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Territorialising Diasporas.

The case of the Russians in the former Soviet republics¹

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Ethnic minorities may be attached to a specific territory to a smaller or greater degree. At one extreme we find autochthonous groups whose very definition depends on such an attachment. (The word *autochthonous* is derived from the Greek and literally means ‘sprung from the land itself’.) At the other extreme we find diasporas. Also a Greek word, *diaspora* literally means ‘spread out’ or ‘dispersed’. It indicates that the group in question has left its original homeland and dispersed to all points of the compass. In an influential article from 1976 John Armstrong defined a diaspora as ‘any ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a given polity’.²

For the purposes of this article the expressions ‘attachment to a specific territory’ and ‘territoriality’ will be used interchangeably. It is argued that in many parts of the world the degree of territoriality of various ethnic groups in a given polity is a politically highly charged question: the ‘sons of the soil’ are regarded as entitled to more rights than are newcomers. Groups with a high degree of territorial attachment are also regarded as more *loyal* than ‘birds-of-passage’ groups.

By calling diasporas ‘groups’ I do not mean to say that they necessarily display a high degree of collective identity or ‘groupness’. Many individuals of whom one might expect an adherence to a given diaspora community by dint of their ethnic extraction or official passport registration, may instead choose to identify with the majority population in their country of residence, or opt out of the diaspora community for some other reason. Identities are malleable and fluid, and a high number of possible identity trajectories for diaspora members may be identified.³ For the purposes of the present article

¹ I would like to thank David Laitin and *Millennium*'s reviewers for insightful comments to the draft version of this article.

² John A. Armstrong, ‘Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas’, *The American Political Science Review* 70 (1976), 393--408, p. 393.

³ Pål Kolstø, ‘The new Russian diaspora - an identity of its own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republic’, *Ethnic and Racial studies* 19, no. 3, (1996), 609--639.

I will bracket this aspect of the identity issue. Instead, I will focus on fluidity along the spatial axis: territoriality as a fluid and malleable property.

Territoriality is not a given. It is determined not only by geography, demography, and history, but also by such intangibles as perceptions and ideas. The members of a minority group may see themselves as clearly 'rooted' in the land, while the members of the majority culture would be unwilling to accept this claim. Whereas the minority prefers to describe itself as 'indigenous', majority members will use words such as 'migrants', 'diaspora', even 'occupants'. Thus, the struggle for territoriality starts with a struggle over terminology. The party which is able to impose its own words and concepts on the discourse will have a clear political advantage.

As I have argued elsewhere⁴, two dimensions of territorial attachment may be analytically distinguished: cultural and political. A member of a diaspora community may feel attached to his new -- or old -- homeland both culturally and politically but these two vectors may also point in different directions: An individual may be culturally attached to his/her 'historical fatherland' at the same time as his/her political allegiance is to his/her present country of residence. It should be pointed out, however, that in this respect the cultural and political dimensions of territoriality are not symmetrical. Cultural reorientations may represent a *continuum* of positions stretching from minimal change towards complete cultural re-identification with numerous intervening graduations and intermediate types. The political dimension, on the other hand, represents more of a *discontinuous* set of choices. While also political loyalties may be vague and blurred, the individual will eventually have to select one to which he desires to pledge his allegiance from among the political entities available to him. He may postpone this identity choice or hide behind a posture of 'dual loyalty', but he cannot ride two horses indefinitely. In a military conflict a soldier cannot fight on the side of two warring parties at the same time.

Below, these general points will be illustrated by an examination of the Russian minority groups in the former Soviet republics after the break-up of the unitary Soviet state. It is argued that, from very different starting points, the Russian state and the political leaders in the non-Russian Soviet successor states, somewhat ironically, have arrived at basically the same conclusion: they tend to see the Russian diaspora communities in the so-

⁴ Ibid., 613--14.

called 'near abroad' as 'extra-territorial', that is, as territorially linked to Russia rather than to the countries in which these communities are actually based. However, a substantial and possibly increasing number of the Russian diasporians themselves have come to believe that this extra-territorial status is not in their own interest, and wage a political struggle to be recognised as locals.

In the Soviet Union being 'a Russian' was not a neat and clear-cut category which could be placed alongside other national identities and recognised as clearly distinct from them. While the boundaries of all ethnic groups no doubt are blurred at the edges it can be argued that, as a result of the Soviet nationalities policies, this was, and is, particularly the case with the regard to the Russians. In the Soviet Union Russification of non-Russians was both *encouraged* through the educational system and, at the same time, *retarded* through the system of ascriptive nationality entries in the passports through which the individual inherited the official nationality of his/her parents whether s/he liked it or not. Millions of Soviet citizens saw themselves, and were regarded by others, as both 'Russians' and 'non-Russians' at the same time.

This ambiguity lingers on today and in post-Soviet Russia there is no consensus as to how Russian national identity should be defined. An interesting survey conducted in several Russian cities in 1994 revealed that, among the one thousand persons who were interviewed, 29 per cent said that in order to be considered as a Russian (*russkii*), both one's parents needed to be Russian, whereas 15 per cent opined it was enough if the one parent was Russian. Furthermore, 6 per cent replied that only those whose passports proclaimed them as 'Russian' should be counted. On the other hand, 17 per cent felt that all people living in Russia should be considered 'Russian'. And finally, 25 per cent opted for the purely subjective response category: A Russian is someone who considers himself to be Russian.⁵

For the purposes of this article I will use the official Soviet census data as a benchmark for 'Russian-ness'. Since nationality in the censuses was registered according to self-perception rather than according to the nationality entry in the passports, this definition comes close to the subjective definition. At the same time, there is every reason to believe that

⁵ See *Argumenty i fakty*, 8 February, 1994.

the ethnic self-awareness of most Soviet citizens was strongly influenced by the official nationality ascribed to them.⁶

Diaspora, territory, and terminology

The paradigmatic case of a diaspora group is of course the Jews. After their defeat in the second Jewish war in year 70, the Jews were no longer allowed to live in Palestine and were forced to settle down elsewhere. Thus, distinct and in time well-established Jewish communities sprang up in numerous distant places. However, even when these communities could claim a continuous existence in the same area, even the same houses, for centuries,⁷ they were poorly integrated into the local society. From this unrooted quality of the Jewish communities sprang the myth of Ahasverus, the perennially wandering Jew, in European folklore, as well as the myth of the Jews as the 'rootless cosmopolitans' of Stalinist propaganda.⁸ However, it is worth noting that the Stalinist campaign commenced *after* the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948. Thus, the charge was not so much that the Jews were completely bereft of roots, but that they had (spiritual and historical) roots in *the wrong country*.

And indeed, in the modern world the idea of diaspora-ness implies not so much that a group is totally devoid of territoriality but that it has its territoriality *abroad*.⁹ In this sense the term is being used in scholarly literature with reference to Chinese, Armenian, Greek, and other diasporas. Even non-European immigrant communities in West European countries, such as *Gastarbeitern* in Germany and Switzerland, are sometimes referred to as diasporas.¹⁰

⁶ See Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, 'Estimating Russification of Ethnic Identity Among Non-Russians in the USSR', *Demography* 20, no. 4 (November 1983), 461--89.

⁷ See e.g. Salman Rushdie's description of the Jewish community in Cochin on the Malabar coast in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Vintage books, 1994), 68--120.

⁸ See e.g. Frederick C. Barghoorn, *Soviet Russian Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 125--138.

⁹ It should be noted that the phenomenon of a Jewish diaspora also predates the expulsion from Palestine in year 70. In late antiquity the Jews began to settle in towns and cities all around the Mediterranean world. These communities were in the New Testament collectively referred to as the 'diaspora' (see John 7,35, Jacob 1,1, and 1 Peter 1,1.)

¹⁰ Gabriel Scheffer, ed., *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, eds., *Nations Abroad. Diaspora Politics and International Relations in the Former Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1998).

In recent years, the concept of diaspora has been enlarged to include also ethnic groups that have not migrated to distant countries, but live in territories adjacent to 'the historical homeland'. Thus, also Russians outside Russia, Serbs in Bosnia, and Hungarians outside modern Hungary are regularly referred to as diasporas.¹¹ In these cases new diaspora groups were created not by people crossing borders, but by the moving of borders across settlements. Or, in the Soviet case, by elevating the status of internal administrative borders within a state to the level of international borders. This process left the Russians living in the non-Russian Soviet republics, in David Laitin's phrase, as 'beached diasporas': their state withdrew leaving them behind.¹²

Or was this really the case? Why should we take for granted that the Russians in the Soviet successor states identify more with Russia than with their country of residence? Or, to the extent that they do so, why should we expect this situation to last? Why should the diaspora Russians not gradually transfer their attachment and allegiances -- their territoriality -- to their place of residence?¹³ These questions are at the core of the modern Russian diaspora issue.

The Soviet legacy

In the Soviet Union the link between ethnicity and territoriality was strong and institutionalised. In 1913, the future People's Commissar for the Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, wrote a treatise on *Marxism and the National Question*. Here, he presented for the first time what was later to become the 'Stalinist model of nationality'. A nation, Stalin explained, 'is an historically formed, stable community of people, which has arisen on the basis of a common language, common territory, common economic life, and common psychological cast of mind, which is manifested in a common culture'.¹⁴ On the basis of this definition, Stalin has been accused of reifying the nation, by

¹¹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich and Emil Payin, *The New Russian Diaspora. Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 1994); Kolstø, 'The new Russian diaspora'; M.Iu. Martynova, ed., *Novye slavianskie diaspori* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii, 1996).

¹² David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation. The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1998), 29.

¹³ This, in fact, is the scenario which David Laitin for his part finds most likely. Laitin, *Identity in Formation*.

¹⁴ I.V. Stalin, 'Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros', in I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1946), vol. 2, 290--367, p. 296.

defining it in terms of objective qualities.¹⁵ He certainly does, but he was hardly alone in that respect. His definition simply reflected the received wisdom of his time and place.

Of particular interest to us is Stalin's emphasis on territoriality as an essential element of nationhood. This point he uses to explain why Americans and Englishmen do not constitute one common nation in spite of the fact that they speak the same language. 'Nations are formed only on the basis of protracted and regular contacts as a result of a community of life over generations. And a protracted community of life is impossible without a common territory'.¹⁶ A side-effect of this definition is that it denies the Jews a status as a nation, but again, also on this score Stalin was hardly breaking new ground. Already in 1903 his mentor Vladimir Lenin had written that 'the Jews have ceased to be a nation, for a nation without a territory is unthinkable'.¹⁷ Lenin's statement is telling not only of his ideas on Jewishness, but also on nationhood. From the very beginning territorial thinking was thoroughly ingrained in the minds of Soviet communists.

Lenin had described the Russian empire as a 'prison-house of the peoples', and promised that if only the non-Russians helped him topple the autocratic regime he would grant them complete freedom of self-determination, up to and including the right to secede from the state altogether. Only territories can secede, not individuals, and this right presupposed the existence of separate, nationally defined territories for all major ethnic groups in the country.

After the October revolution the right of secession soon turned out to be illusory, but the territorial thinking remained and was reflected in the very structure of the Soviet socialist state. The USSR was established in 1922 as a federation in which most of the federal units were ethnically defined. Over

¹⁵ Laitin, *Identity in Formation*, 10. See also Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 102--03.

¹⁶ Stalin, 'Marksizm' vol. 2, 294.

¹⁷ *Iskra*, 22 October 1903, as quoted in Zvi Gitelman, 'The Jews: A Diaspora within a Diaspora', in Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, *Nations Abroad*, 59--78, p. 62. In the Russian empire the Jews had been designated not as a nation (*natsiia*) but as 'allogenes' (*inorodtsy*). This was a common designation for most Asian subjects of the tsar, but the Jews were the only major European group included in this category. At the same time, the tsarist authorities had in fact given the Jews a kind of quasi-territoriality, or enforced territoriality, by imposing upon them the so-called Pale of Settlement (*Cherta osedlosti*). The Pale covered most of the westernmost parts of the empire, and the Jews were forbidden to leave it permanently without permission. Established in the eighteenth century the Pale was abolished only in 1917.

the first decades of its existence the federal structure was constantly tinkered with. In time it was expanded into an elaborate hierarchy with several layers of autonomous units. At the highest level were the Union Republics, replete with all the trappings of statehood, including their own flag, anthem, constitution, criminal code, ministries, etc. The republics were named after and supposed to reflect the interests and identity of the dominant ethnic group, the so-called 'titular nation'.

Also at lower levels -- i.e. those of the autonomous republics, autonomous *oblasts* (counties) and national (later autonomous) *okrugs* (districts), in descending order -- the units were named after and supposed to function as homelands for one and occasionally two ethnic groups. Often, this was simply a matter of tokenism. The special status of the titular group was reflected only in the area of language policy and even there to a very moderate degree: teaching in the titular language was provided for the first years of grade school only, a small number of books was published in this language, etc. Most Western observers dismissed the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet state as mere sham since all major (often also most minor) political and economic decisions were taken in Moscow.¹⁸ Some researchers, however, warn against regarding the Soviet ethno-federation as a hollow shell. They point out that it gradually became filled with a certain amount of real content;¹⁹ increasingly so as the grip of the Brezhnevite regime slipped in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²⁰ In many cases the ethnically defined autonomous units provided the local elites of the titular nations with the means to influence political life locally far beyond what their share of the total population in the area would lead us to expect.²¹

¹⁸ Robert Conquest, ed., *The Last Empire. Nationality and the Soviet Future* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion. A History of Nationalities Problems in the USSR* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990).

¹⁹ E.g. Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past. Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Yuriy Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994), 414--452.

²⁰ Victor Zaslavsky, 'The Soviet Union', in Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen. eds., *After Empire. Multiethnic Societies and Nation-building* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview press, 1997), 73--96.

²¹ Some observers believe that this was more typical of the Asian than the European Union republics. See Rasma Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR. The Perspective From Below* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986/1989), 77--100.

While the Soviet population censuses operated with more than a hundred ethnic groups,²² only some fifty of them had an autonomous unit of their own. Indeed, many ethnic groups in the USSR were so small that the establishment of a separate autonomy for them was out of the question, but importantly, also some larger groups had to do without their own homeland. These were the diasporas, such as the Poles, Koreans, Bulgarians, Greeks, etc. There seem to have been two reasons for this. In most cases these diaspora groups did not live on a compact territory, but were indeed dispersed, (and if they did have their own distinct settlements in the interwar period, they no longer did so after having been forcibly deported to Central Asia during World War II).²³ The other reason was that these groups belonged to nations that had their own separate nation-states elsewhere: Poland, Korea, Bulgaria, etc., and no one could expect to have more than one territorial unit, could they? This was an egregious case of collectivist thinking: groups have rights, not individuals. The same principle was applied to the ‘internal Soviet diasporas’: Ukrainians living outside Ukraine and Tatars living outside Tataria etc. enjoyed no cultural protection or linguistic rights.²⁴

The other important exception to the rule that major national groups in the Soviet Union should be entitled to their own socialist territory, was the Russians. Contrary to what is often believed, the largest Union republic, the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR), was *not* named after the Russian nation. Rather, its designation was derived from the supra-ethnic name which Peter the Great gave his empire, *Rossia*. While the distinction between *rossiiskii*, referring to the state, and *rususkii* referring to language, culture, and ethnicity, is blurred in English and most other languages, it is unambiguously clear in Russian.

²² The number varied from census to census, reflecting changing political winds in Moscow as well as the effect of assimilatory processes on the ground. See Francine Hirsch, ‘The Soviet Union as a Work-In-Progress’, *Slavic Review* 56, no. 2 (1997), 251--278.

²³ The Germans did have their own autonomous oblast on the Volga but this was abolished in 1941 when its population was deported to Kazakhstan and Kirgizia on the suspicion that they might try to collaborate with the Nazi invaders if they got the chance.

²⁴ While some Ukrainian-language schools existed in Northern Caucasus and Moldova under Stalin, the last of these were scrapped under Khrushchev.

Does this mean that the Russians were a stateless people in the Soviet period, as some Russian nationalists claim today?²⁵ Hardly. Instead, most ethnic Russians in the Soviet Union identified with not one particular Union republic -- the RSFSR -- but with the Union as a whole, the 'Socialist Fatherland'.²⁶ They felt equally at home in all nooks and crannies of this huge multinational state, and did not really have a feeling of being a 'minority' anywhere, not even in those republics where they constituted a tiny fraction of the total population. As a result, as summarised by Paul Goble, 'For all groups except the Russians, nationality was completely territorialized: one had language and other ethnic rights only within one's own ethnic territory. Russians, on the other hand, enjoyed extraterritorial status, that is, the right to use their own language and to have their own Russian-language institutions throughout the country'.²⁷

In her seminal study *Ethnic relations in the USSR, the perspective from below* (1986), Rasma Karklins made the distinction between territorially based groups, on the one hand, and extraterritorial and dispersed groups, on the other, her most important analytical tool. 'Territoriality provides a people with a much more distinct historical and cultural identity as well as more clearly identifiable cultural, economic, and political interests', she maintained.²⁸ In most cases the non-titular nationalities in the Soviet republics were subordinate to the territorially based group, according to Karklins, but the Russians were not. 'This is a source of conflict with the titular nations of the non-Russian union republics who feel that within "their" republics they should be the decisive group'.²⁹

The Russians outside the RSFSR: for whom the bell tolled

Under perestroika the time of the non-Russian titulars had come. The story of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is well known; here only one aspect

²⁵ See e.g. Viktor Kozlov, 'Glavnyi natsional'nyi vopros v Rossii vchera i segodnya', *Etnopoliticheskie vestnik Rossii*, no. 2 (1992), 97--109; and Kseniia Mialo, 'Izgnannaia natsiia. Russkie kak inozemtsy', *Vek XX i mir*, no. 9--10 (1994), 20--29.

²⁶ Leokadia Drobizheva, 'Russian ethnonationalism', in Leokadia Drobizheva, Rose Gottemoeller, Catherine McArdle Kelleher, and Lee Walker, *Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Soviet World. Case Studies and Analysis* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996/1998), 129--147, p. 132.

²⁷ Paul Goble, 'Three Faces of Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union', in Charles A. Kupchan, ed., *Nationalism and nationalities in the New Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1995), 122--135, p. 125. Although it is quite clear what Goble means, he perhaps overstates his point somewhat. As already mentioned, the Russians also had a territorial attachment, but it was general, directed towards in the Soviet state as a whole, not towards one particular part of the country.

²⁸ Karklins, *Ethnic Relations*, 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1986, 8.

will be discussed: the titular groups' active use of their territoriality in their struggle to achieve supremacy over the local Russians and other Russophones in the Union republics.

Glasnost opened up formerly unheard-of possibilities to vent complaints and resentments of all kinds in the Soviet press, including ethnic grievances. The Russian researcher V.K. Malkova has shown how the concept of the ethnically understood 'us' changed in the non-Russian press during perestroika. The 'we' was associated with national history; with the language, culture, and economy -- and the territory of the group.³⁰

The political exploitation of territoriality in the Soviet Union during perestroika passed through several phases, Malkova writes. First, the damage which the Communist regime had caused to the ecology and environment of the national homelands was exposed and decried. In the next phase, praise for the beauty of nature was crowded out by calls for political and economic independence for the national territory. In the third stage, territoriality was turned into a weapon against 'alien' ethnic elements living in the national territory, the 'migrants', 'the newcomers', and -- in some republics -- 'the occupants'. This third stage did not set in at the same time in the various republics, but may generally be dated to around 1989–90.

At this time, one particular Russian ethnographer, Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, acquired a measure of popularity among the general Soviet public which most scholars around the world could only envy him. Gumilev's mother, Anna Akhmatova, was one of most celebrated icons of Russian literature, while his father, Nikolai Gumilev, also a poet, had been shot for counterrevolutionary activity in 1921. Gumilev Jr had himself spent years of his life in Stalin's prison camps, and many of his books had been banned by Soviet censorship. This exceptional biography probably provides part of the explanation for the almost explosive interest in his works as soon as they were allowed through the censorship during glasnost.³¹ Another, equally important reason was that they fit like hand in glove with the struggle for political independence launched by non-Russian elites at the same time.

³⁰ V.K. Malkova, *Obrazy etnosov v respublikanskikh gazetakh* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii, 1991), 56.

³¹ At the flea market in Odessa in 1992 a second-hand book by Gumilev fetched eight dollars in hard currency, eight times as much as a volume of Stalin's collected works, and fifty times as much as a hard-cover edition of one of Solzhenitsyn's novels. Also in such distant places as Riga and Almaty the present author experienced exuberant praise for Gumilev during the early 1990s.

In the monograph *The Geography of The Ethnos in the Historical Period*, Gumilev explains that the ethnic diversity of the human race is caused by geography. The various ethnic groups and cultural traditions of mankind are formed under the influence of the different landscapes and climatic conditions of the globe.

The ethnos is not a biological and not a social phenomenon. Instead, I propose that we regard it as a *geographical phenomenon*. It is always *linked to a landscape in which it is seated and which feeds the ethnos that is adapted to it*. And since the landscapes of the world are different from each other, so are the ethnoses.³²

This geographical determinism was one of the reasons why Gumilev's books had been roundly denounced by the captains of Soviet ethnography.³³ An implicit corollary of Gumilev's theory was that migrant communities were literally 'out of place'. Gumilev himself, who died in 1992, would no doubt have denied that diaspora groups with weak attachment to the soil should have fewer rights. Nevertheless, this was often the conclusion drawn by non-Russian nationalist activists.³⁴ To them, Gumilev's theories provided a (quasi-)academic and non-communist confirmation of the ideas which the Soviet nationalities practices had already imbued in them: full-fledged, genuine nations have their own territory. Cultural rights are collective and restricted to a specific territory. Diaspora groups have no territory of their own and should have no collective rights.

Not one diaspora, but fourteen

The Russian minority communities in the non-Russian former Soviet republics are far from homogeneous. Any talk of 'a' or 'the' new Russian

³² L.N. Gumilev, *Geografīa etnosa v istoricheskii period* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990), 17. Emphasis in the original.

³³ See e.g. Viktor I. Kozlov, 'O biologo-geograficheskoi kontseptsii etnicheskoi istorii', *Voprosy istorii*, no. 12 (1974), 72--85.

³⁴ Another crucial element of Gumilev's organic theory of ethnicity was his idea of *passionarnost'*, a Russian neologism based on the Latin word *passio*, or passion. *Passionarnost'* was supposed to be a measure of the collective energy of the ethnos, its inner striving towards the realisation of its coveted aims. The *passionarnost'* of the various nations waxes and wanes. At a time when some nations have reached a stage of stagnation and torpor others may be bursting with vitality and energy. During perestroika many non-Russians believed that this theory accurately described the national blossoming they were experiencing.

diaspora in the singular is highly misleading. It would probably be more fruitful to see them as fourteen different diasporas, each with their own peculiar characteristics. The qualities of each community are influenced by many different factors, such as their size (absolute, and relative to the total population in the state), ethnic cohesion, social composition, cultural distinctiveness (the cultural contrast to the dominant ethnic environment), the compactness of their settlements, and rootedness in the area.³⁵

Table 1
RUSSIANS IN THE SOVIET SUCCESSOR STATES, 1989

<i>Republic</i>	<i>In thousands</i>	<i>Percentage of total pop. in rep.</i>	<i>Percentage of non-titular pop. in rep.</i>	<i>Percentage of Russians living in urban settlements</i>	<i>Russians claiming fluency in tit. lang., in percent</i>
Russia	119,866	81.5	–	77	100.0
Estonia	475	30.3	78.8	92	14.9
Latvia	906	34.0	70.7	85	22.0
Lithuania	344	9.4	45.8	90	37.5
Belarus	1,342	13.2	59.5	87	27.3
Moldova	562	13.0	36.4	86	11.7
Ukraine	11,356	22.1	80.8	88	34.0
Georgia	341	6.3	21.1	86	23.0
Armenia	52	1.6	23.0	85	33.0
Azerbaijan	392	5.6	32.2	95	14.5
Turkmenistan	334	9.5	33.7	97	2.3
Tajikistan	388	7.6	20.2	94	3.3
Uzbekistan	1,653	8.3	29.1	95	4.6
Kyrgyzstan	917	21.5	45.1	70	1.2
Kazakhstan	6,228	37.8	62.6	77	0.8

Sources: *Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR*, (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1991); in Iu. V. Arutiunian (ed.), *Russkie. Etnosotsiologicheskie ocherki*. (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), p. 25.

Some 12.5 million diaspora Russians, or roughly half of the total, are living

³⁵ For more details, see Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (C.Hurst/Indiana University Press: London/Bloomington, 1995).

in the Slavic states of Ukraine and Belarus (see Table 1). In this region, the cultural distance between the Russians and the titular nations is very short. With the partial exception of Western Ukraine, hardly any Russians here have a feeling of living in an alien cultural environment at all.

In the Baltic states important parts of the indigenous population claim that a yawning chasm separates their own culture from Russian culture, while the Russians themselves more often underline the common elements of European-ness, Christian faith, etc. which unite them. After the incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR during World War II the influx of Russians and other Russophones to the area was dramatically steep. In the course of four decades, the share of the titular nation in the total population dropped from 90 per cent to 60 per cent in Estonia and from 75 per cent to 52 per cent in Latvia. Many Balts feel that this demographic development is undermining the very basis of their separate cultures, and are determined to roll back Russian influence. The Russians, however, are already so numerous and so entrenched in society that this is a formidable task which can be accomplished only by exceptional measures, if at all. Only in Lithuania is the proportion of the Russians so low (around 9 per cent) that they are not perceived as a serious challenge by the titular nation.

In Transcaucasia and the southern tier of Central Asia, Russian demographic penetration has historically been weak. In the 1989 census the Russians' share of the total population in all of these republics was below 10 per cent (in Armenia as low as 1.6 per cent); since that time, Russian communities in much of the region have been further depleted by out-migration. The Russian populace has been almost exclusively clustered in the larger towns and cities, particularly in the capitals, while the countryside has been dominated by the locals.

In Kazakhstan and to some degree also in Kyrgyzstan, the ethno-demographic situation is rather different from other parts of Central Asia. On the Kazakh steppe and in the Kyrgyz valleys, Russian peasants have been tilling the soil for generations. These are the only republics where rural dwellers make up substantial parts of the local Russian groups (23 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively). At the same time, the Russian presence in urban areas is also very large. The 900,000 Russians in Kyrgyzstan made up more than 20 per cent of the total population in the 1989 census, while the 6 million Russians in Kazakhstan at that time constituted no less than 45 per

cent. The vast majority of Kazakhstani Russians live in the northernmost parts of the country.

While there are large differences between the various Russian diaspora communities there are also of course significant differences *within* each group. Some members of these communities have been living outside the ethnic Russian core area for generations, whereas others are recent immigrants. These newcomers are typically less able, or willing, to adapt to the alien ethnic environment. Their command of the titular language is usually poorer. The language proficiency among the Russian diasporians is also influenced by such factors as the complexity of the various languages and the number of native speakers they meet in daily life, but even more, it seems, by such intangibles as the 'prestige' the various languages carry.³⁶ In the Soviet Union, European languages with long literary traditions had a higher status than Asian languages with recently established literary standards.

Adjusting to a life in the diaspora

When the Union republics were proclaimed as independent states during the second half of 1991, no formal distinctions were made among their citizens on ethnic criteria. With two exceptions -- Latvia and Estonia -- all former Soviet republics granted the status as original citizens to all persons residing permanently in their territory at the time when independence was proclaimed (or alternatively, when the new citizenship law was adopted or entered into force). Latvia and Estonia awarded the status of original citizens only to citizens of the interwar Latvian, respectively Estonian republic and their descendants, but neither in these countries were formal distinctions made in the constitutions or citizenship laws dividing permanent residents according to ethnic criteria.

It is necessary to underline the word 'formal' here. While all of the new states make efforts to live up to Western ideas about 'civic statehood' in their legislative practices, the ethnicity-neutral formulations in their legal acts are often a play to the gallery. As Rogers Brubaker has perceptively remarked, the civic principles in their public declarations remain external.

³⁶ Aadne Aasland, 'Russians outside Russia. The New Russian Diaspora' in Graham Smith (ed.), *The Nationalities question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 477--498.

It is hard to imagine a civic understanding coming to prevail given the pervasively institutionalised understanding of nationality as fundamentally ethnocultural rather than political, as sharply distinct from citizenship, and as grounding claims to ‘ownership’ of polities -- (which, after all, were expressly constructed of and for their eponymous ethnocultural nations).³⁷

Evidence in support of Brubaker’s view is not difficult to find. In April 1996, a local newspaper in Latvia printed a letter from a reader who claimed that

Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians who live in Latvia may not be regarded as national minorities, since all these people have their own ethnic territories somewhere else in the world. If they want to live in the territory of Latvia, they must without any reservations accept all the laws, the social structure, the mentality, language, and culture of the Latvians, in short, everything that characterises the life of the Latvian people.³⁸

Outbursts like this may perhaps be dismissed as extremist, and indeed, such categorical language will rarely be found in official documents. Even so, the reasoning behind many legal acts and official pronouncements in the new states bears a striking resemblance to the ideas expressed by this Latvian reader. A good example is the Latvian language law. Adopted in its original form in October 1988, it underwent radical changes in March 1992. In the first version, Russian-speaking residents had been guaranteed various important rights which were scrapped in the revised edition. What concerns us here is the official justification which was given for these changes in the preamble of this law: ‘Latvia is the sole ethnic territory in the world populated by the Latvian nation. The Latvian language is one of the most important preconditions for the survival of the Latvian nation and for the

³⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 432.

³⁸ *Netkarīga Rita Avize*, 11 April 1996, as quoted in Aina Antane and Boris Tsilevich, ‘Nation-building and Ethnic Integration in Latvia’, in Pål Kolstø, ed., *Nation-building and ethnic integration in post-Soviet societies. An investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview press, 1999), 63--151, p. 85.

preservation and development of its culture'.³⁹ This was an unequivocal expression of an ethno-territorial understanding of the nation.⁴⁰

A similar reasoning lay behind the decision to make Belorussian the sole state language of the Belorussian SSR in 1990, in spite of the fact that Russian was spoken by a larger part of the population. The Belorussian legislators acknowledged that 'In Belorussia people representing many different nationalities have been living for a very long time'. However, one of these peoples, the Belorussians, have a special attachment to the land, it was asserted; they are indigenous (*korennye*). 'It has become necessary to protect the Belorussian language in its state-ethnic territory (*gosudarstvenno-etnicheskoj territorii*)'.⁴¹

Also in neighbouring Ukraine more people are familiar with Russian than with the titular language. the protection of the Russian language, therefore, would presumably be a smart cause to promote in Ukrainian politics, and indeed, during the 1994 presidential elections the winning contender, Leonid Kuchma, himself a Russian-speaking Ukrainian, promised to introduce Russian as an official language.⁴² This pledge earned him the ire of Ukrainian ethnonationalists. In a blistering attack, Mykhailo Kosiv, the chairman of the Committee on Cultural Affairs in the Ukrainian Parliament, asserted that

Ukraine is the Fatherland of the Ukrainian people. This is a people that has realised its sacred right to self-determination and has created the Ukrainian state, in which there also live some national minorities. [...] The Russian people live in Russia, whereas smaller segments of this

³⁹ M.N. Guboglo, *Perelomnye gody. Tom 2. Iazykovaia reforma -- 1989. Dokumenty i materialy*. (Moscow: Tsimo. 1994), 36.

⁴⁰ A new and even more restrictive Latvian language law was adopted by the Saeima on 8 July 1999, and was severely criticised by several European Human rights organisations and by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. The Latvian president has therefore refused to sign it and has returned it to the legislators.

⁴¹ Guboglo, *Perelomnye gody*, 92. It must be added here that this argumentation was not accepted by the Belorussian population at large. In a referendum in May 1995 85 percent of the voters supported the idea of granting Russian status as a state language on a par with Belarussian. Under its current autocratic president, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, Belarus is today clearly moving away from ethnic nation-building.

⁴² He made a fine distinction between 'state language' and 'official language'. Whereas Ukrainian would remain the sole 'state language' of the country, Russian would be given the status of an 'official language'.

people live as national minorities in Ukraine (as they also do in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Belarus, etc.).⁴³

This was a clear-cut case of assigning ethnic groups to specific territories and linking rights to these assignments. And Kosiv and those who think like him had their way. In a remarkable political turnabout president Kuchma shelved the plans to give Russian an official status. The new Ukrainian constitution adopted in June 1996 mentions only one state language -- Ukrainian.

The first Kazakhstani Constitution adopted after independence (in 1993) opened with a reference to the supranational entity: 'We, the people of Kazakhstan'. The very first article, however, declared that the state of Kazakhstan is 'the Kazakh people's form of statehood' -- an ethnically based concept of the nation had somehow managed to sneak its way in again. Russophone activists in Almaty maintained that the terms 'the people of Kazakhstan' and 'the Kazakh people' were used synonymously in the Constitution: the fact that half of the population are the Russian-speakers was ignored.⁴⁴ Possibly in an attempt to alleviate such fears, when a new constitution was adopted in 1995, the reference to 'the Kazakh people's statehood' was omitted. However, at the same time a new formulation was added that even more explicitly than before underlined the special and exclusive attachment of the ethnic Kazakhs to the territory of the Kazakhstani republic. 'We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historical fate, have created a statehood on the ancient land (*iskonnaia zemlia*) of the ethnic Kazakhs'.⁴⁵ A Western expert on Kazakhstan sees this as an even stronger expression of ethnocentric nation-building than the formulations of the previous constitution.⁴⁶

The struggle for and against certain formulas in the constitutions and other official documents in the Soviet successor states is not an academic game of words for philologists, but rather the symbolic expression of hard-nosed

⁴³ Mykhailo Kosiv, 'Bez movy, netaie narodu, bez narodu, netaie derzhavy', *Holos Ukrainy*, 16 September 1994.

⁴⁴ See for example the article by Prof. V. Moiseev in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 27 August 1993.

⁴⁵ 'Konstitutsiia respubliki Kazakhstan', *Mysl'*, (Almaty), no. 10 (1995), 3--22.

⁴⁶ Shirin Akiner, *The formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation-State* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 69.

power politics. In Kazakhstan, for instance, ethnic Kazakhs have been able to dominate political life to an extent far out of proportion to their demographic strength. As pointed out above, tendencies in this direction were evident already in the late Soviet period, but have clearly been strengthened since independence. Thus, while the Kazakhs made up approximately 45 per cent of the total population in 1994, and an even smaller proportion of the adults, a full 60 per cent of the seats in the Kazakhstani Supreme Soviet were filled by ethnic Kazakhs at that time. The Russians made up some 35 per cent of the population but only 28 per cent of the MPs belonged to this group. In the new two-tiered parliament established in 1995 26 Kazakhs and 12 Russians were in part elected, in part appointed to the upper chamber, the Senate.⁴⁷ In the presidential apparatus -- the real focus of power -- the ethnic incongruities were even more glaring. In the spring of 1994, there were 74 per cent ethnic Kazakhs, 23 per cent Slavs, and 3 per cent representing non-Slav minorities (Koreans, Uzbeks, etc.) in president Nazarbaev's staff.⁴⁸

Kazakhstan is not an exception. In Latvia and Estonia the clear predominance of the titular population in political life is of course primarily secured through the exclusionary citizenship policies, but these policies by themselves do not provide the whole explanation for the political overrepresentation of the titulars. Although some 5 per cent of the Estonian citizenship population in 1992 were non-Estonians in the ethnic sense, the 100-member Estonian parliament Riigikogu elected that year did not have a five-member strong non-titular faction. Instead, it was made up of ethnic Estonians exclusively. In Latvia, Russians represented approximately 16 per cent of the citizens in 1993 and 1995, but had only 6 per cent of the deputies of the parliament, the Saeima.⁴⁹ In January 1994 it became known that of Latvia's 152 judges, 142 were ethnic Latvians. No Russian has ever been appointed minister in a Latvian government.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Bhavna Dave, 'A New Parliament Consolidates Presidential Authority', *Transition* 2, 6 (22 March 1996), 33-37; Pål Kolstø, 'Anticipating Demographic Superiority. Kazakh Thinking On Integration And Nation Building', *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 1 (1998), 51-68.

⁴⁸ A.B. Galiev, E. Babakumarov, Zh. Zhansugurova and A. Peruashev, *Mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia v Kazakhstane. Etnicheskii aspekt kadrovoi politiki* (Almaty: Institut razvitiia Kazakhstana, 1994); *O demograficheskoi situatsii v 1995 godu* (Almaty: Pravitel'stvo respublikii Kazakhstan, 1996); Kolstø, 'Anticipating Demographic Superiority', 63.

⁴⁹ The situation improved considerably, however, when ten of the 100 Latvian MPs elected to the 7th Saeima in 1998 were Russians, in addition to another nine hailing from non-Russian minorities.

⁵⁰ Pål Kolstø and Boris Tsilevich, 'Bulletin of Electoral Statistics and Public Opinion Research Data: Patterns of Nation Building and Political Integration in a Bifurcated Post-communist State: Ethnic Aspects of Parliamentary Elections in Latvia', *East European Politics and Societies* 11, no. 2 (1997), 366-391.

The Russia factor

Russian politicians across the board express grave concern about the political and cultural discrimination of Russians in the other Soviet successor states. They all agree that Russia has an obligation to act as their protector but disagree about the best ways to provide such protection, as well as how Russia's special role as human rights watch dog in the Baltic countries and the CIS area ought to be justified. It is the latter point which concerns us here.⁵¹

Roughly speaking, two principally different views have emerged from the Russian debate on the legitimacy of Russian interference in the nationality policy of the neighbour states, views that correspond to two different perceptions of 'the Russian homeland'. Russian democrats define contemporary 'Russia' as identical with 'the Russian Federation', the internationally recognised successor state to the Soviet Union. Nationalists, Communists, and imperialists of various hues, however, who do not accept the break-up of the Soviet Union as an accomplished fact, continue to identify with this defunct country as their homeland.⁵² Certain nuances and varieties in this position may be discerned: the Communists regard the USSR as the multinational homeland of all the peoples of the Soviet Union, while ethnocentric Russian imperialists see this state as the latest incarnation of the Russian empire in which ethnic Russians ought to play first fiddle. In both varieties, the political independence of the non-Russian successor states is regarded as illegitimate. The Russian minorities living in these states ought to be full-fledged members of the same Russian state like all other Russians.⁵³

The influential journalist Eduard Volodin is a leading ideologue of the restorationist view. In a hard-hitting article written in 1995 he presented a kind of *Lebensraum* justification for Russian revanchism without beating about the bush: 'The nation together with its social structure possesses a certain geographical (territorial) space and this space has to be defended

⁵¹ The first question is discussed in Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics*, (C.Hurst/Indiana University Press, London/Bloomington, 1995), 259--89.

⁵² V.I. Mukomel', 'Problemy rossiiskoi diaspory v kontekste vnutripoliticheskoi bor'by', *Informatsionno-analiticheskii biulleten'*, *Analiticheskoe upravlenie prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 1, May (1995), 53--76, pp. 56--57.

⁵³ Vera Tolz, 'Conflicting "Homeland Myths" and Nation-State Building in postcommunist Russia', *Slavic Review* 57, no. 2 (1998.), 267--294.

against outside invaders'. The instrument that the nation uses to protect its territory is the State. Any nation worthy of the name must have a territory large enough for its members to move about freely, without getting in each others' way. And that is why, according to Volodin, Central Asia belongs to the natural territory of Russia. Also the Russian presence in the Baltic is vital and historically legitimate.⁵⁴

In contrast to this view, Russian politicians who accept the break-up of the Soviet Union are faced with the task of explaining why Russia should be entitled to a say in what the leaders of the other former Soviet republics regard as their 'internal affairs'. The simplistic answer to this question is that Russia is the state formation of the Russian nation, and the fact that some members of this nation happen to be living in other countries, does not deprive of them of the right of Russian protection. However, as explained above, Russia was *not* the homeland of ethnic Russians, and they are not assigned any status as the 'titular nation' of the present-day Russian Federation either. Responsible Russian politicians strenuously try not to fall into 'the ethnic trap': After all, their main criticism against the other Soviet successor states is that these states are based on an exclusionist, ethnic concept of the nation which favours the titulars over other groups. Russian liberals must weight their words carefully lest their statements be interpreted as expressions of a similar kind of ethnic thinking.

During the early 1990s Russian authorities experimented with various terms by which to designate the relationship of Russia to the diaspora communities in the 'near abroad'. Certain expressions seem to have been rejected at an early stage and are rarely used in the official lexicon. They include words like 'diaspora' and 'minority' (whether 'national', 'ethnic', or 'cultural'). The choice of the word 'minority' might have signalled that the Russian authorities regard these groups as territorially based in their respective countries of residence. Instead, terms like *grazhdane* (citizens) and *vykhodtsy* (those who hail from, or have left, Russia) were bandied about. In May 1991, for instance, Boris Yeltsin stated that '*vykhodtsy* from Russia live in all republics of the Union, and we will not abandon those of our *grazhdane* who live there to the mercy of fate'.⁵⁵ This remark, however, was made before the break-up of the Soviet Union. While the term *grazhdane*

⁵⁴ Eduard Volodin, 'Sud'ba russkoi natsii -- sud'ba Rossii', *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 4 (1995), 3--16, on 9--10.

⁵⁵ *Izvestiia*, 24 May 1991.

could at this time perhaps be used in such a vague and metaphorical sense, after the adoption of citizenship laws in Russia and the other successor states it acquired a very precise meaning: persons holding a Russian passport.⁵⁶ Only a small fraction of the new Russian diaspora belongs to this group in the strict sense. By the spring of 1997 approximately one million Russian diasporians, or 4 per cent of the total, had obtained Russian citizenship and most of the others will probably not do so in the foreseeable future.⁵⁷

Another term in circulation is *ruskoiazychnye*, 'Russian-speakers', and a fourth is *etnicheskie rossiane* or 'ethnic rossiane'.⁵⁸ Since the neologism *rossiane* had been invented under perestroika precisely in order to find an ethnically neutral way to describe the citizens of Russia, 'ethnic rossiane' sounded like a curious hybrid, bordering on an oxymoron.⁵⁹

The term which Russian officialdom seems to have settled on is *sootchestvenniki*, which literally means 'compatriots'. A special Duma committee is called 'the Committee on CIS affairs and Compatriots Abroad', and in November 1998 the Russian parliament adopted a law on 'The State Policy Of The Russian Federation Towards Compatriots Abroad'.⁶⁰ Also the president and his apparatus show a clear preference for this term. In August 1994 the Russian government adopted an important policy document, 'The main directions of the state policy of the Russian Federation towards *sootchestvenniki* living abroad'.⁶¹ The document declared that 'the Government of the Russian Federation intends to make use of all possible acceptable means under international law to ensure that the rights of its

⁵⁶ However, also at a later stage *grazhdane* continued to be used occasionally in official documents in a very loose sense, divorced from the legal context of state citizenship. See E.I. Filippova, 'Novaia russkaia diaspora', in Martynova, *Novye slavianskie diaspori*, 45--80, p. 58.

⁵⁷ This figure gives the total number of former Soviet citizens outside Russia who had taken Russian citizenship, but since very many do so on the eve of leaving for Russia no one, it seems, not even Russian authorities, knows for sure how many of these continue to live in one of the non-Russian Soviet successor states today. Most likely this figure is considerably lower.

⁵⁸ Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia. The Politics of National Identity* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 16; Mukomel', 'Problemy rossiiskoi diaspori'.

⁵⁹ At a press briefing in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 1992, a Ministry spokesman defined '*etnicheskie rossiane*' as 'all *vykhodtsy* from Russia, (irrespective of generation) who are living abroad. Ethnicity (*natsional'nost*) plays no role'. Quoted in *Estonia*, 6 June 1992, 2.

⁶⁰ 'Zakon o gosudarstvennoi politike Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov za rubezhem. [Law On The State Policy Of The Russian Federation Towards Compatriots Abroad]', adopted on 13 November 1998.

⁶¹ 'Osnovnye napravleniia gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh sa rubezhom', Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii 31 August 1994, no. 1064.

compatriots abroad are not encroached upon'. That Russia has a right and, indeed, a moral obligation to pose as a protector of the Russian diaspora communities in the neighbouring states was apparently regarded as so obvious that the case did not even have to be argued.⁶² Russia was designated as 'the historical motherland' (*istoricheskaja rodina*) of the Russians. The use of the term 'historic' in this context, would, one might think, make the relationship of Russia to these communities a thing of the past. But no, the strong message of this and similar documents is that Russia, also at the present time, has a very definite role to play in the life of the Russian minorities in the other Soviet successor states.

At the same time, the same document states that it is a priority concern of the Russian government 'to promote the voluntary integration of [the compatriots] into the political, social, and economic life of the newly independent states'. This objective, however, may well be obstructed by the very terminology it employs and by the general thinking on the Russian diaspora issue which it reflects. To the same degree as Russia poses as a protector of the Russophone minorities in the neighbouring states and is becoming involved in the domestic affairs of these countries, this involvement may -- almost irrespective of motives and causes -- induce local Russians to direct their political and cultural allegiance not towards their country of residence, but towards Russia. Thus, the stronger the authorities of the Russian Federation argue their right defend the Russians in the neighbouring states -- by posing as their historical fatherland -- the more they may weaken the local territoriality of these people and, indirectly at least, also the basis for their rights in their state of residence.⁶³

The remarkable fact is that, in spite of representing very different interests on the Russian diaspora issue, the political pronouncements of both Russia and the new nationalising states tend to propel the local Russians in the same direction, towards the external homeland rather than towards local territoriality, as push and pull factors respectively. The dominant discourse in Russian politics as well as in their country of residence tells them that Russia is where they 'really' belong. To be sure, no one denounces them as

⁶² In Neil Melvin's view, it is an important element of official Russian self-understanding today that Russia is a 'diasporic state'. Neil Melvin, 'The Russians: Diaspora and the End of Empire', in Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, *Nations Abroad*, 27--58, p. 47.

⁶³ To point out this tension between aims and means is not the same as to pass a normative judgement on it. The morality of Russian diaspora policies must be judged by other criteria.

‘rootless cosmopolitans’. Everyone acknowledges that they do have roots, only not in the local soil.

Territorialising the diasporas

However, deeds speak louder than words and many Russian diasporians feel that the actions -- or rather the inaction -- of the Russian state belie its intentions. The ‘Main Directions’ programme of the Russian government fleshes out a number of specific measures which the Russian state pledges to undertake to protect the Russian ‘compatriots’ -- in the fields of media and information technology; diplomacy; economic support; and social and cultural measures. The social and cultural fields, in particular, might seem promising in this respect. Hardly anyone in the new states would object to Russian state support for local Russian cultural centres. Germany, Poland, Turkey, Israel, and other ‘external homelands’ are already actively supporting schools, media outlets, and cultural activities of ‘their’ respective diasporas in the former Soviet republics, without provoking any negative reactions. Furthermore, such cultural support would not require very great outlays for the Russian state, at least not compared to other types of engagements in the CIS states, such as military interventions.

Even so, those Russians and other Russophones in the ‘near abroad’ who try to organise their co-ethnics for joint cultural activities often feel that the financial support they receive from the Russian state leaves much to be desired. A good case in point is the struggle for control over the old Palace of Peter the Great in Riga in 1997. The Latvian Centre of Russian Culture finally won the right to rent the palace and tried to turn it into a Russian cultural centre. It soon transpired, however, that the organisation was unable to cover the expenses for its restoration and maintenance and the Latvian government threatened to annul the tenancy contract.⁶⁴ The Russian ambassador to Latvia involved himself in the matter, but not by pledging Russian authorities to support this project financially, as it had been hoped that he would do. Instead, he signed a petition appealing for donations.⁶⁵ Russophone activists in other Soviet successor states can tell similar stories about tightly held Russian purse strings.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *SM-segodnia*, 28 January 1997.

⁶⁵ Antane and Tsilevich, ‘Nation-building and Ethnic Integration’, 146.

⁶⁶ Author’s interviews with, *inter alia*, Aleksandr Belopotapov and Ivan Garev at the Russian Cultural Centre in Chisinau, September 1992; Nina Sidorova at the Russian Cultural Centre and Iurii Bunakov in ‘the Russian Community’, both in Almaty, May 1993; and Halida Agapova, Narva Labour Union, Narva, January 1999.

As long as the Russian state is unwilling to 'put its money where its mouth is' -- to give the saying a slightly new meaning -- the Russian minorities in the former Soviet republics might find its loud declarations of support less than convincing. The concept of 'a beached diaspora' acquires the added quality, as it were, of 'a marooned diaspora'. This feeling of abandonment weakens the ties to the 'historical homeland' and induces the Russians to try to find a new footing in the local community, by relying on themselves. Thus, while the rhetoric of diaspora politics in Russia may tend to sustain an 'external territoriality' for the Russian diaspora communities, the -- actual or perceived -- inaction of Russia in support of these communities may turn them away from Russia towards their new homelands.

In contrast to the 'compatriots' discourse in Moscow some Russian diaspora leaders are consciously cultivating an alternative discourse, about 'indigenusness'.⁶⁷ The message of this discourse is that 'We are no less indigenous than you, the titulars, are'. Or, if this sounds unconvincing: 'we will do our utmost to become just as territorial as you are.'

When a 'Law on national minorities' was discussed in Ukraine in early 1992, the Russophone 'Party of Slavic Unity' published a statement protesting against the very concept of 'minority'. 'Families of Russians, Belorussians, Poles, Greeks, Crimean Tatars, and other people who have lived for centuries in Ukraine, are not national minorities, but indigenous (*korennyye*) inhabitants of Ukraine', the party insisted.⁶⁸ In the same year a Russian historian from Ust-Kamenogorsk, a compactly Slavic city in the north-eastern Altai region of Kazakhstan, wrote a small treatise on *Russians, Kazakhs, and Altai*. His message was that ethnic Kazakhs had no right to claim Kazakhstan as their exclusive ancient homeland -- at least not in north-

⁶⁷ To be sure, many of the diaspora leaders themselves -- those who agree with the 'red-brown' restorationists in Moscow -- will not accept my view that this discourse about 'indigenusness' represents an alternative to the 'compatriots' discourse. On the contrary, since 'Russia' in their view ought to be coterminous with the territory of the former Soviet Union, they will tend to see these two discourses as basically two versions of the same message.

⁶⁸ *Zaiavlenie Partii Slavianskogo Edinstva (Ukrainy)*. Undated leaflet.

eastern Kazakhstan. ‘The terms “indigenous people” and “indigenous inhabitants” . . . are *incorrect*.’⁶⁹

Other Russians in Kazakhstan argue the case of local territoriality for the non-titular population in slightly different terms. They point not to the record of past centuries, but to the life stories of the people who live in Kazakhstan today. Surveys in Kazakhstan indicate that the majority of the Slavic inhabitants are either born in the country or have lived there for more than ten years. The organiser of one of these surveys wrote in her analytical report that ‘as the tables show, the non-titular persons interviewed have struck rather deep roots (*ukorenilis*) in the soil of Kazakhstan. They have life traditions here stretching several generations back, and their dear ones are buried here’.⁷⁰

Similar observations have been made in the Baltics. Having conducted a series of surveys in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, Richard Rose of the University of Strathclyde concluded that a large majority of the Russian-speakers in these countries have a pair of identities: as Russians, and as residents of a city or a region within a Baltic state. ‘Significantly, a majority put their local identity before their national identity; they are Rigans and then Russians, or Vilnians and then Russians’.⁷¹

Rose points to an important aspect of the rootedness of the Russian diasporians: Rather than having a state or a country as its focus, it may be directed towards a very specific community, town, or city. The Russian word for motherland -- *rodina* -- may also be translated as ‘the place where I was born’, or ‘my home district’. (Sometimes the latter is referred to as ‘the small *rodina*’ in contrast to ‘the big *Rodina*’, the state or the country.) Identification with a particular city or town in one of the non-Russian successor states does not by itself imply that the person identifies politically with the country in which this city is located. Even for a Russian who is intensely conscious of being a Narvian or a Crimean, the Big *Rodina* may still be the Russian Empire.

⁶⁹ A. Feoktistov, *Russkie, kazakhi i Altai* (Ust-Kamenogorsk: Alfa i Omega, 1992), 40. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁰ Irina Malkova from the Giller Institute. Irina Malkova, ‘Analiticheskii otchet po rezul'tatam issledovaniia na temu "Osobennosti natsional'nogo stroitel'stva i problemy sozdaniia edinogo gosudarstva v bikul'turnykh obshchestvakh"’ (Almaty: Institut Gillera, 1996), 10.

⁷¹ Richard Rose, ‘Rights and Obligations of Individuals in the Baltic States’, *East European Constitutional Review*, Winter (1997), 35--43, p. 40.

The future trajectories of the political allegiances of the Russian diasporians will to a large degree be influenced by the actions and attitudes of the titular group and the state authorities in their country of residence. Integration is a two-way affair,⁷² and if the non-titulars conclude that their integrative endeavours are not being reciprocated, a strong feeling of local attachment may galvanise them into determined opposition against a nationalising regime that refuses to accept them as full-fledged members of the 'nation'. This can give rise to secessionism as has occurred with respect to the Dniester republic in Eastern Moldova.⁷³ An official memorial book commemorating the more than four-hundred victims on the Dniestria side in the Moldovan civil war in 1992 explained the outbreak of the war thus: The inhabitants of Moldova had been inhumanely divided into two categories: the Moldovans, who were regarded as the *korennoi* population, the 'masters of the land', versus the 'newcomers', the 'migrants', and 'occupants'. While most Western observers tend to describe the Russian population in the Dniester as late arrivals, they themselves insist that they live on 'ancient Slavic land'.⁷⁴

In 1996--1998 I led a research team which conducted large-scale surveys in Latvia, Kazakhstan, Estonia, and Moldova.⁷⁵ In one question we asked, 'Which country do you regard as your homeland?' In Kazakhstan, 35 per cent of the Russians answered 'USSR', 10 per cent 'the Kazakh SSR', and 40 per cent 'Kazakhstan'. Remarkably, only 13 per cent ticked off for 'Russia'. In Latvia, support for the Russia option was even lower: 11.4 per

⁷² For a brilliant theoretical treatment of integration processes from this perspective, see R. A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative ethnic relations: a framework for theory and research* (New York: Random House, 1970), 63--84.

⁷³ Pål Kolstø and Andrei Malgin, 'The Transnistrian Republic: A case of politicized Regionalism', *Nationalities papers* 26, no. 1 (1998), 103--128.

⁷⁴ *Kniga pamiati zashchitnikov Pridnestrov'ia* (Tiraspol: no publisher given, 1995), 16 and 20.

⁷⁵ The surveys included 1000 respondents in each country. The survey in Kazakhstan was organised by the Giller Institute between May and October 1996 on 53 different locations in 10 oblasts. The Latvian survey was conducted by the Laboratory of Sociological Research at the Daugavpils Pedagogical University in September 1997 in all five administrative regions of Latvia. A full report of these survey results can be found in Irina Malkova, Pål Kolstø, and Hans O. Melberg, 'Attitudinal and Linguistic Integration in Kazakstan and Latvia', in Kolstø, *Nation-building and ethnic integration*, 227--280.

The Estonian survey was organised by SaarPoll and the Moldovan survey by 'Moldova Moderna', again with 1000 respondents in each country. The data from these two countries are still in the process of being analysed. In all surveys the respondents were free to chose whatever ethnic identity they wanted. Those who indicated a dual identity (ranging from 5 to 8 percent in the various surveys), were grouped together with the nationality they indicated as their identity of first choice.

cent, while nostalgia for the defunct USSR was significantly low: 18 per cent.⁷⁶ 41 per cent claimed that 'Latvia' was their homeland.

At the same time, the political allegiance of Russians in Kazakhstan seems to have been moving away from this new state over the last years. True, 5 per cent of the Russian respondents in our survey indicated that they had earlier been opposed to the establishment of an independent Kazakhstani state but were now in favour of it, but 12 per cent confided that they had previously supported Kazakhstani statehood, and had later turned against it.⁷⁷

In Moldova the attachment of Russians to Russia was just as low as in Kazakhstan: 13 per cent. Only 12 per cent of the Russians in Moldova claimed that they had supported independent Moldovan statehood from the very beginning, whereas no less than 42 per cent reported that they had rejected it all along.

The strongest attachment to Russian we found among Russians in Estonia: 27 per cent claimed that Russia was their homeland. This could perhaps be seen as an indication of a low degree of local territoriality for Russians in Estonia; indeed, 55 per cent of them reported that they were born outside the country. However, as pointed out above, cultural and political identities may develop in different directions, and in political terms Russians in Estonia, somewhat surprisingly, seem to identify more with their country of residence than any other Russian diaspora group in our sample: 41.5 per cent claimed that they had always supported Estonian independence, while another 15 per cent has switched from hostility earlier to support now. Only 23 per cent are opposed to Estonian independence today. Significantly, even among those who said that Russia is their homeland, 34 per cent claim that they have always supported Estonian independence.

In Latvia, more than 100,000 Russophones who have become eligible for Latvian citizenship after 1995 have failed to apply for one. While the reasons for this lapse remain obscure, and may stem from many different causes, one of them is clearly the lack of identification with the Latvian Republic. Many local Russians are strongly attached to Latvia as a country and territory, but for all that they do not identify with the Latvian *state*. This is perhaps unsurprising as the political authorities in Latvia are emitting

⁷⁶ Malkova, Kolstø, and Melberg, *ibid.*, 239.

⁷⁷ Malkova, 'Analiticheskii otchet', 72.

rather unambiguous signals to the effect that they are not intending to invite them into the fold of the Latvian nation. So they naturally decline membership of a club that does not want to have them as members. However, this explanation may be difficult to reconcile with the results from our Estonian survey which showed that local Russians seem to identify not only with Estonia as a *country* but also as an *independent state*, in spite of the exclusionary policies pursued by the Estonian government towards them.

Territoriality and perceptions

The quality of territoriality cannot be divorced from quantifiable factors such as duration of residence, compactness and size of settlements, etc. However, ultimately it is a matter of perceptions. You don't have roots in a region if you yourself don't feel that you do. A person will acquire such a sense of attachment only when and to the degree that s/he sees this identity as more advantageous than the alternatives. As long as, and to the degree that the members of the Russian communities in the non-Russian Soviet successor states believe that they can benefit from playing 'the Russian card', perceiving themselves as Russians not only in the cultural and ethnic sense, but also in some political or territorial sense, most of them will continue to do so. However, the day when this option loses its appeal, the local Russians will start to look for other ways and means to secure their political representation, to get a fair share of prestigious jobs in the community, prop up the status of the Russian language, and protect Russian educational institutions. The fact that Russia for all practical purposes has failed to live up to its pledge to support the Russian diaspora communities financially may in the long run prove to be more momentous than the sometimes high-pitched Russian rhetoric in their defence.

However, I will argue that self-perception is not enough. In order for a self-perceived identity to hold, it must be also accepted by other interested parties, by the 'external national homeland' and the 'new nationalizing state', to use Roger Brubaker's terminology.⁷⁸ The Ossetians in Southern Ossetia certainly regard themselves as natives of the region they inhabit in Northern Georgia, having lived there for more than two hundred years. This claim, however, is generally repudiated by ethnic Georgians who insists that

⁷⁸ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

the territoriality of the Ossetians is in Northern Ossetia on the other side of the mountain range, whence they migrated in the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ The issue is politically highly contentious and provides part of the explanation for the civil war which broke out in the region in 1992.

The Russians in the former Soviet republics will never reach a status as an 'autochthonous population', either in their own eyes, or in the eyes of others. Such a claim is simply not credible and is not one of the available options. But between the positions of 'autochthonous' and 'diaspora' there is not an empty space but a continuum, and the Russians may gradually move from the diaspora end of the spectrum towards the centre. There we find the rather amorphous category of 'national minority'.

'National minorities' *do* have certain specific rights under international law, most recently spelled out in the Council of Europe Framework Convention in 1995.⁸⁰ The main problem with this term from a legal point of view is that no legally binding documents define the groups that fall under the category. From an identity point of view, however, this undefined quality may provide for flexibility and elasticity: Those groups that regard themselves as national minorities, it can be argued, may be regarded as such.

However, as the attentive reader may have noticed, in several of the statements quoted above, by Russians and non-Russians alike, the status of 'national minority' for the Russians in the former Soviet republics is explicitly rejected. Part of the explanation for this seems to be the legacy of Soviet ideology in which the notion of a 'national minority' had a bad ring. This was allegedly something one would find in capitalist countries only: in the Soviet Union all citizens were equal; identifying majorities and minorities was immaterial. This perception lingers on today in some of the new states. In our survey in Kazakhstan, less than 10 per cent agreed that they belonged to a minority, in Moldova, 29 per cent.⁸¹ In the Baltics, however, the process of 'minoritisation' seems to have progressed further: in

⁷⁹ Viktor Shnirelman, 'National identity and myths in Transcaucasia', in Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, and Edward Allworth, *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands. The politics of National Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998), 48-66, on 59-64.

⁸⁰ *Framework convention for the protection of national minorities and explanatory report* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, February 1995).

⁸¹ 30 percent of the respondents in Kazakhstan insisted that 'there are no national minorities in Kazakhstan'.

Latvia more than a third of the Russians were ready accept this self-designation, in Estonia 48 per cent.⁸²

To some extent the territorialisation of the Russian diaspora groups is a matter of time: those who leave the non-Russian successor states for Russia indirectly contribute to the territorialisation of those who stay behind. Those who leave first are usually those who arrived last and feel least attachment to the region. As the years pass those who remain will feel that their roots grow deeper, if for no other reason than that their loved ones are buried in local soil.

⁸² Malkova, Kolstø and Melberg, 'Attitudinal and Linguistic Integration', 228--232.