreed it; neither of them were prepared to tolerate putting the issue to a referendum. However much one can argue that there were significant differences between Czechs and Slovaks in terms of political values, preferences, mutual perceptions or attitudes to particular policies, most of the evidence suggests, as Wolchik has noted, that 'most citizens in both the Czech lands and Slovakia continued to be against the break-up, even as their leaders negotiated it'.

Although Elster has argued that it might be plausible to suggest that 'separation was everyones second preference', his own evidence from a summer 1992 opinion poll shows only 8% of Czechs and 16% of Slovaks supporting separation. This was not even a second preference in each republic. However, the problem for the chances of continuing federation, as identified by Elster was that the pattern and ranking of preferences among Czechs, on the one hand, and Slovaks, on the other, was so very different. This does not detract from our main point that the break-up was pushed through with very little popular support. This was only possible, Wolchik suggests, because of the weakness of democratic institutions and forces, ill-equipped to constrain such instrumental and elitist activity. In turn we would suggest, this activity further weakened the efficacy or vitality of these democratic institutions and forces. Political elites were thus able to draw on the symbols and structures of 'the nation' in order to operate 'relatively unconstrained by mass preferences'.

This use of nationalism constrained political activity, took it beyond direct and focused public scrutiny, and facilitated the further development of nationalist-based politics. There would appear to be a significant correlation here between low levels of mass political activity and growing political alienation and apathy on the one hand, and the increasingly firm grip held on power by particular political forces more or less cynically deploying nationalist ideologies for their own narrow purposes.

Nationalism and civil and political rights — the Baltic states

If the Czechoslovak case is an instance of nationalism being deployed to dismember a polity in ways which seem to undermine the conduct of democratic politics, then the Baltic states present us with a more extended problem. Here the issue is not whether nationalism is compatible with the democratic maintenance of a particular polity, but whether it is compatible with the maintenance of democratic rights within the polity itself. The problem is posed by the presence in each of the Baltic states of substantial minorities identified in ethnic terms as, in some sense, to a greater or lesser degree, 'alien' intruders, and thus a 'threat' to the core identity of the (ethno-national) state.
These minorities varied and vary in size. In Estonia at the time of the 1989 census 600,000 out of a population of 1,600,000 were non-Estonians, mainly Russians (30%). In Latvia, only 52% was ethnically Latvian, with Russians forming 34% and Belarussians a further 5% of the population. Only Lithuania among the Baltic states was relatively homogeneous with 80% of its population Lithuanian, the remainder including Russians (9%) and Poles (7%).

The measures taken to deal with this 'threat' also varied from case to case. In Estonia in February 1992, the 1938 law on citizenship was re-enacted with some minor amendments, restricting citizenship to those who were residents before the Soviet occupation and their descendants, with a two year period of residence required for others before citizenship could be applied for, one further year of naturalization and some proof of knowledge of the Estonian language. This was followed by a very restrictive Law on Aliens the following summer. As a result of these restrictions, all Soviet-era immigrants were effectively barred from voting not only in the September 1992 national elections but also in the June 1992 referendum on the constitution. In the town of Narva, for example, only 6,000 out of the population of 77,000 were eligible to vote. In Latvia, similar legislation initially required a much longer period of residence (sixteen years!) before this was reduced after protests from within and without to a mere ten years. It was accompanied too by a quota system whereby only 2,000 non-citizens could become citizens each year. This too was modified after protest, but even then, it will take until 2005 before all those who might wish for citizenship can be naturalized. (Even then, according to the law, they will need, inter alia, competence in the Latvian language, a knowledge of the words of the national anthem and of Latvian history, to have a legal income, and they must swear allegiance to Latvia and to defend Latvia with their lives) Only in Lithuania by contrast was the so-called ‘zero option’ adopted, whereby all residents in Lithuania at the moment of independence could become citizens.

It may not be wholly surprising that few have applied for citizenship in these conditions. The language test alone would provide a major hurdle, as it was probably intended to do, particularly when it is accompanied by the establishment of a language inspection force with the authority to impose fines on those failing. As Gray notes,

only about 14% of those living in Estonia, 20% of those living in Latvia and 34% of those living in Lithuania speak the local language. The upshot is that relatively few have so far applied for citizenship ... This has in turn meant the disenfranchisement of most Russians. By the time of the March 1995 local elections in Estonia, for example, only 50,000 non-Estonians had been naturalized, only 24% of non-Estonians had Estonian citizenship, 11.5% had Russian citizenship, and 64.5% were non-citizens. In the Latvian case only 70% of the inhabitants were citizens as at July 1995. The effects, however, go far beyond the issue of the franchise involving attempts not only to insist on knowledge of the 'national' language as a condition of citizenship, but also as a condition for those working in the public, and sometimes even the private, sector. Many Russians have been replaced in areas of public administration in both Latvia and Estonia. Although there is some evidence in Latvia of pragmatic laxity in the application of the language...
laws, in Estonia, Nørgaard suggests that the language requirement has been almost cynically used as the pretext to make superfluous workers redundant.

Defenders of these measures usually prefer to remind their critics of the historic injustice they are designed to correct. The occupation of the previously independent Baltic states by the USSR was the result of the infamous Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939. It led to a wave of Soviet state-directed Russian immigration both then and after the victory of the USSR in the war that the pact only briefly delayed. This immigration was thus a central element in an imperialist project of colonization and subordination, destructive of national self-determination. The citizenship measures have thus to be understood as reactive and defensive of the democratic right of each nation to restore its independence and re-establish its identity, imperilled both in the past (by annexation and the 'asymmetrical bilingualism' of the communist period64) and in the present (by the continued presence of the Russian minorities, compounded in Estonia and Latvia, but not in Catholic Lithuania, by the comparatively low birth rates among the 'native' populations). The larger the minority presence, the greater the need for such measures: hence the difference between Latvia and Lithuania. The project to restore independence moreover mobilized large numbers in an essentially democratic, authentically pluralist movement such as the various Popular Fronts that successfully challenged the central power of the Soviet state in the late 80s.65 Gorbachev's inability to acknowledge this was his greatest failure, revealing him as insincere in his democratic protestations as well as being an incompetent autocrat.66

Our point is not to deny the clearly imperial nature of Russian domination historically in the Baltics but to question the political use in the present of a history, and memories which are themselves highly selective, and arguably prone to more or less overtly racist inflections. For the region in question has, over many centuries, been the site not of one (state-sponsored) immigration but of multiple migrations, which render problematic any easy invocation of a simple or straightforward 'return to independence'67 or a fixed, 'previously existing ethnic balance'.68 Certainly the urban centres, as Gray notes, have since Hanseatic times been quite cosmopolitan, inhabited by, amongst others, Germans and Swedes, as well as Russians. Suny has drawn attention to the differences between urban and rural areas in the nineteenth century, with urban areas dominated by these and other national and ethnic groups, quite distinct from the ethnic composition of the countryside.68a There were, too, earlier periods of Russian immigration than that of the post second world war, the period seen as problematic by present day Baltic nationalists. More dramatically, the absence today of a large Jewish population from this region can scarcely be registered as a natural development. It was the systematic extermination of east European Jews by the Nazis (often with the active, even enthusiastic assistance of 'local' nationalists) which transformed the demography of the region. The assault in June 1941 on the Jewish population of Kovno, for example, the pre-war capital of Lithuania, where Jews formed a quarter of the population, was after all initiated and conducted by ultranationalist Lithuanian partisans.69

Even the feared Russians cannot be simply dismissed as imperialist invaders, not only because there is a long history of a Russian presence going back to at least the seventeenth century, but because even the Russian immi-
Migration is complex, cyclical and involving different degrees of ‘rootedness’. Many migrants came from Russia for short periods for specific employment; thus throughout the periods of immigration there was also considerable emigration. There is also evidence of a commitment to staying in the Baltic Republics among many Russians, and an identification with the new republics, as evidenced by a greater willingness to learn the ‘national’ language. In this context, the definition of others as a problem of incorporation, rests on a prior definition of the polity according to exclusivist criteria which deny this complex history. The racist inflections of this discourse are sometimes made explicit. Thus Vebers moves from arguing that ‘the postwar immigration was contrary to the will and needs of the Latvian people’ to the claim that in many towns and villages, Latvians live in conditions of ethnic discomfort [sic] in their own homeland because they are unable to conduct daily affairs in their own language. Former norms of behaviour and community standards have been replaced by the new alien majority.

As power has returned from the imperial centre to the newly renational periphery, as these movements have swept to power, their concern has abruptly switched from pluralist inclusion to ethnic discrimination. The supposedly happily multi-ethnic democratic movements and coalitions that mobilized in the dying days of Soviet rule have fragmented, as ethnic exclusivists have begun to set the political agenda. According to Nørgaard the desired aim of many nationalist politicians and civil servants in Estonia and Latvia is to reduce the immigrant population by between a third and a half. In Latvia, nationalists occupied positions in the newly-formed Department of Citizenship and Immigration and used their positions to engage in systematic bias against applicants for citizenship. As a result there are a number of so called ‘round-stampers’ who find themselves without residence permits and thus have no rights to social benefits and medical treatment, or even to get married or register their children.

Underpinning the questioning of diversity is a prior representation of Others as inherently alien on ethnic grounds, itself justified by reference to an ideologically simplified history. The restrictions on citizenship (formally or substantively, directly or indirectly) which then follow, however presented as corrections for past injustices, may do nothing but undermine democratic rights, and contradict the right of self-determination itself.

Nationalism and the liquidation of citizens(hip) — Yugoslavia and after

In the case of the former Yugoslavia of course the divisive exclusionary character of ethno-nationalism and the mortal threat it carries for democracy are most cruelly apparent. We write at a time when the Dayton peace accord appears to have entrenched the effects of atrocities driven and perpetrated in the name of ethnic loyalties and commitments, replete with cultural and historical invocations, which were fostered and manipulated by clearly identifiable political forces. It would not be possible to complete this piece without some reference, however brief and inadequate, to these stark and chilling events. For what is involved, above all in the dismemberment of the
multi-ethnic society of Bosnia-Herzegovina, is a conflict between nationalism and democracy taken to its extreme.

The Greater Serbia project especially (though one should not minimize Greater Croatian ambitions) was devised and has been carried out in a ruthlessly undemocratic manner, from the muzzling of (what was, at the outset, strong) domestic opposition, to the seizure of media control and the nightly doses of television propaganda, to the militarization of the state and its vicious deployment in a war against the civilian population. In this instance, citizens' rights within the polity have not only been limited but liquidated through what has become euphemistically known as 'ethnic cleansing'. Alongside this physical elimination of minority populations have been attempts to reconstruct history, to obliterate all cultural traces of particular ethnic groups from particular areas. Hence the widespread destruction of Mosques and Catholic Churches in Serb-conquered areas, and the targeting by artillery of the Bosnian National Library and the School of Oriental Studies in Sarajevo.

In this case, all the ingredients of the nationalism we have sought to analyze here have come together. It required the (selective) articulation of memory and the projection of chosen (Serbian and to a lesser extent Croatian) identities and the denial of (multi-ethnic as well as Bosnian Muslim) others; the mobilization of political forces within an available institutional framework (the decentralized Yugoslav republics and party machines); the ruthless use of nationalist ideology to gain power; and the formulation and attempted implementation of specific political projects.

In the case of Bosnia, the racist dreams of Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia converged on the common project of dismembering a multi-ethnic society. Throughout the conflict between Serbia and Croatia, Milosevic and Tudjman made repeated efforts to come to an agreement on how to divide Bosnia between them. The subsequent peace 'settlement' has to a depressing extent rewarded the ethnic cleansers through a variety of means. The Dayton accord of December 1995, despite provision for some of the trappings of a unified state, essentially split Bosnia along ethnic lines, a principle which beneath all the diplomatic comings and goings, underpinned all efforts by the western powers (European or American) at so-called mediation from the beginning. The Dayton settlement itself was the product of a change in the balance of military power, not between ethnic nationalists and democrats, but between the Serbian and Croatian forces. It was a settlement between nationalist forces both outside Bosnia (the Milosevic and Tudjman regimes) and within.

Since the agreement, nationalist parties within Bosnia have tightened their grip on all sides, consolidating their power in the obviously flawed elections of September 1996. (There were widespread allegations of fraud with participation rates going over 100% in some areas; however, it has not been seriously suggested that this significantly distorted the results!) The victors of the elections among all three ethnic communities have been parties endorsing national and ethnic difference and separation. The ruling SDA party on the Muslim side has moved in a steadily more exclusionary direction to mirror the ruling parties of the Croats (allied to the ruling party in Croatia itself) and the Serbs (where the main opposition to the governing SDS was an alliance with links to Milosevic). One of the few serious attempts at non-ethnic or
multi-ethnic politics, the SBiH party of former Bosnian Prime Minister Silajdzic had very limited success, and it was only around Tuzla that such politics were successful.

With nationalist forces dominant, it is no surprise that the appalling atrocities of ethnic cleansing have gone largely unpunished, despite the setting up of the War Crimes tribunal in the Hague. (Indeed it needs to be remembered that the war finally came to end with yet another bout of ethnic cleansing in the Croatian expulsion of 180,000 Serbs from the Krajina region, a forced ‘migration’ rather overlooked perhaps predictably in the western media but perhaps more astonishingly in some academic discussions. Key figures heavily involved, such as the Bosnian Serb leader Karadzic, continue to operate freely and effectively in post-Dayton politics. They continue to pursue and implement the project of ethnic exclusion, denying refugees the right (formally guaranteed to them by the agreement) to return home. (This has not prevented the German government using this ‘right’ as an excuse to begin the mass expulsion of Bosnian refugees who have no home to return to. Their continued presence in Germany clearly offends the ethnically-based principles of citizenship as much there as elsewhere). Where Muslims have tried to force the issue there were clashes with local Serbs, and although the UNHCR has now made provision for procedures to enable refugees in northeastern Bosnia to return, ‘the Muslims charged that the Serbs were using the lists of applicants in order to target former Muslim homes for destruction’.

Effective control in Bosnia clearly does not lie with what remains of a multi-ethnic government. Rather as Denitch describes it, ‘post-Dayton Bosnia encompasses one weak federal state, two more or less ethnically defined entities and three ethnic communities with mutually hostile armies and police forces’. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that other key features of the accord were not enforced by IFOR, the NATO implementation force. Thus there has only been a limited development of free mass media, with television firmly in the hands of nationalists on all sides, following the principles and practices established by their masters in Zagreb and Belgrade. The right to freedom of movement has not been established. As Moore suggests ‘Not only did this not exist between the Federation and the Republica Srpska, but it was little honoured between the Croat and the Muslim areas within the Federation itself’. The issue of the local elections, postponed from September 1996, continues to be unresolved at the time of writing. Allowing refugees to register to vote anywhere in Bosnia-Hercegovina for local elections (under the terms of the so-called P-2 Dayton option) has the potential to allow for gerrymandering on a large scale, and the further consolidation of the results of ethnic cleansing. Given the processes of war, manipulation, coercion, and media domination, this is not surprising.

The future space for the development of any multi-ethnic politics in Bosnia-Hercegovina looks bleak. For although all-out war was ended by the Dayton peace agreement, few observers believed that this represented any permanent solution to the conflict. Since its terms, timescales, and implementation strategies had, arguably, more to do with the pressures of the 1996 Presidential election in the USA and less to do with any long-term investment in democracy, peace and stability in the region, this is hardly surprising. The victims of all this have been the citizens of the region themselves, their homes,
their security, their very lives. Tens of thousands of people were killed in the Bosnian conflict; hundreds of thousands were displaced from their homes. The resultant political settlement seems only temporary and democracy cannot properly flourish amidst such virulent nationalism.

Conclusion

In the course of this paper we have tried to emphasize the dangers of nationalism and in particular ethno-nationalism for democratization in post-communist societies. We are sceptical as to whether there can exist a progressive and democratic form of nationalism or national identification in the contexts of Eastern Europe and beyond. The greatest dangers have come from nationalism coming to occupy the ideological vacuum formed by the demise of state socialism. This is not to say that there are not some hopeful signs; there are now more arguments about policies within the post-communist states. Thus other forms of politics may continue to reassert themselves.

On the other hand there is no real sign of any diminution of nationalist legitimation by politicians. Many tensions arising from minorities within post-communist states have yet to come to the fore. Rosa Luxemburg, a radical critic of nationalism, once posed the choice for the world as socialism or barbarism. The stalinist forms of socialism that were developed and imposed in Eastern Europe failed as political and economic systems. They certainly failed to resolve the problem of nationalism. It would be a tragic historical irony if the demise of stalinist socialism should produce the very barbarism Rosa Luxemburg warned against. The challenge for the peoples of Eastern Europe is to find forms of politics which can accommodate ethnic and national differences without trampling on minority rights. To do this they will need to reject the politicians who have consolidated their power through nationalist legitimations. In so doing they will have to realize that cultural differences are not fixed and immutable, and do not need to be expressed in nationalist form. That is a pretty tall order, but the alternative may turn out to be unthinkable.

Notes

2. See for example David Held’s identification of nine different models of democracy derived from both classical and contemporary debates (D. Held, Models of Democracy, Cambridge, 1987). These may usefully be divided, as Held has done into two main types, direct/participatory and liberal/representative.
3. Clearly we do not have space here to discuss the related and very important issue of different notions of citizenship, particularly the distinction between formal and substantive kinds. Our argument here is that, even on the most basic, minimal interpretation of citizenship, nationalism poses a major threat to democracy. For a more extensive discussion which takes up the whole issue of citizenship from a similar perspective to that adopted here (T. Hammar, Democracy and the Nation State, Avebury 1990).
19. As Seroka describes it, 'Milosevic and his allies [then] orchestrated an extraordinary series of events, culminating in huge street demonstrations, which resulted in the wholesale replacement of the provincial Party and governmental structures' (Seroka in White, 1993) p. 114.
20. Bette Denitch has analyzed closely how various efforts were made by Serbian (and Croatian) political leaders to 'manipulate myths with polarising emotional content' in order to construct historical images of the past in which the Other would appear ineluctably and permanently as the enemy; see Bette Denitch, 'Dismembering Yugoslavia — Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1994, p. 369.
25. The reaction to attempts to close down the last remaining independent radio station in Croatia, Radio 101, in November 1996, when some 100,000 demonstrators were reported to have taken to the streets of Zagreb shows us that these processes of the nationalist hijacking of democracy are not going unchallenged, and provide a more hopeful sign of the possibility of a genuinely democratic future.
Holovaty says that Kravchuk ‘grasped at the idea of political independence ... as an oxygen mask to revive [his] political fortunes’. S. Holovaty, ‘Ukraine—a View from Within’, Journal of Democracy, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1993, p. 111. Motyl by contrast seems to think that Kravchuk’s ‘expertise in staging communist verbal pyrotechnics’ had the effect temporarily at least of limiting the worst effects of a more throughgoing exclusivist nationalism; see Motyl in Colton and Tucker (eds), op.cit., p. 111; and A. Motyl, Dilemmas of Independence — Ukraine after Totalitarianism, New York, 1993. Is this a case of better the devil who pretends to be a nationalist than the one who really is?!

33. Ibid., p. 3.
40. As Wolfgang Thierse of the SPD put it later, in perhaps self-justificatory mode, ‘the population was exhausted. Why build the next utopia when ... the achievable democracy is so near, next door’; cited in J. Torpey, ‘Intellecuals, Socialism and Dissent — the East German Opposition and its Legacy’, Contradictions of Modernity, Vol. 4, 1995. This raises a more general issue about the nature of democratization which we cannot pursue in any detail here. Put simply, can democracy be simply adopted, or perhaps ‘bought into’ in this way without this undermining a core element of the democratization process, the self-activity of the demos itself?
41. Philipsen, op.cit., p. 6.
42. Torpey suggests that there was a solid precedent for this in West Germany’s own post-war ‘escape from memory into a monomaniacal preoccupation with reconstruction’; op.cit., p. 172.
43. Ibid., p. 174.
47. A party compromise on tightening the asylum law was reached in January 1993; K. Jarasch and V. Gransow, Uniting Germany — Documents and Debates, Oxford, 1994, pp. 269–71.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 186.
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58. Senn in G. Smith, op.cit.
61. Nørgaard, op.cit.
63. The Estonian 1996 Public Service Act, for example, provides for the dismissal of policemen who have not been granted, or have not applied for, Estonian citizenship, or have insufficient knowledge of the Estonian language by 1 February 1997. In the north-eastern Ida-Virumaa region and Narva, there were 192 policemen in these categories. They were to be given until 1 January 1999 to pass the language test required for citizenship; OMRI Daily Digest, 17 January 1997.
66. Senn in Smith, op.cit.
68. Vebers, op.cit., p. 181.
69. Failure to address this historic injustice whilst others are foregrounded continues to haunt and distort both nationalist politics and historiography in the region, as Senn notes. Krickus, for instance, comes close to blaming the Jews of Lithuania for their own extermination because of their welcoming of the Soviet invasion in 1940 in the wake of fear of the Nazis, and their participation levels in the Communist Party.
70. Gray, op.cit., p. 79.
74. In the light of Croatian military success in the Krajina, Tudjman's long expressed belief in the Croat identifications of the Bosnian Muslims is chilling. 'An objective examination of the numerical composition of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot ignore that the majority of the Moslems in its ethnic character and speech is incontrovertibly of Croatian origin. Despite religious and cultural distinctions created by history the vast majority of the Moslems declared themselves Croats whenever an opportunity arose'; F. Tudjman, Nationalism in Contemporary Europe, Boulder, 1981, pp. 113-4. Hence, he concluded, the majority of the Bosnian population is Croatian!
74a. Silber and Little, op.cit.
75. For a highly critical view of these efforts, locating them in a struggle for hegemony in the new world order between the Americans and their European 'allies', see J. Petras and S. Vieux, 'Bosnia and the Revival of US Hegemony', New Left Review, 218, 1996.
76. See, as an example of remarkably loaded understatement the following laconic comment by Mladen Klemencic in a text published by the School of Oriental and African studies. 'Since this chapter was written, Krajina has been reincorporated within Croatia and few of the Serb population are in residence there'; 'Croatia Rediviva' in Carter and Norris, The Changing Face of the Balkans, London, 1996, p. 217.
76a. Denitch, op.cit.
80. Moore, op.cit.