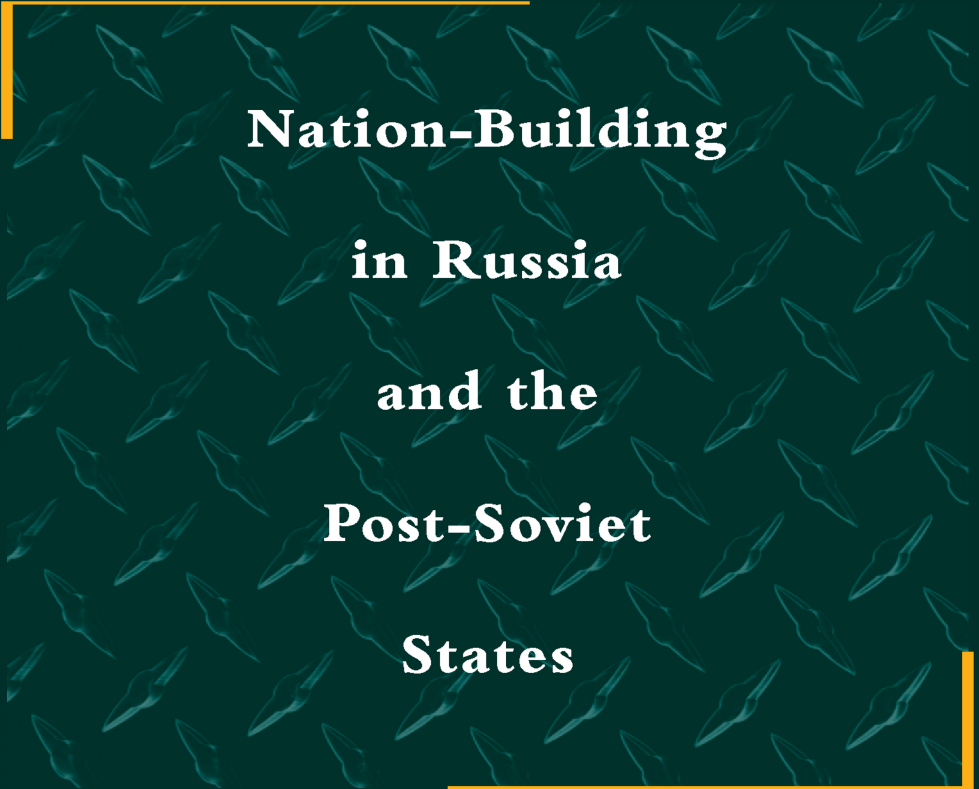






Political

CONSTRUCTION SITES



**Nation-Building
in Russia
and the
Post-Soviet
States**



PÅL KOLSTØ



Political Construction Sites



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*Nation-building in Russia and
the Post-Soviet States*

Pål Kolstø

University of Oslo

*Translated from Norwegian by
Susan Høivik*



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PREFACE

This book is written for the undergraduate student as well as the general reader. Some chapters and parts of chapters are adapted versions of previously published articles and monographs. These are listed in the bibliography together with other sources; readers who want more detailed analysis than this book provides should consult these works.

This book is part of the research project "Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies," financed jointly by the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian University Council through the Program for Eastern Europe. Without their support I could not have written this book.

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Pål Kolstø
Stavanger, Norway, June 1999



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1

INTRODUCTION

“When the Soviet Union fell, fifteen new states saw the light of day.” At first glance, this statement would appear quite unproblematic. But it cannot stand up to closer scrutiny. A “state” in the full sense of the word does not appear simply because of a political proclamation of independence or international recognition. A true state must have control of its own frontiers, have a monopoly of coercive powers on its own territory, be able to collect taxes and tolls, and so on. To carry out these and other necessary tasks, at least a modicum of administrative apparatus is required, as well as broad societal consensus as to the rules and routines for doing these jobs.

In winter 1991–1992 these preconditions were generally not fulfilled in any of the Soviet successor states of Eurasia. The armed forces on their territories were beyond the control of the new state authorities, as were the levers of economic policy—the joint military command remained in Moscow, together with the state mint and banknote press. Administrations were understaffed, except in Russia, which could take over the old organs of the central Soviet power—so it ended up instead with an out-sized central administration. Furthermore, there were no border defense systems between the new states; indeed, state borders were not even marked on the ground.

For these reasons, it is better to say that during the winter of 1991–1992 the *foundations* were laid for the growth of fifteen new states in Eurasia. The establishment of governmental institutions and other attributes of the state is a long-term process that will continue for many years to come. Exactly what forms this process will take, and at what pace, will depend on a series of conditions: economic and geographical factors, the attitudes of other states (especially neighboring ones), the demographic and cultural composition of the population, and the political decisions taken by the elite—to mention only a few of the most important.

In this book, however, I leave aside the economic and institutional aspects and focus instead on some crucial political and cultural aspects of nation-building. If a state is to remain viable in the long term, it is essential that its people believe they have a common identity and a common destiny. They must feel linked together by allegiance to certain shared values, as well as to the same shared symbols and institutions. This need not imply that everyone must feel culturally identical. There may well be pronounced regional differences, differences that can even find institutional expression by means of a federal state structure. But what is necessary is broad agreement as to the politicogeographical map of state legitimacy and the principles underlying its structure.

The USSR was officially defined as a “multinational federation.” By contrast, the successor states have proclaimed themselves “national states” or “nation-states”—and here a further difficulty arises. This concept, so basic to modern political science and related studies, can have several different meanings. Sometimes it is used simply to apply to all modern states, in contrast to the old dynastic states of the past. The modern state defines its field of responsibility and competence far more broadly than did states in former centuries. It is not enough merely to collect taxes and defend the land against internal and external foes: Today’s state also has clear goals and strategies—for improving the lives of its citizens (their standard of living, educational levels, and health conditions); for linking the country together through a tighter infrastructure; and so on.

The national (nation-) state can also be defined by contrast to the empire. An empire is usually understood as a heterogeneous state held together by external means of force, whereas the more homogeneous nation-state is seen as based on the consent of the populace. The empire has subjects; the nation-state has citizens. So what is the glue that holds the nation together? There exist at least two very different views as to what a nation is. Some use a political definition: The nation is simply the sum of all the citizens or inhabitants of that state. In this view the nation is kept together by its common territory, common government authority, and common political history. This has been the dominant understanding in the West and is enshrined, for example, in the name of the world organization: the United *Nations*.

There exists, however, a rival concept that sees the nation as a cultural entity, held together by common language, traditions, folklore, mores, and religion—in short, the ethnic nation. This concept has deep roots in the eastern part of Europe, not least in Russia. One reason was that the multinational empires survived much longer in this part of the world. The state was imperial; the nation was nonstate. Central to the oppositional struggle against the empire was the notion of national autonomy, understood as the right of ethnic groups to organize states of their own.



New States of the Former Soviet Union. Courtesy of Trond A. Svensson.

In ethnically based nation-building, the symbols and traditions of the titular nation become equated with the symbols and traditions of the state: They thereby become the norm for the entire populace.¹ The state authorities will seek to create maximum correspondence between the ethnic and the political “nation”—by means of assimilation, emigration of minorities, or other ways.

By contrast, in civic nation-building the authorities will seek to secure the allegiance of all the inhabitants—without, however, encroaching on their cultural distinctiveness. There is a search for political traditions and symbols common to all ethnic groups, and if necessary these can even be created from scratch. One of the shortcomings of this strategy is the generally weaker emotive power of such supraethnic symbols. They may easily be dismissed as artifacts—which, of course, in one sense they are. Nevertheless, it is quite conceivable that large groups—even the entire populace of a country—may develop a dual set of identities: In political terms, they are proud of being citizens of *their* particular state; in cultural terms, they are proud of being members of their particular ethnic group. In the course of time, a common identity can be built up, centered on the national anthem, the coat of arms, the parliament, and the president. Even though few if any may feel anything special about a newly designed flag, many will come to feel a lump in their throats and tears in their eyes when, to the strains of the national anthem, the top athletes of the nation ascend the winners’ block at international sports events.

Successful nation-building need not involve democratization. Democratic and nondemocratic states alike try to gather their populations to form one nation, united in shared symbols and values, but their means and methods vary. In democracies, elections—to the national assembly and to the presidency—are essential elements in nation-building: The president of the country is also *my* president because I helped to vote him into office. And if my candidate lost, well, then, better luck next time.

In nondemocracies it is difficult to achieve a similar kind of identification through the active involvement of citizens. All the same, we should not think that authoritarian and totalitarian regimes always rely solely on force to stay in power. Quite the contrary: Nation-building on the symbolic and ritual level is often particularly intense in precisely such states. Nondemocratic leaders will do their utmost to camouflage their state means of force behind posters with resounding slogans and portraits of the leaders of the country. Impressive patriotic marches may serve to deafen the voices of the opposition. These were conspicuous features of Soviet society, noticed and remarked on by foreign tourists who visited the country during the Communist era.²

The Soviet leaders saw it as their goal to create the “new Soviet man.”³ This was *homo sovieticus*, a being who had managed to free himself of all

cultural “remnants” (*perezhitki*) of the past and now lived and breathed for the new Soviet values. We have no grounds for dismissing this project as a total failure. Today’s Western visitors to the former Soviet Union are often struck by how many people express nostalgia for the good old days before perestroika, when a ruble was a ruble and you knew what the values of your society were. Yet it is also clear that this “Soviet mentality” was never rooted firmly enough in enough people to prevent the state from falling to pieces when perestroika arrived, bringing with it tendencies toward dissolution. The Soviet nation-building project ended up in the dustbin of history—to use the phrase coined by Leon Trotsky.

What about the new projects being launched today? Will they have greater chances of success? Obviously, it is still far too early to offer any decisive answer to that question, but certain tendencies have begun to appear, and in the final chapter I suggest some tentative conclusions.

Nation-Building Versus Ethnic Consolidation

With the exception of Armenia, none of the Soviet successor states is even remotely homogeneous in ethnic terms. The census of 1989—the last one before the breakup of the USSR—found that in all the republics but Armenia, the titular nation constituted 40 to 80 percent of the total populace. In the Ukraine, for example, close to 73 percent of the population were Ukrainians (see Table 1.1). The remainder of the populace in each case was made up of ethnic groups that either belonged to the titular nation of the neighboring republic and had ended up on the “wrong” side of the border when the boundaries were drawn up or had immigrated from other parts of the Soviet Union. Another complicating factor in post-Soviet nation-building is the lack of ethnic consolidation of the titular nations themselves. In many areas there are deep-rooted group allegiances at lower levels—toward the tribe, clan, subethnos, or region. In other cases there may be overarching supranational ties of cultural identity, linked, for example, to language or religion.

Strong subnational identities need not in themselves represent any contradiction to a shared, unifying national identity: A strong national identity can be developed precisely on the basis of pronounced subnational identities. But we should keep in mind that many ethnonationalists see it as their goal to reduce the importance of loyalties that link the individual to entities other than the ethnic group and to develop stronger common traditions linked to shared ethnic customs, language, and so on. This is what we may term “ethnos-building,” or ethnic consolidation.

In many states in the former Soviet Union, we can see two processes—nation-building and ethnic consolidation—developing in parallel. One

TABLE 1.1 Language, Religion, and Ethnicity in the Soviet Successor States, 1989 (in percentages)

<i>State</i>	<i>Language of Titular Pop.</i>	<i>Traditional Religion of Titular Pop.</i>	<i>Titular Pop. in Percent of Total Pop.</i>	<i>Largest Minority Group and Percent of Total Pop.</i>	<i>Next Largest Minority Group and Percent of Total Pop.</i>
Russia	Indo-European, East Slavic	Christian, Orthodox	81.5	Tatars, 3.7	Ukrainians, 2.9
Estonia	Finno-Ugric	Christian, Lutheran	61.5	Russians, 30.3	Ukrainians, 3.0
Latvia	Indo-European, Baltic	Christian, Lutheran/R. C.	51.8	Russians, 34.0	Belarusians, 4.5
Lithuania	Indo-European, Baltic	Christian, R. C.	79.5	Russians, 9.4	Poles, 7.0
Belarus	Indo-European, East Slavic	Christian, Orthodox/Uniate	77.8	Russians, 13.2	Poles, 4.0
Moldova	Indo-European, Romance	Christian, Orthodox	64.4	Ukrainians, 13.8	Poles, 13.0
Ukraine	Indo-European, East Slavic	Christian, Orthodox/Uniate	72.7	Russians, 22.1	Jews, 0.9
Georgia	Caucasian	Christian, Orthodox	70.0	Armenians, 7.9	Russians, 6.3
Armenia	Indo-European, sui generis	Christian, Monophysite	93.3	Azeris, 2.5	Kurds, 1.7
Azerbaijan	Turkic	Shi'ite/Sunni Muslim	82.6	Russians, 5.6	Armenians, 5.5
Turkmenistan	Turkic	Sunni Muslim	71.8	Russians, 9.5	Uzbeks, 8.8
Tajikistan	Iranian	Sunni Muslim	62.2	Uzbeks, 23.3	Russians, 7.6
Uzbekistan	Turkic	Sunni Muslim	71.2	Russians, 8.3	Tajiks, 4.6
Kyrgyzstan	Turkic	Sunni Muslim	52.2	Russians, 21.5	Uzbeks, 12.9
Kazakhstan	Turkic	Sunni Muslim	39.6	Russians, 37.8	Germans, 5.7

SOURCE: Natsional'nyy sostav naseleniya SSSR (The national composition of the population of the USSR) (Moscow: Finansy i Statistika, 1991).

might expect these to be located on two different levels: nation-building on the political and ethnos-building on the cultural level. And yet we often see that the two are intermixed, resulting in a hybrid: ethnic nation-building.

Many of the Central Asian nations are rather recent creations. The boundaries between them have been drawn up by state authorities on the basis of fieldwork carried out by Russian cartographers and ethnographers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often with clearly political motives. The Communists wanted to establish quasi nation-states in Central Asia in order to break down allegiances to such overarching ideologies as Pan-Turkism and the Islamic fellowship (*ummah*).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, old clan antagonisms began to resurface. In Kyrgyzstan the main conflict is north-south: The Kyrgyz in the southern parts of the country are heavily influenced by Uzbek oasis culture, and Islam is fairly strong, whereas the Kyrgyz of the north are marked more by Russian cultural influence. Southern Kyrgyz were in control during the Communist period, but at present the northerly clans dominate the political life of the country, at the expense of the southerly Kyrgyz and the various national minorities. In Kazakhstan we find a tripartite division of clan patterns between the three large Kazakh "hordes" (*zhuz*): the Great, Middle, and Small Hordes, who live in the south, the northeast, and the northwest, respectively. The southerly Great Horde currently controls the state apparatus at the expense of both Slavs and the northerly Kazakh groupings.

In neither Kyrgyzstan nor Kazakhstan have clan or regional antagonisms found violent expression. This has, however, been the case in both Tajikistan and Georgia. During the Communist era, the northern Tajiks, centered around the city of Leninabad, dominated in Tajikistan. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Leninabad leadership found itself challenged by the southern Tajiks. This unleashed a lengthy civil war in which tens of thousands were killed. This conflict had certain ideological aspects, since many of the Tajik leaders from the south and east brandished the banner of Islam, whereas the northerly groups stuck to communism and formed alliances with certain groups from central areas in the country. But when the "Communists" finally emerged victorious, they, too, were hit by rivalries and antagonisms, and the ensuing conflicts saw them split along traditional clan lines. This would indicate that the ideological banners of communism, Islam, and democracy were but thin fig leaves concealing a naked power struggle between clan leaders and regional interests. Most observers would now say that today's "Tajik nation" is a sheer fiction, existing solely in official Tajikistani propaganda.

Georgia has been rent by no less than three bloody civil wars since the breakup of the USSR. In two of these, ethnic Georgians were on one side of the conflict and the national minority groups of Abkhazians and South Ossetians on the other. The third conflict (1992–1993), however, pitted Georgian against Georgian. This was a power struggle marked by fierce personal antagonisms between such figures as former president Zviad

Gamsakhurdia and the current president, Eduard Shevardnadze, but it also had a regional aspect. The Georgian ethnic group is made up of a whole series of subgroups—the mountain Svans, the Kartlis, the west Georgian Mingrelians—with highly disparate self-identities and linguistic norms. Gamsakhurdia was a Mingrelian, and when he was forced out of the capital he found support and refuge in his home area, Mingrelia.

Even in a European nation like Ukraine, the process of ethnic consolidation is far from completed. Both in Galicia in the west and Donetsk in the east, most people consider themselves “Ukrainians”—but what they mean by this term can differ greatly. The Galicians have been subjects of the Habsburgs and of Poland, whereas eastern Ukrainians have been Russian/Soviet subjects for centuries. Both cultural and political identity cannot avoid being marked by such different experiences.

In neighboring Moldova the picture is quite different still: Here, too, is tension between various regional forms of the ethnic Moldovan identity, but the main conflict concerns another issue: the extent to which the “Moldovans” can be said to constitute a separate ethnic group at all. Some Moldovans would say no, that they are in fact Romanians. And so whereas in some states the nation-building project is threatened by sub-national and subethnic identities, in Moldova it is the titular nation itself, the Moldovans, who are seen (by a minority) as merely a subethnic group.

Like Tajikistan and Georgia, Moldova has been the scene of civil war in post-Soviet times, although it has assumed somewhat smaller dimensions. In the spring and summer of 1992, the Moldovan authorities in Chișinău fought against separatists from the left (eastern) bank of the Dniester who had proclaimed their own independent Dniester republic. The secessionists won, backed by political and some military support from Russia. Today the Moldovan Dniester Republic remains an independent, lilliputian state lacking international recognition.

The Dniester conflict can be said to occupy an in-between position, between interethnic and intraethnic conflict. To some extent it was a struggle involving Russians and other Slavs on the one (eastern) side of the Dniester against ethnic Moldovans on the other bank of the river—but it was also a showdown between and among various Moldovan groups. The Moldovans living on the eastern side of the Dniester had become more Russified than their ethnic counterparts on the western side. During the Soviet era they enjoyed privileged status, but since independence they have been relegated to the sidelines in the politics of the new country—whose capital, Chișinău, lies to the west of the river.

Topics and Cases

After almost a decade of post-Soviet nation-building, some patterns are emerging. Practically everywhere the titular nation has been placed

in the center of the project and given certain prerogatives, implicitly or explicitly. For instance, with a few notable exceptions the language of the titular nation has everywhere been elevated to the status of state language. It would, however, be wrong to claim that the new states of Eurasia are based exclusively on the ethnic principle. Their new state structures embody elements from both the civic and the ethnic model. In the lands of the former Soviet Union, these two nation concepts seem to be living in uneasy cohabitation.

The breakups of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union after the fall of communism have provided students of nation-building with an abundance of comparative cases. Not since the decolonization of Africa has the world seen a similar proliferation of new states in one area. The post-Soviet states have all the necessary prerequisites for fruitful comparisons: a large number of similarities but at the same time important differences.

To a surprisingly high degree, the leaders of the new states have chosen different models of nation-building. Up to a point, these variations may be explained by reference to demographic differences, historical experiences, and cultural peculiarities. But in some cases states with very similar cultural and historical preconditions have ended up with strikingly divergent outcomes. Take the case of Ukraine versus Belarus. The Ukrainians as well as the Belarusians are East Slavs, and both ethnic groups have over the centuries been exposed to massive cultural and political pressure from the same two states—Poland to the west and Russia to the east. Even so, we can conclude that Belarusian nation-building today is at the very best an uphill battle; some would call it a complete failure. At the same time, the Ukrainian nation-state is slowly but surely gaining acceptance and maturity.

In this book I look at the ongoing nation-building projects in the Soviet successor states in a comparative perspective, discussing their preconditions, the means employed by the nation-builders, and the goals they are aiming at. I focus on the nationality discourse in the various countries on the one hand and the practical actions taken by the political leaders on the other. Politicians often say one thing and do something quite different. Clues as to what kind of nation the state authorities want to bring about may nevertheless be gleaned from official documents such as declarations of independence, constitutional clauses, and various legal and sublegal texts (laws on national minorities, language, etc.). Whether the authorities have the will and the means to fill their policy declarations with real content is another question. In order to find the answer to that, we must analyze their actual political actions.

Chapters 2 through 5 are thematically structured. Here I take up some aspects and problems of nation-building that are common to most or all of the new states: Chapter 2 deals with the development of nation-building

theory in Western research and the applicability of this theory to post-Communist realities in the former Soviet Union. Readers who find such theorizing too heavy can simply skip over this chapter without much danger (unless, of course, they happen to be so unfortunate as to have it as required course reading). Chapter 3 deals with the rewriting of history currently in full swing in all the Soviet successor states. Although the modern theory of nationalism has pointed out that “nations” as we know them today are fairly new as a societal phenomenon, an important part of nationalist self-identity is precisely the feeling that “at least *my* nation is as old as the hills.” Thus, most nation-builders do not present their program as *nation-building*; rather, they prefer to see it as a kind of restoration work or perhaps even archeology. The nation has been there all along, at least potentially, and all that is needed is to bring it forth into the open and polish it. For this reason, historians are an indispensable group of craftspeople in the nation-building team. They sift through the available historical material in order to find proof of the nation in past centuries. In relation to the established versions of the historical record, this enterprise is revisionist. The previous historiography was geared toward a legitimization of the existing state—in our case that means the Soviet Union and, prior to that, the czarist empire.

Chapter 4 deals with the role of religion in nation-building. In most parts of Eastern Europe, the cohesion and commonality of ethnic groups is based on language, with religion playing a subsidiary role. Neighboring groups who profess the same faith may regard themselves as separate nations, citing their linguistic differences as the reason.⁴ Even so, in the ongoing nation-building projects of the Soviet successor states religion may play a part. Throughout the world, nationalists comb the cultural landscape in search of construction materials for their respective nation-building projects. Among their discoveries is often “the faith of the ancestors,” which they seize upon and utilize—although they may well be nonbelievers themselves. In this way religion is reintroduced into the national identity, not as essence or driving force but as superimposed ideology.

Chapter 5 discusses the millions of Russians and other Russophones living in the non-Russian successor states. In most of the new states, the Russians represent the only cultural tradition that is strong enough to rival, and perhaps even outperform, the culture of the titular nation. Given that the Russians enjoy the express backing of the most powerful post-Soviet state, Russia, they are also politically the most important group. How, then, are the Russian minorities being treated in the non-Russian Soviet successor states? Are they being defined as a part of the new nation, or are they seen as alien elements? What are Russia’s interests and priorities on the diaspora issue? And finally, to what extent are

the local Russians themselves satisfied or dissatisfied with their new status as national minorities in their respective countries of residence? Do they want to be included in the ongoing nation-building projects, or would they prefer to stay on the sidelines?

Chapters 6 through 10 are geographically structured. In this part of the book, rather than examining all regions or countries in the former Soviet Union, I single out for closer scrutiny six countries I consider particularly interesting: These are Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Latvia, Kazakhstan, and Russia.

Belarus is fascinating in that it represents a case of a “dog that did not bark.” Ernest Gellner used this expression (from the Sherlock Holmes story “The Hound of the Baskervilles”) to describe nationalisms that fizzle out without ever achieving their goals. Expected events that never take place may give the trained detective just as much valuable information as unexpected events that do come to pass.⁵ From a theoretical point of view, therefore, bungled nation-building projects may be just as important as the success stories. They remind us that nation-building is not a train on tracks that will reach its destination sooner or later. How and why some of these trains run out of steam or derail may tell us much about the dynamism and mechanisms of nation-building.

Moldova presents us with an intriguing case for precisely the opposite reasons. It represents a nation-building project that seems to have taken off against formidable odds. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, practically all pundits agreed that there was no such thing as a “Moldovan nation.” What passed for a Moldovan nation was just one of Joseph Stalin’s sinister concoctions, designed to justify his annexation of Bessarabia (that is, Moldova) from Romania during World War II. Stalin reckoned that if a separate Moldovan identity, distinct from the Romanian identity, could be established and accepted, this would complicate the return of this region to Romania. Indeed, the old schemer may have hit upon a shrewd idea. Even while strong cultural elites in today’s Moldova are pushing for reunification with Romania, support for this option among the general Moldovan populace is very weak. Most Moldovans, not to mention the members of the ethnic minorities in Moldova, clearly prefer the establishment of a separate, independent Moldovan state. Realization of this fact has given many Romanians, as well as a score of Western nationality experts, a rude awakening. These experts now have to go through their theories anew to try to find out why the Moldovans so obstinately fail to act in accordance with the accepted scheme of things.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ukraine, too, stands in contrast to Belarus, but for reasons other than the Moldovan case. Like the Belarusians, the Ukrainians have historically been exposed to heavy doses of assimilatory pressure from their dominating neighbors to the east, the

Russians. In certain respects this pressure has been even greater in Ukraine than in Belarus. In demographic terms, for instance, Russians are more strongly represented in Ukraine: More than 20 percent of the total Ukrainian population is composed of ethnic Russians (as against 11 percent in Belarus). In addition, millions of Ukrainians in the eastern and southern parts of the country are linguistically and culturally Russified. Probably as much as half of the total population are more familiar with Russian culture and language than with Ukrainian. This is true not least of the urban and political elites.

Nevertheless, Ukrainian nation-building today is imbued by a strong impulse of Ukrainization. Most remarkably, this impulse seems to impact heavily on political leaders elected to high offices in Kiev from the eastern, Russophone provinces—even when they have been elected on a specifically pro-Russian or pro-bicultural ticket. Chapter 9 seeks to provide some explanations for this paradox.

Latvia and Kazakhstan are interesting cases of nation-building since the titular ethnic groups compose only about half of the total populations: currently about 57 percent in Latvia and 50 percent in Kazakhstan, lower than in all other post-Soviet states. In both Latvia and Kazakhstan, most members of the nontitular population seem to be coalescing into a common group with a high level of shared identity as post-Soviet Russophones. This means that both countries are characterized by a notable degree of ethnodemographic bipolarity. In such cases, one would assume, nation-building based on the culture and traditions of the titular group alone would be out of the question. And yet for all practical purposes this is what is taking place. Although the means employed in each of the two states differ somewhat, it seems fair to say that Latvian nation-building is geared toward the Latvianization of the Latvian state, and in Kazakhstan Kazakhization is a desired goal.

But is this at all possible? Is half of the population supposed to be “integrated” into the other half—and if so, what will be the result? Obviously, the answers to these questions will not be the same in both countries. Latvia and Kazakhstan alike are post-Soviet, bicultural states, but they are very different in other respects. Latvia is a small country the size of Ireland, with no more than 2.5 million inhabitants; Kazakhstan covers a territory as large as Western Europe, with a population of more than 18 million. But it is precisely the combination of significant similarities and dissimilarities between the two cases that makes a comparison of Latvia and Kazakhstan a fruitful endeavor.

Finally, I discuss nation-building in Russia. In important respects the contemporary Russian state project differs from nation-building in the fourteen other Soviet successor states. Russia has a continuous existence as an independent state since the Middle Ages but has never been a

nation-state. Czarist Russia was an empire in actual fact as well as in self-designation. Whether or not it was also an ethnic empire in which the dominant group, the Russians, enjoyed special rights and privileges is a moot question (though—except with regard to the last decades of its existence, the 1880s to 1917—I would answer in the negative).

In the Communist period, the vast majority of Russians identified with the Soviet Union as their fatherland. This distinguished them from most of the other large nationalities in the country, who tended to feel more attached to the particular republic that bore the name of their group. The challenge facing the nation-builders in Russia today is not how to establish and gain acceptance for a new or newly independent state but how to win support in the population for a drastic truncation of state territory.

In the USSR the Russians made up barely 50 percent of the total population; in today's Russia they constitute no less than 81.5 percent. By dint of this demographic factor, Russia has a far more "Russian" quality than the Soviet Union ever had. Russian nation-builders may therefore be tempted to try to construct a Russian nation-state in an ethnocultural sense. Because, however, Russia—like the USSR—is an ethnically based federation, with separate autonomous territorial units allotted to a large number of minority groups, this will be a risky project indeed, fraught with new state truncation.⁶

Russia has no less than twenty-one ethnically defined republics, one autonomous province (*oblast*), and ten ethnically defined national districts (*okrugi*). This federal structure has given the minorities far stronger levers in their struggle for ethnic rights than those the nontitular groups in the other Soviet successor states have at their disposal. This is true even though, taken together, the minorities in Russia make up a smaller share of the total population than in most other former Soviet republics, and they are also divided into a high number of sometimes very small groups. For instance, the largest minorities in Russia, the Tatars and the Ukrainians, make up only 3.7 percent and 2.9 percent of Russia's total population, respectively (see Table 1.1). Moreover, the minorities live scattered over several regions of the country, separated by large areas of compact Russian settlements. They also belong to many different language groups and religions. For these reasons, one might have expected central Russian authorities to have played a successful ethnopolitical game of divide-and-rule. Some attempts at this have indeed been made, but generally speaking the minorities have been more adroit in playing off various groups within the central elites against each other than vice versa. This was particularly true during the constitutional crisis of 1993, when President Boris Yeltsin and the leadership of the Russian parliament confronted each other in a bitter, and eventually bloody, power struggle. During this standoff both the president and his adversaries

tried to enlist the support of the non-Russians by holding out the promise of greater self-rule for the autonomous units.

Some republics, however, signaled that they were not content with self-rule in any form: They demanded complete independence. In most cases this demand was apparently set forth primarily to strengthen their bargaining position. Republics such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan adopted declarations of independence as a tactical ploy to ensure for themselves more profitable agreements with the center than they would otherwise have achieved. In one particular case, however, Chechnya, it soon transpired that the local leadership was deadly serious about independence. The willingness to compromise left much to be desired in both Moscow and in the Chechan capital of Grozny. Indeed, the path of negotiations was hardly traversed at all. The upshot was the deeply tragic Chechen war of 1995–1996. From a nation-building perspective, the Russian military defeat in Chechnya had several important implications. As it sapped the country of badly needed resources, it also seriously impaired the prestige of the central authorities. Worst of all, by fighting against its own citizens the Russian state put into question the very existence of the “Russian nation” in the political sense.

The result of the war seemed to indicate that it was possible for an autonomous Russian unit to break out of the state if its citizens were willing and able to fight for this goal with weapons in hand. But it also showed that the costs of such secession were extremely high. Most potential secessionists in other Russian autonomies will probably regard these costs as prohibitive and be deterred from following in the footsteps of the Chechens.

From 1991–1993 it was widely believed—in Russia as well as among foreign observers—that the Russian Federation might eventually go the same way as the Soviet federation: that is, it might be dissolved into its constituent parts. Chechnya notwithstanding, it seems that the scenario of ever-accelerating fissions has been averted. Many of the autonomous republics in Russia are located in the central regions of the country, surrounded on all sides by Russia proper. Even if they should achieve international recognition as independent countries, practical, geographical circumstances dictate that this would not amount to more than a status comparable to that of the small, landlocked state of Lesotho, heavily dependent on South Africa, which surrounds it on all sides. In addition, in many of these autonomous units the titular nation comprises a relatively modest share of the total population. In several cases, Russians are the largest ethnic group, and they are usually not keen on being separated from Russia.

The debate on the future structure and identity of Russia continues. Several right-wing radical parties, such as the so-called Liberal Democrats headed by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, are openly revisionist. On the

left, the Communist Party, the largest political party in Russia, has repeatedly shown that it is not reconciled to the fact that the Soviet Union has been dissolved. The Communists are strenuously working to establish a renewed union of some kind or another.

Even so, a slow but perceptible identity change seems under way in the Russian population at large, as well as among the elites. More and more people seem to be transferring their political loyalty to the new incarnation of Russian statehood, the Russian Federation. As the memory of the Soviet Union recedes ever further into the past, this new Russian state is likely to be accepted by larger and larger parts of the citizenry. Perhaps Russia may in time become a nation-state, a multiethnic or "multinational" nation-state—for the first time in history.

In 1989 the famous British historian Eric Hobsbawm remarked that it is not implausible to present the history of the nineteenth-century world as one of "nation-building." But toward the end of the twentieth century, he claimed, as state integration through supranational organizations such as the European Union is gaining speed and the countries of the world are becoming increasingly interlinked and interdependent through traffic and trade, the perspective of nation-building is becoming ever more anachronistic. "Is anyone likely to write the world history of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries in such terms? It is most unlikely."⁷ I have nevertheless sought to do just that—not the history of the entire world, it is true, but the history of fifteen new states.

2

NATION-BUILDING AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION THEORY

Nation-Building Theory

The term *nation-building* came into vogue among historically oriented political scientists in the 1950s and 1960s. Its main proponents included such leaders of the American academic community as Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly, and Reinhard Bendix. Nation-building theory was used primarily to describe the processes of national integration and consolidation that led up to the establishment of the modern nation-state—as distinct from various forms of traditional states, such as feudal and dynastic states, church states, and empires. *Nation-building* is an architectural metaphor that, strictly speaking, implies the existence of consciously acting agents—architects, engineers, carpenters, and the like. As used by political scientists, however, the term covers not only conscious strategies initiated by state leaders but also unplanned societal change.¹ In the apt phrase of Øyvind Østerud, the concept of nation-building became for political science what industrialization was to social economy: an indispensable tool for detecting, describing, and analyzing the macrohistorical and sociological dynamics that have produced the modern state.²

The traditional, premodern state was made up of isolated communities with parochial cultures at the “bottom” of society and a distant and aloof state structure at the “top” largely content with collecting taxes and keeping order. Through nation-building these two spheres were brought into more intimate contact with each other. Members of the local communities were drawn upward into the larger society through education and political participation. The state authorities, in turn, expanded their demands

and obligations toward the members of society by offering a wide array of services and integrative social networks. The subjects of the monarch were gradually and imperceptibly turned into citizens of the nation-state. Substate cultures and loyalties either vanished or lost their political importance, superseded by loyalties toward the larger entity, the state.

Stein Rokkan's model saw nation-building as consisting of four analytically distinct aspects.³ In Western Europe these aspects had usually followed each other in more or less the same order. Thus, they could be regarded not only as aspects but also as phases of nation-building. The first phase resulted in economic and cultural unification at the elite level. The second phase brought ever larger sectors of the masses into the state system through conscription into the army, enrollment in compulsory schools, and so on. The burgeoning mass media created channels for direct contact between the central elites and periphery populations and generated a widespread sense of identification with the political system at large. In the third phase, the subject masses were brought into active participation in the workings of the territorial political system. Finally, in the last stage, the administrative apparatus of the state expanded. Public welfare services were established and nationwide policies for the equalization of economic conditions were designed.

In the oldest nation-states of Europe, along the Atlantic rim, the earliest stage of these processes commenced in the Middle Ages and lasted until the French Revolution. Although it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when the entire nation-building process was completed, it certainly went on for several centuries. In the ideal variant, each consecutive phase set in only after the previous one had run its course. This ensured the lowest possible level of social upheavals and disruptions, Rokkan believed.

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In the mid-1970s, discussions on nation-building took a new turn. In a seminal article pointedly titled "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" Walker Connor launched a blistering attack on the school of thought associated with Karl Deutsch and his students.⁴ Connor noted that the nation-building literature was preoccupied with social cleavages of various kinds—between burghers and peasants, nobles and commoners, elites and masses—but virtually or totally ignored ethnic diversity. This Connor regarded as an inexcusable sin of omission, since, according to his computation, only 9 percent of the states of the world could be regarded as ethnically homogeneous.

Since nation-building in the Deutschian tradition meant assimilation into the larger society and the eradication of ethnic peculiarities, Connor believed that in world history it had produced more nation-destroying than nation-building. But the efficiency of active engineering in nation-

building, he held, had generally been greatly exaggerated. Very often it was counterproductive, regularly producing a backlash of ethnic revivalism. Connor maintained that complete assimilation of ethnic minorities had largely failed all over the world, even in that alleged stronghold of consummate nation-building, Western Europe.

Another reason behind the fundamental flaws of nation-building theory Connor found in the terminological confusion caused by the diverse usages of the word *nation*. As he pointed out, this term sometimes is used with reference to cultural groups and peoples and at other times describes political entities (states)—compare, for example, expressions such as *United Nations* and *international politics*. Even more misleading, he felt, was the tendency to use the term *nation* to describe the total population of a particular state without regard for its ethnic composition.

Reserving the term *nation* for ethnic groups only, Connor discarded all objective cultural markers as valid identity demarcations for these units. Neither common language, common religion, nor any other shared cultural reservoir within a group qualified as a genuine sign of nationhood. Any such attempt to objectivize the nation was to mistake the cultural manifestations of a nation for its essence. The true nature of the nation was in every case the sense of common ancestry shared by its members, Connor asserted. The nation is the ultimate extended family. To be sure, hardly ever could a common origin of the members of the nation be proven. In fact, very often it can be established that a nation stems from diverse ethnic sources. The belief in a common genetic origin can therefore usually be shown to be pure myth. Nonetheless, adherence to this myth has remained a *sine qua non* for every nation, Connor maintained.⁵

Later theoreticians developed Connor's understanding in two different directions. The "modernists"—such as Benedict Anderson, Tom Nairn, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm—strongly underlined the myth aspect of the nation. In a celebrated book title, Benedict Anderson coined the expression "imagined communities" to describe modern nations. The nation is a product of imagination in the sense that the members of the community do not know each other personally and can only imagine themselves to be in communion with each other. But Anderson distanced himself from Gellner and Hobsbawm, who took the "imagination" metaphor one step further, interpreting it in the direction of "invention" and "fabrication." The nation should not be defined as "false consciousness," Anderson insisted. Definitions like that would imply that there are such things as "true communities" that can be juxtaposed to "artificial" nations. "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined."⁶

At the same time, Anthony Smith, Rasma Karklins, and others developed Connor's themes in another direction, strongly emphasizing the

ethnic aspect of the nation. Agreeing with the modernists that “nations” as we know them are recent phenomena, Smith nevertheless insisted that they have a long prehistory, evolving out of ethnic cores. Of the conglomerate of ethnic groups existing in earlier ages, some developed into would-be nations aspiring for nationhood and a state of their own, with a few eventually acquiring it. Why do some groups succeed whereas others fail? Often this must be explained as a result of historical contingencies, a confluence of felicitous circumstances. But it may also be because of the active efforts of determined nationalists, the nation-builders.⁷

Smith and his disciples retained but reemployed the term *nation-building* introduced by the earlier school of thought. In accordance with their “neo-primordialist” understanding of all modern nations as products of age-old ethnic building material, they heavily underlined the cultural, symbolic, and mythmaking aspects of nation-building:

Even for the most recently created states, ethnic homogeneity and cultural unity are paramount considerations. Even where their societies are genuinely “plural” and there is an ideological commitment to pluralism and cultural toleration, the elites of the new states find themselves compelled, by their own ideals and the logic of the ethnic situation, to forge new myths and symbols of their emergent nations and a new “political culture” of anti-colonialism and the post-colonial (African or Asian) state.⁸

Social Integration Theory

In the liberal tradition of the nineteenth century, we may identify two somewhat divergent views on national integration. One dominant line of thought regarded the cultural and linguistic dissolution of the minorities into “high cultures” as not only historically inevitable but also indisputably beneficial to the minorities themselves. This process was often labeled “assimilation,” “acculturation,” or “amalgamation” rather than “integration,” but no clear distinctions were made among these concepts.

A classic expression of the assimilationist view may be found in John Stuart Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government*:

Experience proves that it is possible for one nationality to merge and be absorbed in another: and when it was originally an inferior and more backward portion of the human race the absorption is greatly to its advantage. Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of a highly civilized and cultivated people—to be a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French citizenship,

sharing the advantages of French protection, and the dignity of French power—than to sulk on his own rocks.⁹

A somewhat different view was taken by Lord Acton. He was more inclined to see cultural diversity as a blessing for the members of society and a safeguard against tyranny: "The presence of different nations under the same sovereignty . . . provides against the servility which flourishes under the shadow of a single authority, by balancing interests, multiplying associations, and giving the subject the restraint and support of a combined opinion."¹⁰ Not unity and uniformity but diversity and harmony ought to reign in society, Acton maintained. But by no means did he regard all cultures as equal or equally worthy of preservation. On the contrary, one of the main reasons people from different cultures ought to be included in the same state was that "inferior races" could thereby be raised, by learning from intellectually superior nationalities: "Exhausted and decaying nations are revived by the contact of a younger vitality. Nations in which the elements of organization and the capacity for government have been lost . . . are restored and educated anew under the discipline of a stronger and less corrupted race."¹¹

In fact, Acton was prepared to use such phrases as "the cauldron of the State" in which a "fusion" takes place through which the vigor, the knowledge, and the capacity of one portion of humankind may be communicated to another. Thus, his arguments for a multicultural state lead us toward a surprising result: Under the tutelage of a superior nationality, members of the less-advanced cultures in the state will shed many of their distinctive traits and learn true civilization. Exactly how much will remain of their peculiar identities (to use a modern word that Acton does not employ) remains unclear, but his vision of social integration was not as far removed from John Stuart Mill's as many observers have been led to believe.¹²

Most of what was written on nation-building and integration in the 1960s and 1970s stood in the combined tradition of Mill and Acton. To Karl Deutsch and his disciples, nation-building and national integration were but two sides of the same coin—indeed, simply two ways of describing the same process. A major object of nation-building was to weld the disparate population elements into a congruent whole by forging new loyalties and identities at the national (or state) level at the expense of localism and particularistic identification. Deutsch specified four stages by which he expected this process to take place: (1) open or latent resistance to political amalgamation into a common national state; (2) minimal integration to the point of passive compliance with the orders of such an amalgamated government; (3) deeper political integration to the point of active support for such a common state but with continuing