



Framing the National Question in Central and Eastern Europe: A Quadratic Nexus?

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This paper stems from research on the 'national question' in Estonia during the past decade – the relationship between the restored Estonian Republic, its large, mainly Russophone 'non-titular' population and a Russian state which has reserved the right to defend the rights of so-called 'compatriots' residing in the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union (Smith 1997).¹ At first sight, the Estonian case apparently constitutes a clear example of what Rogers Brubaker has famously termed the 'triadic nexus' – the dynamic interaction of three forms of nationalism which has informed the politics of the post-socialist states. Estonia's citizenship and language policies, for instance, are commonly depicted as 'nationalising' measures intended to restore a unitary nation-state.² These policies have been condemned both by the Russian Federation and by representatives of 'Russian-speaking' political parties and organisations within Estonia, who continue to argue for a bi-national or multi-national variant of statehood (Vetik 1999). In the course of my own research, however, it has become clear that the bases of Brubaker's theory can be questioned on a number of counts. What follows is therefore a critical analysis of the 'triadic nexus'. Above all, I argue, Brubaker neglects the crucial role of international organisations such as the EU, NATO, the OSCE and the Council of Europe in shaping the post-communist identity politics of Central and Eastern Europe. In this regard, I suggest it would be more apt to talk of a quadratic nexus linking nationalising states, national minorities and external national homelands to the institutions of an ascendant and expansive 'Euro-Atlantic space'. I will attempt to illustrate what I understand by the 'quadratic nexus' by making reference to the Estonian case.

Brubaker's Triadic Nexus Theory

Brubaker developed his theory in a series of essays, published from 1993 onwards. These were then combined together to form the book *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, published in 1996. The point of departure of the latter work is to deny any suggestion that post-Cold War Europe might be entering a 'post-nationalist' era. On the contrary, Brubaker claims that 'the future displayed by Europe to the world looks distressingly like the past' (Brubaker 1996: 2). The supposed drive towards institutionalised supranationality in Western Europe, symbolised by the year 1992, was 'rudely pre-empted' by the outbreak of a bloody war in Yugoslavia, whilst a number of developments across the continent suggested that Europe was moving *back* to the nation-state rather than *beyond* it (ibid.). The aim of his work, however, is not to 'engage in an unproductive debate about nationalism and the nation-state in general', but rather to 'grapple with the 'actually existing nationalisms' of a particular - and particularly volatile - region' (Brubaker 1996: 3). The region in question is the area once occupied by the Habsburg, Ottoman and Romanov Empires. The defining feature of this region during the 19th and 20th centuries, he argues, has been the progressive nationalisation of political space. The reorganisation of 'loosely integrated, polyethnic, polyreligious and polylinguistic' empires along ostensibly national lines began with the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century, gained huge impetus following World War One, but remained incomplete until the recent break-up of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia (ibid.). As was the case with the states which emerged from the ruins of the Habsburg, Ottoman and

¹ For a summary, see David J. Smith (1998). I have also referred to aspects of this work as part of a general survey of post-soviet transition in Estonia (Smith 2001b).

² For a summary of Brubaker's theory, see Brubaker (1996: 4-5); for a depiction of Estonia as a 'nationalising' state, see, for example, Graham Smith (1999: 80-83).

Tsarist empires after World War One, however, the new (or recreated) successor states to Yugoslavia and the USSR are only putatively national, in so far as nearly all contain significant ethnic minority populations within their borders. Recent changes have thus failed to solve the national question; rather, they have simply recast in a different form.

This 'reframed' national question is characterised in terms of the interaction between three elements. The first of these is what Brubaker calls the 'nationalising' state'. In his view, the dominant mode of nation building in the countries created or restored following the collapse of Yugoslavia and the USSR inevitably revolves around a 'nationalising' discourse which portrays the state as property of a single 'core' or 'titular' nation, defined in *ethno-cultural terms* and distinct from the state citizenry as a whole. Typically, the nationalising discourse portrays the state as an 'incomplete nation-state'. Despite having attained a state 'of its own', the core nation is defined as being in a weak cultural, economic or demographic position within it. This state of affairs is held to be a legacy of past discrimination against the nation in the period before it attained independence. In the light of this weakness, specific action is needed to promote the language, culture, demographic position, economic welfare and political dominance of the core nation. This discourse forms the basis for 'nationalising' state policies and practices towards minority groups. Nationalising policies might attempt to *assimilate* a minority linguistically and culturally into the core nation. Alternatively, if it is felt that a minority cannot or should not be assimilated, then the policy is more likely to be one of *dissimilation*. By dissimilation, Brubaker understands attempts to displace or exclude minority groups from certain key positions. Here the aim is weaken the minority as an organised group, thereby preventing it from exercising undue influence over the political, cultural or economic life of the new state (Brubaker 1996: 79-106).

This 'nationalising' model is sharply distinguished from what Brubaker terms the civic state. The latter is described as state of and for all of its citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity. Ethnicity has '*no public significance*' (my italics) and individuals are the constituent units of the polity. This understanding, Brubaker asserts, captures well the historical experience of western state nations (Brubaker 1996: 34, 105). Among other potential models of statehood, he lists the binational or multinational state, understood to be a state of and for two or more ethnocultural core nations. Here, ethnicity has major public significance and ethnonational groups are the constituent units of the polity. Finally, there is the 'hybrid model' of minority rights. Here, 'the state is understood as a national, but not a nationalising, state; members of minority groups are guaranteed not only equal rights as citizens (and thus protected, in principle, against differentialist nationalising practices) but also certain specific minority rights, notably in the domain of language and education (and are thus protected, in principle, against assimilationist nationalising practices)' (Brubaker 1996: 105). According to Brubaker, however, neither the civic nor the binational-multinational model has much chance of prevailing in the new states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. With regard to the former, he notes that 'it is hard to imagine a civic self-understanding coming to prevail given the pervasively institutionalised understandings of nationality as fundamentally ethnocultural rather than political, as sharply distinct from citizenship and as grounding claims to ownership of polities' (ibid.). For the same reason, he asserts, it is hard to imagine a binational or multinational understanding of the state coming to prevail.

National minorities make up the second element of the national question as framed by Brubaker. Nationalising state practices are apt to evoke a backlash on the part of non-titular groups residing within the borders of the state. According to Brubaker, the term 'national minority' denotes 'a dynamic political stance, or, more precisely, a family of related yet mutually competing political stances, not a static ethno-demographic condition (see below)' (Brubaker 1996: 60). Minority nationalism defines the identity of



the non-titular ethnocultural group in specifically 'national' rather than merely 'ethnic' terms. On this basis, it asserts certain collective rights. Such demands are likely to find support from 'external national homelands' to which the group is linked by virtue of ethno-cultural identity (but not citizenship). Political spokesmen in these states assert the right – obligation – to protect the interests of their ethno-national kinfolk residing in other states. Such claims are typically made when the ethnonational kin are seen as threatened by the nationalising nationalism of the state in which they live.

In his opening chapter 'Rethinking nationhood', Brubaker disputes the long-standing view of nations as real entities, as substantial, enduring collectivities. The problem with this approach, he argues, is that it adopts categories of practice as categories of analysis. The reality of the group, he notes has been called into question by a number of developments in social theory: the flourishing of network theory and of theories of rational action with their relentless methodological individualism; the shift away from structuralism towards a variety of more 'constructivist' theoretical stances; and 'an emergent postmodernist theoretical sensibility which emphasises the fragmentary, the ephemeral and the erosion of fixed forms and clear boundaries.' (Brubaker 1996: 13) Brubaker's own analysis treats nation 'not as substance but as institutionalised form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as contingent event.' (Brubaker 1996: 16) The world as he sees it is not a world of nations. Rather, 'it is a world in which nationhood is pervasively institutionalised in the practice of states and the state system. It is a world in which [the concept of] nation is widely, if unevenly available and resonant as a category of social vision and division.' (Brubaker 1996: 21) Rather than asking the question 'what is a nation?', we should instead ask 'how is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalised within and among states? How does nation work as practical category, as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame? What makes the nation-evoking, nation-inducing efforts of political entrepreneurs more or less likely to succeed? (Brubaker 1996: 17)

Nationalising states, national minorities and external national homelands should therefore be viewed not as fixed entities, but rather as dynamic and relational concepts. Using methodology developed by Pierre Bourdieu, he depicts them as variably configured and continuously contested political fields in which different organisations, parties, movements or individual political entrepreneurs vie to advance their own particular political stance and to gain acceptance as the legitimate representative of the group. These three forms of nationalism are interlocking and interactive. They are bound together in a single interdependent relational nexus. In this regard, Brubaker (1996: 58) notes that:

Projects of nationalisation or national integration in the new nation states ... 'exist' and exercise their effects not in isolation but in a relational field that includes both the national minority and its external national homeland. In this relational field, minority and homeland elites continuously monitor the new nation-state and are especially sensitive to any signs of projects of 'nationalisation' or 'national integration'. When they perceive such signs, they seek to build up and sustain a perception of the state as an oppressively or unjustly nationalising state. And they might act on this perception.

The 'Triadic Nexus' – a Critique

The 'Triadic Nexus' theory has done much to shape research on the national question in post-communist states. Recently, however, a number of authors have criticised Brubaker's ideas on statehood as confusing and potentially misleading. Not least, I would argue, Brubaker's theory reflects a long-standing tendency to treat Central and Eastern Europe as a distinct region with what C. A. Macartney euphemistically termed a 'special

quality' all of its own.³ In this respect, talk of a study of the 'actually existing nationalisms' of CEE is revealing, since it implies that nationalism is a dormant force in the West. As Taras Kuzio has demonstrated, Brubaker's sharp distinction between 'western civic' states and 'eastern nationalising' states is deeply questionable, since, in most cases, it is difficult to differentiate the so-called 'nationalising' practices of CEE states from earlier processes of 'nation-building' which occurred in the putatively 'civic' states of the West (Kuzio 2001). In unitary nation-states such as Britain, France and the USA, national identity has been constructed around an ethno-cultural core. If one accepts this argument, then it follows that 'all civic states are *de facto* nationalising to varying degrees' and the validity of Brubaker's ideas is thereby undermined (*ibid.*). As Kuzio notes, the difference between a civic and an ethnic state rests not so much on the presence of ethno-cultural components - these are something that all states possess. Rather, it hinges upon the degree of democratisation and of inclusivity: the readiness of the state to allow all residents to integrate into the polity and the societal culture, regardless of origin. This is to say that the state does not encourage dissimilating practices, as defined by Brubaker, or even worse, practices such as ethnic cleansing - the systematic killing and/or expulsion of a particular ethnic group. Today, one could equally argue that a civic state does not engage in attempts to assimilate forcibly ethnic minority groups - i.e., that integration into a common societal culture is consistent with the internal diversity and the possibility for minority groups to practice their own culture where they desire to do this. The extent to which multiculturalism should be actively encouraged within civic societies is, however, obviously open to debate (*ibid.*).

Thus, one could argue that although Brubaker refutes the Kohn tendency to differentiate between 'good civic western' and 'bad ethnic Eastern' nationalism, his work is in fact grounded in the long-standing stereotype. Arguing that this image is badly in need of revision, Kuzio (2001: 151) has devised a new taxonomy of civic/ethnic (nationalising) states embracing the whole of Europe and North America. According to this scheme, only Belarus and Yugoslavia can be classed as nationalising ethnic states. Kuzio's analysis is valuable in that it highlights the homogenising logic of the modern state. This logic became apparent in the longer-established 'civic' states of the West during the 19th-early 20th century, when ethnic minorities were progressively assimilated into a new transcendent national identity founded on the notion of a single official language of education and administration. If the homogenisation of statehood was at times deeply conflictual in the West, it was even more problematic in the multinational empires of the East, which, by the late 19th century, already contained 'substantial and self-conscious national minorities' in the sense defined by Brubaker (1996: 35). Whilst the Mazzinian precept of 'to each nation a state of its own' quickly became the dominant conception of national self-determination in this part of the world, the complex ethnic geography of the region meant that, in practice, it would be impossible to realise this vision. Rightly foreseeing the dangers of trying to apply the western model of the 'homogenising' state to the multi-national patchwork of Central and Eastern Europe, more prescient political actors stressed the need to recognise ethnic diversity and to seek to manage it rather than seeking a definitive 'resolution' of the problem. For some, territorial federalism represented the best way of accommodating the national diversity of the region. Other thinkers, most notably the Austrian Marxists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, argued that the question of minority rights in multiethnic states could not be resolved solely according to the territorial principle. This contention led them to devise a system of non-territorial cultural autonomy, whereby minority groups would have the right to establish national councils, elected by voters who had freely entered their names on a national register. Once elected, these councils would then assume full responsibility for the cultural

³ Burgess (1999: 52), citing Macartney (1934: 290). By 'special quality', Burgess argues, Macartney was attributing to the states of Eastern Europe a 'moral deficiency, which required their supervision by 'superiors'.



and educational affairs of the relevant minority, with funding coming partly from the state and partly from taxes levied on the members of the national register.

The Mazzinian idea, however, ultimately proved more compelling. The dual catalysts of war and manipulation by Germany (in Russia) and the western allies (in the Habsburg Empire) brought about the collapse of the old empires and the emergence of a new belt of successor states. The lack of congruence between political and ethnic boundaries meant that these new states contained ethnic minority populations estimated at anywhere between 30-50 million (a quarter of the total inhabitants of the region). Equally ominous in the minds of many contemporary observers was the erection of 11,000 kilometres of new customs frontiers - in many cases cutting across regions previously functioning as a coherent economic whole - in a continent severely weakened by war. It was a situation which one economist of the day was later to describe as 'European Chaos' (Kurchinskii 1925). By Brubaker's account, inter-war Central and Eastern Europe became the *locus classicus* of 'nationalising statehood' and the triadic nexus, concepts which he illustrates with reference to the practices of the Polish state and the brand of 'homeland nationalism' practised by Germany throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Kataryna Wolczuk has criticised Brubaker for his excessive emphasis on this inter-war Polish case. Whilst discerning a general difficulty in applying Brubaker's theory to particular case studies, Wolczuk is especially critical of his use of an inter-war example to illustrate a phenomenon which is allegedly germane to contemporary Eastern Europe (Wolczuk 2000: 675).⁴ Brubaker is careful to avoid the danger of inappropriately generalising from different cases. His basic thesis is that all of the new/restored post communist states of the region will be 'nationalising' (as were those between the wars), but will differ in terms of how they are nationalising and how nationalising they are (Brubaker 1996: 106). As he notes in the case of Poland, 'nationalising policies and practices were shaped by the specific (and internally varied) political, geopolitical, economic and cultural contexts that framed the relations between Poles and minorities. To say anything specific about nationalising policies and practices in the new states and about how they might resemble or differ from those of interwar Poland, would require sustained attention to *their* formative contexts - contexts that differ sharply from those that shaped nationalising stances in interwar Poland' (Brubaker 1996: 103). By pointing to the latent conflicts occasioned by nationalism, then, Brubaker merely posits a basic structural similarity between the Yugoslav and Soviet successor states. In so doing, however, he recognises the need to view nationalism as a cultural and therefore contingent phenomenon (Smith 1991: vii).⁵ By the same token, in order to determine the actual nature of intra and inter-group relations in a particular case (including question of how and when the 'triadic nexus' might translate into overt conflict), one obviously needs to focus upon 'process dynamics' (individual behavioural mechanisms; emotional resentment and perceptions of relative deprivation on the part of members of a particular group and the organisational, material and identity resources available to political entrepreneurs within the group; state actions and strategy; role of individual leaders) (Miall et al. 1999: 68f.; Smith and Wilson 1997; Smith et al. 1998, Laitin 1998, Petersen 2001). This focus on contingent, 'processual dynamics' is indeed central to

⁴ Among other things, Wolczuk criticises an apparent assumption that the discourse promoting the titular ethnic group is fully realised in wide-ranging policies of the state in such spheres as the economy, demographics, politics and culture. According to Wolczuk, however, Brubaker's theory does not offer analytical tools to cope where there is no full congruence between discursive practices and policies. Case studies of Ukraine and Estonia show that there is indeed a clear gap between rhetoric and reality. However, as Brubaker (1996: 63) is careful to point out, 'to ask whether such policies, practices and so on are 'really' nationalising makes little sense. What is important is the *perception* that they are such on the part of a particular minority.

⁵ As Peter Alter (1991: 3) has noted, although it is possible to make general conclusions about the social and political conditions underlying the various forms of nationalism, the very polymorphism of the phenomenon 'does not make it easy to build the desirable bridge between the particular and the general'.

Brubaker's view of nationhood as a political field. With regard to national minorities, he notes that 'nationality-based assertions of collective cultural and political rights, although similar in form, vary widely in their specific content. They range, for example, from modest demands for administration or education in the minority language to maximalist claims for far-reaching territorial and political autonomy verging on full independence' (including whether they exist) (Brubaker 1996: 60). Here, he is especially critical of previous accounts which approach nationhood and nationalism from a long-term, developmental perspective, highlighting an absence of 'sustained analytical discussions of nationness as an event, as something that suddenly crystallises rather than gradually develops, as a contingent, conjuncturally fluctuating and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action, rather than as a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends in economy, polity or culture.' (Brubaker 1996: 19) Whilst 'there are of course many studies of particular nationalisms geared to much shorter time spans than the decades or centuries characteristic of the developmentalist literature, ... those conducted by sociologists and political scientists have tended to abstract from events in their search for generalised structural or cultural explanations, while historians, taking for granted the significance of contingent events, have not been inclined to theorise them' (ibid.).⁶

Yet, for all its sophistication, Brubaker's thinking is still informed by the long-standing western stereotype which portrays the 'East' as somehow less modern, more tribal and predisposed to ethnic violence (Chandler 1999: 70).⁷ As I have argued elsewhere, his depiction of all of the new states of inter-war Central and Eastern Europe as *ipso facto* 'nationalising' (read intolerant) overlooks the relatively successful application of the minority rights paradigm in Estonia and Latvia during the 1920s (Smith, D. J., 1999).⁸ Similarly, with regard to the Former Soviet Union, Brubaker extrapolates from the carnage in former Yugoslavia to predict that 'deeply rooted and powerfully conflicting expectations of belonging – interacting, of course, with conflicts of interest engendered by state-building, regime change, and economic restructuring – will make the dynamic interplay between non-Russian successor states, Russian minorities, and the Russian state a locus of refractory, and potentially explosive, ethnonational conflict in coming years' (Brubaker 1996: 54). In reality, this has not proved to be the case, at least so far: violent conflicts involving the Russian diaspora, such as the Transdnestr conflict in Moldova, have proved to be the exception rather than the rule. Similarly, from the perspective of today, the parallel between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia appears something of a tired cliché. Brubaker's writings can therefore be seen as representative of exaggerated western anxieties that the region might descend into 'Yugoslavia writ large' (Burgess 1999: 54).⁹ As a number of authors have noted, such

⁶ This perspective has been attacked by Anthony Smith (1998) (described by Brubaker as a prime representative of the 'developmentalist' school of nationalism), who reminds us of the character of the nation as a felt and lived community, one which has very real and powerful consequences. Similarly, in an implicit counter to Brubaker's emphasis on nationhood as an institutionalised category, Petersen's (2001) recent work stresses the power of culture and history to generate actions in the absence of elite engineering.

⁷ As Lieven (1993: 381) has noted, western journalists have tended to '[swing] between two contradictory stereotypes of east European nations...The first...is of gallant little freedom-loving peoples, fighting against wicked empires for the sake of independence and liberal democracy. The second is horrible little...peasants, trying to involve us in their vicious tribal squabbles'.

⁸ It is notable that the Estonian and Latvian minority rights legislation was entirely indigenous in conception, and not adopted in response to outside pressure from the great powers. It is also notable that these minority provisions went far beyond those stipulated by the League of Nations in its treaties with other new states of Eastern Europe. Both Estonia and Latvia developed in a more 'nationalising' direction after 1934. However, it has been argued that Estonia, at least, never became a 'nation-state in the narrow, bigoted sense of the term then applicable to much of Eastern Europe' (Ruutsoo 1993: 13ff.).

⁹ As Burgess also notes, 'even if Yugoslav disintegration is perceived as an internally driven 'tribal war', it has been the exception rather than the rule'. Hroch (1994) has spoken of a widespread tendency to regard the recent resurgence of nationalism as an overtly voluntaristic phenomenon - 'a disease for which medicine is needed'. According to this view, claims Hroch, nationalism was simply 'banned' under communism: once



fears have rested upon an essentialist portrayal of the region as a locus of permanent and apparently irreducible tribal hatreds. It is a portrayal which downplays any broader international, social or economic understanding of potential or actual conflict in the East (Chandler 1999, Burgess 1999, Miall et al. 1999, Laitin 1998).

The Euro-Atlantic Dimension

In this latter regard, Brubaker's assertion that 'the future displayed by Europe to the world looks distressingly like the past' implies an essential similarity in international context between the post-Cold War era and the inter-war period. Brubaker, however, fails to develop this dimension, since his theory lacks any systematic discussion of the role assumed by international organisations in the region during the two periods in question. This, I would argue is the major deficiency of his theory. This is not to say that Brubaker ignores the role of international organisations completely. For instance, he claims that 'external incentives – offered for example, by international organisations or by economically, politically, or militarily powerful states – may favor transethnic state- and nation-building strategies, oriented to the citizenry as a whole rather than to one ethnationally qualified segment of that citizenry' (Brubaker 1996: 47).¹⁰ He also notes that, in the wake of the Cold War, minority rights has become an international, rather than purely domestic concern; international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE have, therefore, pressed new states to adopt and implement minority rights legislation. For this reason, he claims, the minority rights model may stand a greater chance of becoming rooted than the civic model.¹¹ However, he devotes little attention to the point, beyond underlining the fact that attempts by the League of Nations to implement a similar framework between the wars ended in complete failure (Brubaker 1996: 106). In my view, the role of international organisations should be central to any discussion of post-communist identity politics in Central and Eastern Europe. My own research has underlined the fact that it is impossible to understand the dynamics of the national question in contemporary Estonia without reference to this dimension (Smith, D. J., 1999: 456, Smith 2001a: 5f., Wolczuk 2000: 676). In this regard, I suggest it would be more apt to talk of a quadratic nexus tracing the dynamic interaction between Brubaker's three political fields of nationalism and a field comprising discourses on 'Europeanisation'/'Westernisation'.

As Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk suggest, post-communist debates on state and nation-building in Central and Eastern Europe have been permeated by the two themes of 'national self assertion' on the one hand and 'Europeanisation' on the other (Batt, et al. forthcoming). These, they suggest, are analogous to the two themes of 'essentialism' and 'epochalism' which Clifford Geertz (1977: 240f.) has used to frame the politics of national identity in post-colonial states. In this regard, talk of a 'Return to Europe' has arguably been only one element (albeit the most essential) of a broader discourse of westernisation connoting claims to membership of what could be termed the 'Euro-Atlantic Space'. In the late 1980s/early 1990s, the two discourses were essentially complementary, in as much as the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe (including the Baltic States) tended to regard their membership of western civilisation and the 'family of democratic European nations' as axiomatic (Smith 2001b: xi-xiii.). Having gained membership of the Conference (later Organisation) on Security and Cooperation in

outside coercion was removed, the resurgence of ethnic conflicts simply occurred as a matter of course. According to Hroch, the violent conflict between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia was based upon a unique configuration of factors which could not be taken to apply to Eastern Europe as a whole.

¹⁰ Brubaker also notes that while the appeal of nationalising programmes and policies have been strong in the Baltic States, western states and western organisations have the greatest leverage over the westernmost successor states

¹¹ Brubaker notes that the civic model has considerable international legitimacy; as a result, civic principles have been incorporated into some constitutional texts and evoked in some public declarations (especially those directed towards international audiences). But these civic principles remain external.

Europe (henceforth OSCE), the states of the region launched bids for membership of the Council of Europe, the European Union and NATO. In this latter regard, however, securing a 'return to Europe' has proved to be a far less straightforward endeavour than was originally anticipated. Whilst the Cold War political partition may have been laid to rest, the imagined East-West division of Europe is of much older historical provenance, and was not about to disappear overnight. As noted above, from a western point of view, the former Soviet bloc was simply re-conceptualized as a post-socialist eastern 'other' and a locus of potential instability and conflict. These concerns meant the discourse of minority rights (discredited by the experience of World War Two) reappeared on the agenda after a long absence.

The current European conception of minority rights has developed out of initial discussions conducted under the auspices of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE. In response to the collapse of communist power, the CSCE sought to establish very far-reaching provisions on minority rights which would avoid the double standards and shortcomings inherent in the League of Nations policy after World War One (Chandler 1999: 64). This approach went beyond previous measures against discrimination and for equal treatment to argue for positive rights. Moreover, it mounted a challenge to state sovereignty by providing for the dispatch of missions of experts to designated states at the behest of other OSCE members. Under certain circumstances, it would be possible to establish such missions without the consent of the state concerned. A similar challenge to state sovereignty was implicit in the creation of an OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) in July 1992, who can become involved in the affairs of a particular state at his own discretion and without the permission of the government concerned (ibid.). In practice, however, attempts to promote a universal and far-reaching policy were undermined by generalised fears that the promotion of minority rights might have a destabilising effect on member states. Above all, they were undermined by the reluctance of western member states to consent to any dilution of their own sovereignty (Chandler 1999: 61ff.). In the course of 1990-92, states such as France, Germany, Britain, Greece, Turkey and Spain took steps to ensure that the concept of 'national minority' could not be deemed applicable to any segments of their own populations. This has involved the drawing of a clear distinction between historically rooted 'indigenous' minority groups and immigrant communities – so-called 'new minorities' or 'ethnic minorities' – of Turks, Kurds, North Africans and Asians. States such as France and Greece (also the United States) have gone a step further, by arguing that there are no national minorities within their borders (despite the existence of groups that could legitimately carry this label). Britain and Turkey, supported by Spain, subsequently insisted that the HCNM could not intervene where terrorism was involved, thus taking the Irish, Kurdish and Basque questions off the international agenda (ibid.). The inability of the OSCE states to come up with any agreed definition of a national minority was mirrored in the 1995 Council of Europe Framework Convention on Minority Rights, which leaves it up to individual states to define the term 'national minority'. As Chandler notes, the concept of minority rights was thereby transformed into a security, rather a humanitarian or cultural issue. Although OSCE norms have retained the principle that national minority issues are an international – rather than a purely domestic – concern, the 1992 Helsinki discussions 'made the OSCE claims to universal commitment ring hollow'. In practice, it became clear that the regulative power of the OSCE would be directed towards Eastern Europe, where the perceived need to regulate conflict was given impetus by the conflict in former Yugoslavia (ibid.).

This 'institutionalisation of inequality' between 'stable, democratic' West and 'unstable, post-socialist' East has been reinforced by the EU stipulation to CEE applications that entry will be contingent upon their demonstrating 'respect and protection of minorities', something which was not required of earlier applicants to the Union. To quote Adam



Burgess, the conditions set in the sphere of minority rights rest on an assumption that the East is 'culturally predisposed towards intolerance of all varieties – most seriously towards other ethnic and racial groups. The west in this context, meanwhile, figures as a suitable tamer of such dangerous passions through its claims to have left intolerance behind on the domestic front, and to be no longer motivated internationally by the selfish power politics of old' (Burgess 1999: 54). Burgess goes on to add that neither of these assumptions – intolerant East and disinterested West - is borne out by reality. Just as western governments have been careful to defend their sovereign prerogatives in the face of demands for a universal minority rights policy, so EU enlargement is an entirely political question 'bound up with western geopolitical concerns' and economic and social anxieties (ibid.). The elusive and ill-defined nature of the conditions set in the sphere of democratisation and minority rights has led to fears that existing member states might shift the goal posts for political reasons. As Batt and Wolczuk note, such practices have strengthened the image of 'Europe' as a 'moving target' for the applicant countries. Like the various forms of nationalism cited by Brubaker, 'Europeanisation' can thus be regarded as a variably configured and continuously contested political field in which different states, organisations, parties, movements or individual political entrepreneurs vie to impose their own particular political agenda.

A Quadratic Nexus? Some Reflections on the Estonian Case

As Wolczuk argues in her critique of Brubaker's theory, 'the European dimension cannot be left out of the analysis of reforging identities, since the post communist states aspire to shed their eastern image by integrating into European institutional structures, most importantly the EU' (Wolczuk 2000: 676). The membership conditions set by the European Union and other institutions have indeed amounted to a significant external constraint on processes of state-building in each of the applicant countries. In the same context, Wolczuk (2000: 675) asserts that current processes within the continent of Europe serve to 'strengthen supra-national forms of identification in addition to the prevailing national identities'. Yet can one automatically take this as read? More critical authors have suggested that, rather than being a force for supranationalism, the minority rights policy of international organisations has merely served to further politicise the national question by undermining the legitimacy of central state institutions in this sphere. Burgess (1999: 51ff.), for instance, is quite explicit on this point as far as the inter-war policy of the League of Nations is concerned. Brubaker, however, is vague and apparently contradictory in this regard. In his limited discussion of the role of international organisations, for example, he clearly implies that this will act as a force facilitating transethnic state- and nation-building and the legitimacy of the minority rights model. At the same time, however, he notes that Russia has 'profited from greater transborder concern with human rights' in order to advance its pretensions as an 'external national homeland' for Russian-speaking minorities within the FSU. He also emphasises Germany's use of the League in this regard between the wars (Brubaker 1996: 138f.).

How has the role of international organisations impacted upon the situation in contemporary Estonia? If one looks at the Estonian case, then international organisations have clearly become an integral part of the relational field linking the Estonian state, the Russian-speaking population and the Russian Federation. The lack of any consensus over what constitutes a national minority and – by extension – the vague and contested nature of minority rights has meant that each of the parties within the triadic nexus has been able to invoke its own conception of European norms and minority rights in order to support its own agenda. Of course, debates surrounding the definition of national minority and minority rights have also a feature of *intra*-group dynamics as well, as an analysis of key state-building debates clearly demonstrates (Smith 2001a). An examination of the Estonian case also provides ample evidence of what David Chandler has called 'forum shopping' (Chandler 1999). This is to say that the interventionist role

of has offered minority and homeland nationalists the possibility of appealing to international organisations in order to bring indirect pressure to bear on the state government. Appeals to the international community have indeed been integral to the strategy of the main self-proclaimed 'Russian-speaking' organisations over the past decade. Critics have argued that minorities are treated unequally in that the HCNM can pay attention to their needs only if there is potential for violent conflict. At the very least, I would say, the policy offers a clear lesson to minority representatives: if you want greater attention from the international community, then it pays to talk up the risk of violent conflict. This is borne out by the Narva Crisis of 1993, when local leaders played on western anxieties by talking of a possible Transdniestria North in the making (ibid.).

As Brubaker implies, in the Yeltsin period Russia clearly used appeals to international organisations in order to advance its own geopolitical 'order-building' project in the region.¹² From 1992-94, Russia used claims of significant minority and human rights abuses in an attempt to halt the withdrawal of former Soviet army units from Estonia and Latvia. Although Russia failed to achieve this objective, attacks on Estonia's nationality policy continued to be deployed as part of a statist strategy designed to halt the enlargement of the NATO alliance to the Baltic States and thereby reinforce Russian pretensions to a leading role within the 'Near Abroad' of the Former Soviet Union. In order to achieve maximum effect, Russian verbal attacks on Estonia were couched in the strongest possible terms, using highly emotive rhetoric such as 'ethnic cleansing' and 'social apartheid'. The fact that Russia simultaneously refused to accept the use of the term 'ethnic cleansing' with regard to Bosnia clearly indicates that these interventions were inspired by geopolitical objectives rather than any real concern for Russian 'compatriots' residing in Estonia and Latvia.

What have been the implications of these minority and homeland nationalist interventions for the policies and practices of the Estonian state? In the early 1990s, at least, the dominant paradigm within debates in state and nation-building was founded upon the discourse of restoring a unitary nation-state (Smith 2001a, 2001b). Central to this vision was the implementation of restrictive citizenship legislation designed to exclude Soviet-era settlers and their descendants (commonly designated as 'colonists', 'civil occupants' and a potential fifth column) from immediate political influence. For proponents of the nation-state model, the nature of the new Euro-Atlantic discourse on minority rights was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it evoked the fear that Russia might be able to play the minority rights card in order to block Estonian moves towards NATO and the EU. On the other hand, the vagueness of European norms and the lack of consensus over what constitutes a 'national minority' afforded considerable room for manoeuvre. In 1994, one local commentator depicted the Estonian government of the day as 'dancing on a rope' as it struggled to reconcile its own domestic 'nationalising' agenda with the requirements of Europeanisation. On balance, however, I would suggest that the two have sat together relatively comfortably. In this regard, Estonian 'nationalisers' (to use Brubaker's terminology) have drawn succour from western support for the doctrine of legal continuity, which held that *de jure*, the Baltic States remained independent counties under illegal Soviet occupation during 1940-1991. The legal continuity principle was important in the sense that Estonia and its Baltic

¹² I have borrowed this phrase from Aalto (2002), who, in discussing the respective roles of the EU and Russia in Northern Europe, claims that both entities are engaged in their own distinct geopolitical 'order-building' projects. Although Russia is not likely to become a member of NATO or the EU, its leaders have been pragmatic enough to realize that, in a globalizing economy, Russia must work with the West in order to achieve economic renewal. At the same time, they are obliged for purposes of domestic political consumption to subscribe to the neo-nationalist discourse of Eurasianism and great power status. This position forms the basis for what Graham Smith (1999: 63), terms 'Democratic Statism', one element of which has been the use of international organisations to exert pressure on Estonia and Latvia.



neighbours were not classified as new states required to provide minority guarantees in return for recognition. Legal continuity has also meant that western governments have been unable to dispute the juridical bases of Estonian citizenship policy: namely that Soviet-era settlers and their descendants living in Estonia were representatives of an illegally occupying power and could therefore expect no automatic rights to citizenship of the restored republic. In order to buttress this argument in the face of international criticism, Estonian governments skilfully employed the very arguments that western states had used in order to avoid recognising any minority rights obligations to their Asian, Arab and Turkish populations. In this respect, Soviet era settlers and their descendants were classed not as representatives of a rooted minority, but as *gastarbeiter* – foreign citizens legally resident in Estonia who had access to social and economic rights but not to citizenship. Since they were citizens of Russia, it was argued, the Estonian state bore no legal responsibility for them.¹³

For Burgess, the fact that western governments and the EU have accepted this argument is indicative of an anti-Russian bias (Burgess 1999: 58). Such a claim, however, downplays the reluctance of the 'West' to alienate Russia as well as the depth of anxiety regarding possible conflicts in the Baltic States. OSCE Commissioner on National Minorities Max Van der Stoep was quick to insist that, *de facto*, Estonia was legally responsible for its non-citizens, and that it should take steps to naturalise them as quickly as possible. This position basically corresponds to the one taken by representatives of western European governments. However unwelcome this may have been to more radical Estonian nationalists, the western discourse concerning soviet era immigrants has remained one of integration rather than minority rights as such. In response, Estonian state representatives have been able to claim that the 'ethnic democracy' created in 1992 was only a temporary phenomenon. The citizenship law passed in that year marked the start of a developmental process whereby all non-citizens would eventually gain political rights and become full members of an integrated, multi-ethnic society (Smith 2001a, Kuzio 2001).¹⁴ Estonian commentators have also claimed – with some justification – that provisions for naturalisation are generous compared to those which exist in many current EU member states, as are the rights enjoyed by Estonia's non-citizens. The failure to achieve any substantial amendments to citizenship policy has meant that many representatives of the 'Russian-speaking' minority have become disillusioned with the work of international organisations such as the OSCE. As far as Russia is concerned, it appears that, on balance, the very extreme rhetoric employed during the early to mid 1990s was counter-productive. Here, the Estonian state was able to employ the machinery of international organisations against Russia by consenting to the presence of an OSCE mission and other forms of international scrutiny. When confronted with the 'logic of evidence', it quickly became clear that Russia's extreme claims had no basis in reality. That Russian pressure has had some effect, however, was apparent when the EU inserted a clause on minority rights into its 1992 Trade and Co-operation Agreement with the Baltic States. It was also apparent over the issue of Soviet military pensioners and their status in independent Estonia.

¹³ Settlers were sharply differentiated from representatives of the 'rooted' Russian minority, resident on the shores of Lake Peipsi. This is consistent with the 1995 CE Framework Convention, which leaves it up to individual states to determine the exact definition of minority. In this regard, many contributors to the debate argued that even those settlers who obtained citizenship by naturalisation could not be classed as representatives of a national minority. Such a stance would be wholly consistent with the policies adopted by western states. For a full discussion of these debates, see Smith (2001a).

¹⁴ In this regard, it is notable that Kuzio describes Estonia and Latvia as 'ethnic democracies' – 'consolidated democracies that are in the process of granting civil rights to their inhabitants but are unlikely to grant polyethnic rights'. This definition of 'ethnic democracy' is somewhat different to the one originally put forward by Graham Smith (1999).

More recently, Estonia has been called upon to amend aspects of its citizenship and language policy as one of the conditions for European Union membership. Although such demands have contributed to a growth in Euro-scepticism amongst the titular population, this has yet to translate into any significant backlash against 'Europeanisation' in Estonia. By the same token, one can say that, despite a certain amount of resentment at western double standards with regard to minority rights policy, criticism of international organisations has been fairly muted in all of the current applicant states, at least when compared to inter-war period.¹⁵ That this is the case says much about the difference in context between the inter-war period and today. For many commentators, CEE governments have no choice but to comply with external demands by the EU, since membership will provide the key to urgently needed resources. Perhaps more significant from the point of view of the peoples of the region, however, is the fact that the EU has a proven track record, having provided the basis for fifty years of unparalleled peace and stability in western Europe. At the same time, however, integration with the West has represented a means of avoiding a recurrence of the 'worst case scenarios' of History such as the inter-war period, when the successor states of CEE found themselves consigned to a 'Europe between' a revisionist Germany and Soviet Russia, and, in the face of impotence and indifference from the western allies, ultimately fell prey to the ambitions of two totalitarian regimes (Smith 2001a: 147ff.). Today, the prospects for the construction of a 'New Europe' appear far more favourable, with the post-war integration of Germany into the EU and NATO and the continued US engagement in Europe. Similarly, recent developments suggest that the danger of a new East-West dividing line between NATO and Russia may have been averted, without prejudice to the legitimate demands of the Baltic States and other CEE countries for NATO membership.

In attempting to expand Brubaker's framework into a 'Quadratic Nexus', I have not sought to question his basic thesis, namely that nationalism constitutes a set of idioms and practices that is and will remain constantly *available* in modern political life. Having said this, though, nor can one assume that nationalism will remain the determinant feature of any part of Europe. In this respect, I would question what I regard as Brubaker's essentialising and deeply pessimistic view of Central and Eastern Europe, and his tendency to treat the region in isolation from the broader developments shaping contemporary Europe. These developments are not leading inexorably in a supranationalist direction. As I've argued elsewhere, *realpolitik* remains an established part of the western European landscape. Similarly, the traditional civic West – ethnic East dichotomy appears all the more overdrawn today, when a number of developments are undermining the assumption (always questionable) of politically integrated, inclusive and tolerant 'civic' societies in the West. Nevertheless, today's context does appear far more favourable than it did between the wars, giving grounds to question the assertion that the future displayed by Europe appears distressingly like the past.

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¹⁵ On the question of western double standards, Chandler (1999: 71) cites Vaclav Havel's suggestion that the Visegrad countries should preside over a commission dealing with the cases of Northern Ireland and the Basque country. Similarly, in response to suggestions last autumn by the British Home Secretary that new immigrants to the UK should be required to take English classes, one Latvian émigré living in the UK suggested that Estonia and Latvia might be well placed to advise the British government in this regard.



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