CHAPTER 3

Nationalism and Its Challenges to Democratic Governance

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One of the most iconic images from the period of the fall of communism is the waving of national flags with the hammer and sickle removed. The symbolism of this is highly significant. It was meant to demonstrate that communism, for all its hegemonic pretentions and corrosive effects, never succeeded in eliminating the ties of history, culture, and identity that bind a nation together. Despite decades of repression and communist propaganda, the nation survived. It also signaled that the nation was to be a source of political legitimacy going forward. It is impossible to understand contemporary Central and East European politics without accounting for nationalism.

This chapter evaluates the challenges nationalism poses to democratic governance in Central and East Europe. This region is not the only place where nationalism is often at odds with democracy. Wherever political elites design nationalist strategies, the process reveals the sources of tension rooted in the Janus-faced character of nationalism: as with other political ideologies, nationalism is forward looking in that it articulates a vision of the future but backward looking in that nationalist strategies almost always purport to turn to the past for self-definition.[1] When nationalists claim self-government rights for "the nation" on a "national" territory or "homeland," they usually offer a certain interpretation of history to justify these claims. Historical evidence is less important than the degree to which such historiography can foster a sense of shared history and purpose. To express this idea, "national myth" is the term most often used to describe national stories.

Some national myths are more successful than others in accommodating cultural and linguistic diversity. The so-called civic type of nationalism, which builds community on shared political traditions and beliefs in a common creed, is potentially more inclusive than ethnic nationalism, which requires members of the nation to share a common language and culture and relies on a particular combination of cultural markers (such as language, race, or religion) and practices (such as holidays and customs around food and marriage). In many instances, the national myth contains stories about ethnic competition over territory, invoking memories of past ethnic dominance and subordination, which continue to influence current state- and nation-building processes. Yet not all ethnic groups engage in national competition. A key difference between ethnic and national groups is that although ethnic groups aim to reproduce particular cultures, only national groups claim self-government rights on a particular territory.[2]

Central and East Europe (CEE) is a particularly interesting place to study nationalism. First, it reveals that the popular appeal of nationalism does not necessarily diminish with the introduction of liberal capitalist democracy and membership in a transnational institutional sphere, such as the European Union (EU). Rather, nationalism can thrive under democratization, marketization, and regionalization. Although the economic and political path out of communism proved bumpy, overall postcommunist CEE has experienced robust economic growth and enjoyed multiparty democratic systems. Virtually all countries became members of the EU or are lined up to join. Yet not only did nationalism not decline, but in some cases it strengthened over time. Second, the study of nationalism in CEE helps us identify key conditions under which ethnic nationalism can be effectively used (like low-hanging fruit) by political leaders and elites interested in taking and maintaining control over societies, undermining democratic institutions, and weakening societies' ability to hold governments accountable.

State centers around the world have been engaged in nation building since the emergence and global spread of the territorial nation-state model. This model promotes the pursuit of congruence between the territorial and cultural boundaries of a nation.[3] In Europe, this pursuit in earlier centuries involved aggressive efforts to "right-size" the state by changing territorial boundaries to include external ethnic kin, assimilating internal "others," eliminating nonconforming groups to "purify" the nation, or encouraging them to repatriate to other countries.[4] Such methods caused brutal ethnic cleansings during World War II and forced population movements thereafter. But by the 1950s, such means of nation-state creation became unacceptable in the Western part of the continent. The primary motivation behind the post–World War II Europeanization process was to create incentives for sustainable peace through economic interdependence and increased social interaction across territorial borders. As the communist regimes began collapsing in CEE, the same interest in regional peace and security motivated the creation of the European Union in 1992 and its "Eastern Expansion" to postcommunist states. Yet a review of the political developments of the last three decades shows that the appeal of nationalism coexists with interest in democratic government across the continent, and the experiences of CEE have revealed key reasons why the relationship between nationalism and democracy remains fraught with tension.

Studying CEE also provides valuable insights into the questions of what makes societies vulnerable to ethnic nationalism, and how the instrumentalization of ethnic nationalism by political elites in turn undermines the ability of social actors to resist authoritarian control. There is a long-standing debate over whether a fully democratic ("civic") nationalism devoid of ethnic politics can be achieved. Influential political theorists point out that no state is completely ethnically "neutral."[5] Even countries traditionally described as textbook cases of "civic nationalism," such as Britain, France, and the United States, reveal significant similarities to "ethnic nationalism." In all these countries, schools, churches, the media, the military, and various other state and private or public institutions privilege a dominant ethnic culture (language, narratives about history and homeland, literature, music, etc.) to create and perpetuate a unified national canon that is rooted in a dominant ethnicity.[6] Others argue that democratic governments have the power to choose between more or less "ethnicized" forms of government.[7] Differences in those choices are manifested in the ways that states institutionalize or work toward

mitigating the advantages and disadvantages associated with ethnic belonging (and similar socially constructed distinctions, such as race or caste) that are embedded in institutions of power and in the bundle of institutions and policies that create or hinder opportunities for people in a state—such as systems of education, employment, and housing.

In the pages that follow, we provide a brief overview of the evolution of nationalism in CEE prior to the 1990s. We then consider the implications of the politics of ethnic demography for democratic governance in postcommunist CEE. We divide the roughly three decades since communism collapsed into two periods. In the first, we discuss how national majorities and minorities struggled, sometimes violently, to assert their rights in their new postcommunist political systems. For most countries, this period lasted roughly until the country entered the EU as a democratic state. In the second, we consider what might (unartfully) be termed the post-postcommunist period, in which the liberal state is under attack and nationalism manifests as populism, especially in states that three decades earlier were front-runners in "Europeanization" and the institutionalization of liberal democracy in the region.

Nationalism before Democratic Competition

Across CEE, the legacies of the previous decades and the challenges of the post-1990 period that followed made societies vulnerable to *ethnic* nationalism. Societies in this region have experienced border changes three times within three generations: at the ends of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. Most of the time, border changes were associated with devastation: war, mass violence, and forced population movements (that is, expulsions, ethnic cleansing, or flight from states in which another ethnic group claimed "titular" rights). This was the norm in 1918 and 1945 and during the collapse of the Yugoslav state in the 1990s. After each border change, large parts of societies became traumatized. Successful nation building requires a broadly shared narrative of nationhood, and the conflicting collective memories of victimization in this region have made the creation of such shared national narratives extremely difficult. The appeal of particular national narratives, however, remains alive, and part of the reason is that narratives of collective memory offer a sense of rootedness for individuals and social groups that undergo dramatic political and socioeconomic changes like those experienced in CEE.

It was not coincidental that the most ambitious efforts by state centers to replace competing national narratives with an internationalist ideology were made by the communist elites that assumed power with Soviet help after World War II. This conflict provided an unprecedented display of the devastation that ethnic nationalism can cause. The first generation of communist leaders, itself disproportionately from minority backgrounds, introduced an internationalist political discourse to counter nationalist ideology. The idea was to transcend differences in ethnicity and race by introducing a supranational identity that would bind the constituent ethnic groups together in one nation. The three ethnofederations—the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia—are the clearest examples of this. All three countries tried to bridge ethnic differences by creating "federal" identities—Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav—to which any citizen, in principle, could belong. In the Soviet Union, the most successful, this involved creating a unifying

Soviet culture rooted in the Russification of the language of school instruction and promoting the dominance of Russian cultural production across the vast territory of the federation. But even though communism provided leaders with unprecedented power to conduct "social engineering," none of these regimes succeeded in creating homogeneity in societies where multiple groups had earlier competed for national rights. Nationalism never really disappeared under communism. It only took different forms.

Despite an initial emphasis on internationalism, in practice nationalism remained a key organizing principle during the communist period.[8] The three ethno-federations are again instructive. In the Soviet Union, the constituent republics recognized a "titular nationality" that was numerically predominant in that republic. For example, there was an Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), a Latvian SSR, and a Lithuanian SSR. The borders of all three roughly corresponded to the borders of independent Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the interwar period. Other ethnicities, such as Jewish, were also recognized. Every Soviet citizen was required to choose the ethnicity of one of their parents to list on their ID card.[9] This ethno-federal model was replicated in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In Czechoslovakia, Czechs and Slovaks were equivalents of "titular" nationalities with separate territories, while Hungarians, Roma, and Jews were treated as ethnic categories with more limited rights.

Yugoslavia, like the Soviet Union, was organized into ethnic republics. Over time the republics succeeded in gaining substantially more autonomy from the federal government in Belgrade. Though all but Yugoslavia were limited in the realm of foreign affairs by their subservience to the Soviet Union, CEE countries pursued their own brand of nationalism in the realm of domestic politics. The post–World War II Czechoslovak government, for instance, declared ethnic Germans and Hungarians collectively guilty of having contributed to Hitler's destruction of Czechoslovakia and gained Soviet approval for the expulsion of these ethnic groups from the country. Based on the Beneš decrees (named for the state's president, Eduard Beneš), Czechoslovakia expelled the overwhelming majority of ethnic Germans to Germany and a large percentage of the Hungarian population, including much of the Hungarian educated class, to Hungary.[10] Those who remained in the state were denied citizenship rights until 1948. Despite such a drastic policy to achieve an ethnic balance favoring Czechoslovakia's two titular groups, a significant number of Hungarians remained in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia. Throughout the communist decades, they were subject to economic, cultural, and educational policies that severely restricted their ability to reproduce their culture or improve their socioeconomic status. The relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks was also tense from the beginning of cohabitation. Initial notions of a unified Czechoslovak identity were soon replaced by efforts to loosen Prague's control over the Slovak part of the land in a federative structure that better represented national interests.

Compared to Czechoslovakia, the post–World War II Romanian communist government adopted more minority-friendly policies. Because the ethnic Hungarian party was instrumental in the communist takeover in Romania, Hungarian minority leaders gained Moscow's support in achieving full citizenship rights, participation in the government, and the right to maintain cultural and educational institutions. The same Soviet government that in Czechoslovakia gave full support to President Beneš's policies to expel German and Hungarian minorities facilitated the establishment of regional autonomy for

Hungarians in Romania's Transylvania region in 1952. Although this autonomous region was short-lived, the first communist-dominated Romanian government was much better disposed toward minorities overall than was the Beneš government in Czechoslovakia.[11] As the influence of ethnic Hungarian leaders in the Communist Party weakened, however, the government launched a nationalizing strategy that severely weakened the political status and social structure of the Hungarian community in Transylvania. Beginning in the mid-1960s, the government of Nicolae Ceauşescu launched a ruthless strategy to consolidate a centralized unitary nation-state. Ethnic Germans were offered incentives to emigrate to West Germany, and Hungarians were subjected to administrative, economic, and educational policies aimed at their assimilation.

The popular appeal of nationalism is illustrated by the anti-regime movements that emerged in the region after the communist takeover. The failed Hungarian national uprising of 1956 sought to free Hungary from the Soviet orbit and establish national self-determination. The idea of different national roads to socialism was picked up by reformists in Czechoslovakia, who in 1968 attempted to establish an independent Czechoslovak "socialism with a human face." As in Hungary, the attempt was quashed by Soviet troops. Nationalism also featured in the anti-Soviet Solidarity movement in Poland, which ultimately played a key role in the collapse of Polish communism. In Romania, Ceauşescu's efforts to assimilate the Hungarian minority to Romanian culture produced a backlash. Ethnic Hungarians played a significant role in the collapse of the Ceauşescu regime in December 1989.[12]

In the Soviet Union, the liberalizing reforms introduced by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s opened possibilities for anti-regime movements among the non-Russian republics. This opportunity was seized in the Baltic states, where nationalist groups organized demonstrations for self-determination. The "Singing Revolution" galvanized voices that rejected Russification and reclaimed national sovereignty through language reforms and a reassertion of Baltic cultures. In the former Yugoslavia, mobilization by the more prosperous Croats and Slovenes against Serbian dominance had begun earlier, after Tito's death in 1980. These nationalist goals had been inadvertently encouraged by an ethnic power-sharing system created within one-party rule, entrenched in the 1974 constitution that devolved power to ethnically defined republics.

Once the communist regimes began collapsing in 1989, all three ethno-federations fell apart along nationalist lines. This is understandable. As detailed above, these states had been organized along ethnic lines that formed the basis for nationalist opposition to the federal system. Ethnonationalism manifested itself powerfully in claims for independence and rearrangement of political borders across the region. In contrast to the border changes that followed the First and Second World Wars, however, the rearrangement at the end of the Cold War was peaceful across the former Soviet bloc (i.e., the Soviet Union and its regional allies). Ethnic nationalism generated war only in the former Yugoslavia. By the mid-1990s, the political map of postcommunist CEE included twelve newly created or recreated states, with only five states continuing within the same borders. The leaders of all states chose ethnically majoritarian systems, yet the postcommunist governments faced major challenges in satisfying desires to build liberal capitalist democracies in majoritarian nation-states. Moreover, most of these governments were asserting national sovereignty while simultaneously demonstrating keen interest in joining a transnational

institution (the European Union) that required them to give up significant elements of sovereignty. The way governments addressed these conflicting challenges revealed the continuing salience of ethnic nationalism. Efforts to design and implement democratic "social contracts" during the three decades of transformation were shaped significantly by patterns of ethnic demography. But it was not ethnic demography itself that "caused" democratic governance to succeed or fail in some place at some time. Rather, it was the *politics* of ethnic demography, in other words, the way political actors employed ethnicity in designing and implementing political and economic systems, that shaped the relationship between nationalism and democracy in each case.

Asserting National Sovereignty

The collapse of communist regimes across the region made self-government tangible, and the majority and minority groups that articulated competing notions of self-government rights were national groups that defined "nation" on the basis of ethnic markers—most commonly language and culture, and in some cases religion. But the states emerging from the post–Cold War rearrangement do not fulfill the nationalist longing for congruence between the boundaries of state and "nation." Although CEE states became ethnically majoritarian, most still incorporate sizable ethnic minority populations and include at least one "national" minority population that has organized to claim self-government rights. As majority political actors in state centers designed institutions for their version of national sovereignty, the presence of such minorities was often framed as a threat to state stability and national security. This "securitization" of the presence of ethnic minority populations became predominant in newly created or reconstituted states. Securitization became especially "acute" in relation to minorities that had potentially activist kin-states in the region—that is, states in which their ethnic kin compose a titular majority. Due to the frequency of border changes and reversals of ethnic hierarchies in this region, most sizable minority populations have kin-states. Among the ethnic minorities targeted as sources of "threat to the nation," Jews and Roma are exceptions in that they have no kin-states in the neighborhood that might be suspected of separatist goals.

Differences in ethnic demography create different challenges for majoritarian nationalists in state centers that aim for "national" congruence. Most CEE states include a *titular* nationality (e.g., Romanians in Romania or Estonians in Estonia) plus other national minorities that seek some degree of political self-determination (e.g., ethnic Hungarians in Romania, ethnic Russians in Estonia, ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia). Some states have no sizable national minorities that claim self-government (e.g., the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland). But nationalism in some of these states (e.g., Hungary, Poland) is complicated by the presence of sizable ethnic kin populations in neighboring countries. It adds to the complexity of this "mismatch" between territorial and cultural notions of nationhood that many states in the region are both home states and kin-states. Romania, for instance, is the home state of a sizable Hungarian minority (in absolute numbers one of the largest national minorities in the region), and it also conducts kin-state politics in relation to ethnic Romanians in Moldova. Serbia also has an important Hungarian minority and yet conducts kin-state politics with Serb co-ethnics in Croatia

Table 3.1. Significant Internal and External Minorities in Central and Eastern Europe

Country	Significant internal minority (>2% of population)	Significant external ethnic kin (>2% of home state population)
Bulgaria	Turks 8.8	—
Estonia	Russians 25.5	—
Hungary	—	Slovakia 8.5, Romania 6.1, Serbia 3.5
Latvia	Russians 26.9, Belarusians 3.3, Ukrainians 2.2, Poles 2.2	—
Lithuania	Poles 6.6, Russians 5.8	—
Poland	Lithuanians 6.1, Latvians 2.4	—
Romania	Hungarians 6.1	Moldova 6.9
Slovakia	Hungarians 8.5	—

Note: Countries are listed in the first column. The second column identifies national minorities that make up more than 2 percent of the country's population. The third column identifies countries that contain greater than 2 percent of the members of the nation in column 1. For example, the fourth row indicates that Hungary has no internal minorities that comprise greater than 2 percent of the population but that Slovakia's population has 8.5 percent Hungarians, Romania's has 6.1 percent Hungarians, and Serbia has 3.5 percent Hungarians.

and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The only state in the region that is more or less "right-sized" from the perspective of ethnic nationalism is the Czech Republic, where the vast majority of citizens are ethnic Czechs, and the small number of minorities (e.g., Jews and Roma) present no national claims. These demographic realities are summarized in table 3.1.

Ethnonationalism and the Collapse of Multinational States

The nationalist movements that pursued state formation emerged in the three multinational federations: Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Although each of these dissolving federal states was ethnically diverse, only a limited number of groups defined themselves in national terms and claimed rights to national self-government. In each case, the titular groups of substate administrative units were most likely to claim such rights. These were Serbs, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Croatians in former Yugoslavia; Czechs and Slovaks in former Czechoslovakia; and Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians in the former Soviet Union. Those engaged in state formation had to answer the following questions: What would be the physical boundaries of the successor states? What would "the nation" mean within those boundaries? Who belonged to the new political community and under what terms? And what should happen to those who did not belong? In all cases, the political elites who led the movements for national independence played an important role in shaping the debates about these questions. In Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, nationalist claims and territorial changes were managed peacefully and even democratically. In Yugoslavia, however, democratic forms of parliamentary debate and party competition were unable to contain national conflicts, and these conflicts escalated into devastating wars.

The difference between the peaceful breakups of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union and the violent breakup of Yugoslavia demonstrates the political importance of elite choices. It is tempting to dismiss the peaceful Czechoslovak "Velvet Divorce" that led to the Czech Republic and Slovakia as a lucky fluke. After all, the Beneš decrees after World War II had "right-sized" the Czech Lands by expelling the formerly influential German minority and reducing the number of Hungarians in the Slovak lands. Czechs and Slovaks dwelled largely in the Czech and Slovak parts of the federation, respectively, and neither group had significant territorial claims against the other. Moreover, the Hungarian minority in the Slovak part of the state, a historic minority with competing homeland claims in the southern region of Slovakia, did not challenge the Slovaks' right to independence. The circumstances were thus ideal for a peaceful parting of the ways. Yet the creation of independent Czech and Slovak states was an outcome negotiated among the political leaders of the two parts of the federation, with only limited public support.[13] This was not the case with Russians in the Soviet Union and Serbs in Yugoslavia, both of whom benefited from being a dominant group and had substantial ethnic diasporas in other republics of their respective federations. The difference between the Soviet and Yugoslav breakups can be attributed to the decision of the Soviet elites to peacefully dissolve the Soviet Union, whereas the Yugoslav elite—dominated by Serbians—decided to hold things together by force.

Independence and State Building in the Baltic States

The Baltic states' journey to independent statehood occurred without significant border disputes and largely reproduced the territorial boundaries that these states had before their forcible annexation to the Soviet Union in 1940. An important factor in the absence of territorial disputes was that, although ethnic Russians were closely associated with Soviet federal power structures, the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic republics overwhelmingly comprised relatively recent settlers whom the native population viewed as colonizers. As the formerly dominant ethnic group in the Soviet Union, the Russians remaining in the Baltic states stood to lose the most at independence. Yet they articulated no systematic challenge to Baltic aspirations for independence. The new states, with their prospects for European integration, offered better socioeconomic conditions than neighboring Russia.

Nonetheless, Baltic statehood did involve a great deal of political rancor. Although Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were formally titular ethnicities in their respective republics during the Soviet occupation, the share and status of these ethnic groups had decreased dramatically during the Soviet period due to large-scale deportation campaigns aimed against the native population, the emigration of great numbers of Baltic peoples to the West, and the massive influx of Russian-speakers. During the Soviet occupation, Russian became the predominant language in the public domain, especially in urban centers.

The relationship between Russian and the titular national languages during the Soviet era remained that of one-sided bilingualism despite language legislation adopted in the final years of Soviet political reform that aimed at "emancipating" the Baltic languages.

Non-Russians had to be fluent in Russian in order to function fully and advance socio-economically, but Russian-speakers were not learning the languages of the republics in which they resided.[14] The notion that the Russian presence represented "illegal occupation" would become a significant building block in strategies of state reconstruction (see chapter 14).

Democratization Derailed: Nationalism in the Balkans

In former Yugoslavia, the substate borders of the republics did not coincide with people's mental maps of "historic homelands." Consequently, national self-determination became a vehemently contested idea, as multiple national groups living in a mixed demographic pattern claimed the same territory as "their own," and each group turned to a different national myth and conflicting interpretation of past relations of dominance and subordination, sacrifice and victimization.

Serbs and Croats comprised the majority of the state's population and the overwhelming majority in the largest republics—Serbia (including its autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina), Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Approximately 24 percent of Serbs lived outside the Republic of Serbia, and 22 percent of Croats lived outside Croatia. Tensions between Serbs and Croats influenced interethnic relations throughout Yugoslavia. Montenegrins generally identified with Serbs, and Muslims lived intermixed with Serbs and Croats. Only Slovenia and Macedonia, with very small Serbian and Croatian populations, avoided the Serbian-Croatian competition.[15] In such a context, successive unilateral declarations of independence by nationalist elites contributed to a cycle of conflict that marked the entire decade of the 1990s and caused devastation and horror not seen in Europe since World War II.

In Yugoslav republics where majority and minority political elites advanced competing and mutually incompatible claims for the same "national homeland," these claims mobilized large-scale support among extremists and demobilized liberals and moderates in the population, enabling the outbreak of violent conflict.[16] The Serb Democratic Party in the Krajina region of Croatia, for instance, immediately challenged the emerging Croatian movement for an independent state by demanding administrative and cultural autonomy for the Serb-majority region. Unable to achieve this goal immediately, the leaders of the four Serb-controlled areas declared the formation of the Serb Autonomous Region of Krajina in January 1991 and added in March of that year that this region would "dissociate" from an independent Croatia and remain within Yugoslavia. This exacerbated already existing distrust and helped trigger a devastating war in Croatia. The government of Croatia on one side and the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav state presidency, as well as local Serb authorities, on the other employed armed forces to achieve their goals. The war ended in 1995 with the help of US and European mediation, but only after brutal destruction in Croatian cities and villages, great suffering among the civilian population, and ethnic cleansing on both sides that resulted in the displacement of more than half a million people. Today, the Serbian minority represents only slightly more than 4 percent of Croatia's population.

Competition over national sovereignty became particularly vicious in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a republic in which three groups began their armed fight for an acceptable state design in April 1992. The Party of Democratic Action, representing the plurality Muslim population, advocated an independent and unitary Bosnia-Herzegovina, with no internal territorial division along national lines. The Serb Democratic Party first rejected separation from Yugoslavia and then, after boycotting a referendum in which citizens voted in favor of independence, fought for a separate state in the Serb-populated areas. They did so with the support of the Yugoslav army and in the hope of future reunification with other Serbian-inhabited territories of (former) Yugoslavia. Bosnia's Croatian Democratic Union allied itself with the Muslim party against the Bosnian Serbs but also staged its own secessionist attempt in Herzegovina from 1993 to 1994, supported by Croatia. This conflict was resolved only through strong international pressure, which led to the formation of a Muslim-Croat federation. The war over the fate of Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted from 1992 to 1995, forcibly displaced 2.5 million people, and involved the engagement of the Serbian and Croatian militaries as well as NATO forces.

The Dayton Peace Accords, reached through international mediation in 1995, created a loose confederation that holds the Muslim-Croat federation and the Serb republic in the common state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dividing the Muslim-Croat federation into separate national cantons and allowing the Bosnian Croats to maintain a close link with the Croatian state. It also imposed rigid ethnic power-sharing arrangements at these levels of governance. The main political parties representing the Serb population have continued to articulate desires for an independent state (see chapter 18).

An externally negotiated arrangement helped to prevent the escalation of ethnic violence in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In 1991, as the conflict in Croatia was turning into a war, Macedonian leaders declared independence after a referendum demonstrated overwhelming popular support (96 percent in a voter turnout of 76 percent). A new constitution was adopted in November 1991 to establish parliamentary democracy in an independent Macedonian republic. The leaders of this new state, however, faced significant challenges both internally from a large Albanian minority population and externally from Greece, which opposed naming the state Macedonia, which is also the name of Greece's largest administrative region. The UN admitted the new state in 1993 under the provisional name of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." The first democratically elected government of this new state began major institutional transformations and nation building under difficult conditions, against the backdrop of nationalist wars in its neighborhood and continuing objections from Greece to the assertion of an independent "Macedonian" nationhood.

Although internal conflict led to a military conflict with Albanian paramilitaries, this conflict did not escalate into another post-Yugoslav war. International mediation involving European and US actors helped to resolve the conflict quickly through the so-called Ohrid Framework Agreement signed in August 2001. In this framework, the constitution was amended to guarantee Albanian minority members equitable political representation similar to power-sharing arrangements, including the ability to veto legislation in parliament, decentralization and the redrawing of municipal boundaries, and institutional rights to enable minority cultural reproduction and peaceful coexistence in a shared state.

The Ohrid Agreement helped to prevent further violence, but the legitimacy of this externally negotiated framework became a major source of internal political conflict. Majoritarian nationalists in opposition (converging in the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, or VMRO-DPMNE) sought internal electoral support and external allies to undermine the multiethnic political coalition (sustained by the Social Democrats) that was working to implement it. Since 2001, the conflict between the VMRO-DPMNE and the Social Democrats shaped the politics of this new state. The nationalist coalition won the 2006 parliamentary elections, and VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski began to instrumentalize popular interest in majoritarian Macedonian nation building in a large segment of the population. This government invested a great deal of public resources into the articulation of a nationalist discourse about the greatness of an ethnic Macedonian nation, which according to this discourse is a continuation of the kingdom of Alexander the Great, who also features in the Greek nationalist canon. The Greek veto in 2008 against Macedonia's EU accession generated popular resentment and greatly facilitated the Gruevski government's success in expanding its nationalist electoral base. The government fueled these sentiments through large-scale investments aimed at changing physical spaces to reflect this ancient ethnic Macedonian nationalist account. For instance, it raised an eight-story-tall statue of Alexander the Great on Macedonia Square. Meanwhile, Gruevski's party changed legislation and captured key institutions of the state in a direction that shifted the country's political development from democratic consolidation to gradual autocratization. This shift fueled intra-ethnic political friction within the majority and further complicated relations between the majority Macedonian and Albanian minority populations. A multiethnic coalition government formed by Social Democrats in late 2016 resumed democratic politics and negotiated with Greece a change in the country's name to North Macedonia, unblocking the EU accession process. In the year of the name change (2019), however, the Bulgarian government took over Greece's role in threatening to block the country's EU accession—this time over the question of whether Macedonians can write their own history books or must adopt the Bulgarian narrative, according to which they are a segment of an ethnic Bulgarian nation created in the ninth century.[17]

There is a postscript involving postconflict Serbia: the issue is Kosovo, a region that features prominently in the Serbian national myth. Before 1989, Kosovo was an autonomous part of the Serbian republic of Yugoslavia but had a majority ethnic Albanian population. In 1989, Slobodan Milošević revoked Kosovo's autonomy. As a result, the Albanians in this province were systematically excluded from institutions of political and economic power, and their means of cultural reproduction (such as education in the Albanian language) were virtually eliminated from state-sponsored institutions. When the opportunity for democratization presented itself, Albanian members of the Kosovo Assembly articulated the Kosovar Albanians' right to national self-determination as early as 1990. In September 1991, they organized a referendum in which an overwhelming majority of Kosovars (99.8 percent) voted for independence.

After significant efforts to achieve independence through peaceful civil disobedience and the gradual construction of a "parallel state" (e.g., parallel institutions of education and health care), the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (KLA) became

Photo 3.1. The eight-story-high statue of Alexander the Great on Macedonia Square in Skopje was erected during the nationalist Gruevski government. The statue was unveiled on September 8, 2011, on the twenty-year anniversary of the country's independence referendum from Yugoslavia.

impatient with this strategy and began a series of violent attacks against Serbs (police officers and civilians) in Kosovo. Serbian authorities responded with a massive offensive in July 1998, forcing the KLA to withdraw into the hills. The Serbs then began a ruthless and systematic process of ethnic cleansing, which resulted in approximately seven hundred thousand ethnic Albanian civilians from Kosovo being expelled from their villages and forced to flee to Albania or Macedonia. Despite international intervention, including two months of massive NATO bombings against military and industrial targets also in Serbia, the Serbian government refused to agree to an independent Kosovo. When Serb forces finally agreed in a June 1999 peace agreement to withdraw from Kosovo, the agreement guaranteed the continued territorial integrity of Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro), including the province of Kosovo, which has been under UN administration since 1999. However, following the collapse of internationally facilitated negotiations between Serbian and Kosovar leaders over the final status of Kosovo and the publication of a UN report calling for the independence of the former Serbian province[18] (albeit under international supervision), the Kosovo Assembly adopted a unilateral proclamation of independence on February 17, 2008. Swiftly recognized by the United States and several EU member states, Kosovo's independence remains challenged by Serbia. Tensions over the border have decreased following an EU-brokered

deal in April 2013 that recognized Serb majority areas of Kosovo as autonomous at the municipal level. Yet Kosovo suffers from weak state capacity and remains under considerable international supervision.[19]

Broader Influence of External Actors

The influence of international actors was not limited to peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia. The EU accession process was very important in moderating the demands of both majority nationalists and minority groups. It incentivized peaceful contestation over violence and set norms for minority protection that governments at least had to pretend to respect if they wanted to become EU members. The "Copenhagen criteria" for EU accession, adopted by the European Council in 1993, included a requirement that states guarantee "respect for and protection of minorities."[20] During the first round of the EU's "Eastern Enlargement," which lasted until the accession of ten CEE countries to the EU from 2004 to 2007, European organizations had an unprecedented degree of influence on political decision making in candidate states. The term "EU conditionality" is widely used for the bundle of tools European actors employed to ensure that the institutions, policies, and practices in aspiring member states became compatible with EU norms. EU actors worked together with other European institutions to achieve this goal. In the domain of minority protection, the EU's main partner institutions were the Council of Europe (CoE) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), an organ of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The HCNM, mandated to work for interethnic peace and security by identifying ethnic conflict and actively seeking to resolve tensions that might endanger peace, became the most visible European actor engaged in persuading governments to adopt, ratify, and implement European norms of minority protection. These norms were set forth in a number of documents that were adopted by European institutions in the 1990s, reflecting how the transformations taking place in CEE, and the needs for interethnic peace in that region, impacted the development of European minority rights law.

The 1990s have often been described as "the decade of minority protection" in Europe due to the high degree of consensus on Europe-wide norms, reflected in an unusually high level of activism in drafting and adopting European documents. Among these, the 1992 European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) and the 1995 Framework Convention for National Minorities (FCNM) are considered the most significant, and the FCNM became an informally accepted precondition for EU accession. OSCE recommendations also became important building blocks of an emerging European minority rights regime, including the 2008 Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations, which focus on peaceful cross-border relations between kin-states and external kin populations.[21] The *Europeanization* process, which means both the enlargement of the EU and the diffusion of European norms and practices, also expanded opportunities for minority actors to find new arenas and build alliances externally, in both kin-states and in the European Parliament, for minority activism. Transnational activism, however, also complicated minority actors' ability to forge

domestic alliances with majority actors in their home states, where nationalist parties routinely framed minority activism as a threat to state stability.[22]

Varieties of Nationalism

Thus, ethnic nationalism was a significant aspect of political development across the region during the period of postcommunist transformations from the 1990s to the first wave of EU accessions in 2004–2007. It coincided with a strong desire to join western transnational institutions, both the security community (NATO) and the European Union. The ability of governments to lead states into these institutions became a source of popular support and governmental legitimacy. At the same time, nationalism remained an effective political strategy across the continent as differently situated political actors pursued competing national interests. The typology in table 3.2 provides four categories for analyzing and comparing these nationalist strategies: traditional, substate, trans-sovereign, and protectionist.

Traditional nationalism aims to achieve and maintain a territorially sovereign and culturally homogeneous nation-state. In other words, this is mainstream majoritarian nationalism, which seeks coherence between political and cultural boundaries in an independent state. *Substate nationalism* is the political strategy of groups that define their nationhood as culturally different from the state's mainstream culture but do not claim an independent state (through secession). Instead, they claim some form of institutionalized self-government, typically either territorial or cultural autonomy, that enables them to maintain and reproduce that culture. Throughout Europe, these groups organize on behalf of "homeland communities" that have a lengthy history (and associated historiography, geography, literature, art, etc.) linking them to the territory in the state within which they reside. *Trans-sovereign nationalism* is a type of nationalism that does not pursue a traditional nation-state through border changes or the repatriation of ethnic kin but instead aims to sustain common cultural "nationhood" across existing state borders.[23] "Divided nationhood" is a term used in the literature for describing

Table 3.2.   Typology of Nationalist Political Strategies That Coexist in the European Union

Type of nationalism	Main objective	View EU as alliance of
Traditional	Ensure congruence of political and cultural boundaries	States
Substate	Strengthen political representation for homeland vis-à-vis state	Nations
Trans-sovereign	Create institutions to link nation across state boundaries	Nations
Protectionist	Protect national culture in face of immigration/ social change	States

Source: Zsuzsa Csergő and James M. Goldgeier, "Nationalist Strategies and European Integration," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 1 (2004): 23.

situations where populations with a shared sense of national belonging, together with associated collective memories and cultural repertoires, have been territorially separated by shifting borders.[24] Such situations exist in many parts of the world, including Latino communities that straddle the border between Mexico and the United States; indigenous peoples living in territories divided across states in North and South America; Kurds living in neighboring territories divided across Iraq, Syria, and Turkey; and Russians living in former Soviet states. Most ethnic and national minorities in CEE live in such situations. *Protectionist nationalism* focuses on preserving a purportedly established national culture and protecting it from newcomers who might introduce unwelcome changes. This type of nationalism involves strategies that keep ethnic "others" from entering the "national" space and usually favors immigration policies that differentiate between co-ethnic and other categories of potential entrants. Protectionist nationalism has been more prevalent in immigrant recipient countries but has also emerged as a significant element of nationalist political discourse in CEE in the context of the so-called European refugee crisis of the 2010s.

In practice, these options coexist in most states in various combinations at various times, and they can be at times competing and at other times complementary to each other. For instance, a state center can engage in traditional (majoritarian) nationalism in relation to internal minorities (adopting policies and funding institutions that ensure the dominance of the majority culture), practice trans-sovereign nationalism in relation to an external "kin" minority (engaging in activities that support "kin" minority cultures outside the state), and also practice protectionist nationalism in relation to refugees or migrants who attempt to enter the state (adopting harsh anti-migration discourse and policies). A national minority political organization can engage in substate nationalism in relation to the home state center (asking for policies and institutions that ensure the continuity of minority culture), and the same organization can also engage in trans-sovereign nationalism in relation to a kin-state, while simultaneously also joining mainstream (majority) actors in protectionist nationalism in relation to refugees or migrants. Political developments in CEE since 1990 have revealed that all these types of nationalism can coexist with an interest in belonging to a transnational framework founded on the principles of democracy and multiculturalism such as the European Union. The next section discusses two types of nationalism that became predominant in CEE during the first period of the post-1990 transformations, highlighting how the politics of ethnic demography complicated democratization goals and contributed to diverse paths and outcomes.

Majoritarian Nationalism and Its Internal Challenges

The collapse of the multinational federations might have been expected to bring about greater congruence in the region between state and ethnic borders, but it did not work out that way. Of the ten new CEE states that emerged from these federations—the Czech Republic and Slovakia (from Czechoslovakia); Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (from the Soviet Union); and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Slovenia, and the newly reconstituted Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consisting of Serbia and Montenegro (from Yugoslavia)—all but the Czech Republic resembled Bulgaria

and Romania as states where there is a mismatch between territorial and ethnic borders. Majoritarian nationalism had to contend with national minorities that sought some form of group rights and participation in the new democratic governments.

This situation created its own challenges for democracy even as most of these countries were democratizing in preparation for possible entry into the European Union. First, at least during the first decade or so of postcommunism, majoritarian nationalists in state centers sought to exclude minorities (as well as their potential allies in the majority opposition) from political power. Minority representatives were not invited to join governing coalitions that decided on the fundamentals of state reconstruction and regime change, nor were they consulted in a meaningful way about legislation that affected minority populations. Minority inclusion in governmental decision making became institutionalized only in the three post-Yugoslav states where external actors directly intervened in state design to end or prevent major interethnic violence (in Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo).

Second, although all potential entrants to the European Union recognized the individual rights of minority group members to speak their languages and engage in their cultural practices, there was an intense (though peaceful) struggle over what, if any, *group* rights minorities should have. The difference between individual rights and group rights is subtle but crucial. No minority individual in postcommunist CEE was prevented by the government from speaking their mother tongue, eating their native cuisine, or engaging in their cultural practices. Instead the fight was over what official status, if any, minority culture should have. The main issue was the primary cultural marker, language. Do minorities have a right to be educated in their own language? Do minorities have a right to interact with government—the post office, the courts, local officials—in their own languages, or must they use the majority language? Should markings in public spaces be only in the majority language or in both majority and minority languages? There were fights over everything that had to do with asserting majoritarian dominance in areas of sovereignty and cultural reproduction.[25]

Third, what in most countries would be considered purely domestic matters, such as administrative territorial reorganizations, sometimes escalated into international political issues due to increased international attention to interethnic conflict in post–Cold War Europe. Minority parties and advocacy groups, too small to effect change on their own and unable to find support among majority parties for institutional accommodation or policy change, used the opportunities provided by democratization and regional realignment toward NATO and the EU. They appealed to external actors in kin-states, European institutions, the United States, or the UN to influence domestic legislation. Transnational lobbying helped to prevent the escalation of conflict and resulted in more accommodative minority policies in several instances, even in the case of Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia that were largely disenfranchised and seen as "fifth columns" of a kin-state unbound by Western transnational institutions.

The struggle between majorities and minorities was perhaps sharpest in the Baltic states. After 1991, there was a strong sense among Baltic populations that democratization should bring national justice. Baltic governments thus adopted harsh policies to establish national dominance over the institutions of the new states. To start, each of the three Baltic governments adopted citizenship and language policies that established the

dominance of the titular language in the state. The politics of ethnic demography became apparent in these policies, as new governments made efforts to incentivize Russians to leave and to prevent those who remained from participating in the design of new political systems. These strategies were most aggressive in Latvia, where the ratio of the Russophone population compared to the native population was the highest, and most moderate in Lithuania, where the ratio of the Russian minority was the lowest. In Lithuania, with some exceptions, residents who had lived in the republic before 1991 could obtain citizenship simply by applying. In Estonia and Latvia, only citizens of the interwar Estonian and Latvian states before Soviet annexation in 1940 and their descendants had an automatic right to citizenship. Citizenship laws required other residents to pass a language proficiency test in order to become citizens of the reestablished states, even though during the Soviet era hardly any Russian school taught Estonian or Latvian. As a result, roughly a third of the population of Estonia and Latvia was excluded from citizenship.[26] Citizenship laws also disadvantaged ethnic Russians in public sector employment and the distribution of resources. The 1991 Latvian privatization law, for instance, excluded noncitizens. In Estonia, property restitution similarly discriminated against Russians.[27]

Despite these exclusionary minority policies, majoritarian nation building in the post-Soviet Baltic states did not trigger the kinds of conflict that devastated large parts of the former Yugoslavia during the same period. The peaceful resolution of the so-called alien crisis in Estonia illustrates the contrast. Russian activists, in response to the Aliens Act adopted in 1993, which reinforced fears of expulsion among Estonia's Russophone population, claimed territorial autonomy in the northeastern region of Estonia, where Russian-speakers (Russophones) compose local majorities. Although the Russian government advocated for the rights of Russophones in former Soviet states and escalated the conflict rhetorically, the Yeltsin government was more interested in regional peace than in the reassertion of Russian geopolitical power. Substantial European involvement (by the OSCE's HCNM), combined with NATO and US involvement, helped to deescalate the crisis. Most Russophones remained excluded from citizenship for a long time, but the Estonian government agreed to moderate naturalization requirements and accelerate the implementation of naturalization laws. Estonia also enabled permanent residents to vote (if not run for office) in local elections, which provided Russian minority members a higher degree of participation rights than those enjoyed by their counterparts in Latvia.

At the same time, "returning to Europe" and obtaining protection from future Russian reannexation by joining the EU were inextricable parts of the pursuit of national sovereignty in this region.[28] Employing the powerful leverage that these motivations provided, European institutions—especially the OSCE's HCNM, the CoE, and the EU—applied strong pressure on the Baltic governments to adopt more inclusive citizenship laws and more pluralistic educational and language policies that complied with "European norms."[29] After 1998, the Estonian and Latvian governments began adopting amendments to their citizenship laws that made the naturalization of "nonhistoric" minorities easier. International pressure was less successful in influencing them to liberalize their language policies. Language legislation in both states continued to reflect a nationalist state-building strategy, although in most cases restrictions were moderately implemented.[30] In Latvia, a new bilingual curriculum introduced in 2002 and 2003 required that minority-language schools teach certain subjects exclusively in Latvian.

In Estonia, a 2007 education reform introduced similar requirements. In both states, policies that mandate the exclusive use of the majority language in subjects considered significant for the reproduction of national cultures, such as history and music, reinforced fears among Russophones that majorities intend to erase Russian culture from these states.[31]

Compared to other minorities of similar "size," the challenge that Russophones presented to these reconstituted states after the collapse of the Soviet Union was relatively weak. Rather than demanding self-government (like Serbs in Croatia), let alone secession and unification with Russia (like Transnistrians in Moldova), Russophone political actors in the Baltics simply contested the exclusionary aspects of citizenship and language laws and occasionally lobbied external actors to pressure these governments to adopt more minority-friendly policies. The weakness of shared Russian "ethnic" identification and the absence of experience with minority politics both played a role. Regardless of when they settled in their current homelands, most Russians were new minorities that had yet to learn how to be a minority, that is, how to articulate and negotiate minority claims under the post-Soviet states in which they found themselves after the breakup. Moreover, speaking the Russian language did not signify ethnic or national identity in these states in the same way that language was the primary marker of Latvian, Estonian, or Lithuanian identity. The Russophone population included people of different ethnicities who had switched to Russian as the language of advancement to higher status. Consequently, no commonly shared national myth existed among Russophones in the Baltic states that could have become the grounds for national sovereignty claims.[32] State-minority relations remained peaceful, and Russophone minority actors continued to pursue claims for minority integration through electoral politics, relying particularly on their strength in the local governments of major cities.[33] The situation of these Russophone minorities differed significantly from that of Russians living as a large regionally concentrated population in eastern Ukraine—a large post-Soviet state with a unique set of historical and contemporary links to Russia and the European Union (see chapter 19).

The Polish minority in Lithuania was a continuing minority, a "homeland community" with historic ties to the Vilnius region, which had been in the core of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and became a contested territory repeatedly in the context of various redrawings of borders in this region. A large ratio of Poles (including most of the educated class) migrated from Vilnius to Poland after World War II, and Vilnius became populated mostly by ethnic Lithuanians and Russophones. The majority of Poles today live in rural areas around Vilnius. During the Soviet period, they were exposed to decades of Russification in local schools. Despite their relative socioeconomic weakness, however, their strength as an ethnic community (with an institutional legacy in their current homeland and a Polish ethnonational narrative) protected them from the possibility of disenfranchisement and facilitated Polish collective action at the time of the Lithuanian "re"-independence movement. Polish minority actors were the first to create a political party in post-Soviet Lithuania, and they articulated a stronger challenge to the Lithuanian nation-state project than Russophones, including a claim for territorial self-government in the region where a high ratio of Lithuania's Poles remain territorially concentrated. These claims were "tamed" with external facilitation, including consensual politicians in the Polish kin-state center, who helped compel Lithuania's majoritarian nation builders

to adopt more minority-friendly policies than their Estonian and Latvian counterparts, at least in the first part of the 1990s.

In Slovakia, the key question was how a Slovak "nation-state" could materialize on a territory that incorporated a relatively large, geographically concentrated, and politically well-organized historic Hungarian community. During the first period of independence, from 1992 to 1998, the Slovak political parties in power, under the leadership of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, opted for traditional nationalist policies.[34] In an attempt to suppress minority claims for substate institutional autonomy, these policies were aimed at establishing Slovak majority control over all institutions of government and cultural reproduction. Restrictive language legislation adopted in 1995 was designed to strengthen the status of the Slovak literary standard against dialects and to exclude minority languages from the spheres considered most important for the reproduction of national cultures: local government, territorial markings, the media, and the educational system. Hungarian minority parties forcefully challenged these policies and pressed for a pluralist Slovak state. Employing the methods of party competition and parliamentary debate, Hungarian minority political elites asked that Slovakia's historic Hungarian minority be recognized as a state-constituting entity. To guarantee the reproduction of Hungarian minority culture in Slovakia, they demanded substate forms of autonomy, at various times emphasizing either the cultural, educational, or territorial aspects of self-government. Despite internal debates among Hungarian parties about the best institutional forms, they agreed on the importance of language rights and claimed the right to use the Hungarian language in the southern region of Slovakia in all public spheres and the educational system.

Majority-minority debates over these questions marked the first decade of democratization in Slovakia. The Mečiar government's policies of increasing centralized control over society also created sharp divisions within the Slovak majority. Based on their agreement about the necessity of moving Slovakia away from a recentralizing authoritarian regime, the Slovak and Hungarian parties in opposition eventually formed a strategic electoral alliance that defeated the Mečiar government in the 1998 parliamentary elections. Although vehement debates about minority self-government and language equality continued, the prospect of European integration provided incentives for peaceful negotiation. While preserving the predominance of the majority language throughout the country, policies gradually expanded minority-language rights in ways that satisfied the main aspirations that minority parties articulated from the beginning of the 1990s. The controversies over restrictive amendments to the Slovak language law adopted in 2009, however, revealed the limits of EU influence in the post–EU accession period, when membership conditionality can no longer constrain majority policy. Since then, electoral and party politics remain the primary form of minority mobilization. Deepening intra-minority fragmentation in the 2010s resulted in loss of representation for Hungarians in the 2020 Slovak parliament, creating new challenges for this large minority population.

Similar contestations in Romania provide a useful comparative perspective on how ethnic majoritarian nation building featured in the postcommunist transformation of a state that continued within its pre-1989 borders. Romania's new constitution adopted an ethnic concept of Romanian nationhood, and Romanian became the only official language. Laws on public administration and education were in some ways more restrictive

of minority-language rights than their precedents during the Ceaușescu dictatorship. These restrictions mobilized the Hungarian minority electorate to lend overwhelming support for the minority political organization that emerged in December 1989 to represent Romania's 1.6 million Hungarian population. Much in keeping with developments in Slovakia, the prospects of NATO and EU membership contributed to majority willingness to accommodate claims. But accommodation occurred only gradually, as an outcome of strategic negotiations between moderate majority parties and the Hungarian umbrella party in the state center.[35] Although Romania was considered a "laggard" in democratic consolidation and EU accession (admitted together with Bulgaria in 2007), post-accession Romanian governments remained more supportive of minority-friendly policies than their Slovak counterparts. In both states, the question of whether minority parties can hold their electorates together and navigate in volatile political environments remains open.[36]

The Trans-Sovereign Nationalism of Kin-States

In addition to majoritarian nationalism, trans-sovereign nationalism also gained significance in the region during this period, revealing the continuing impact of the legacies of shifting borders and ethnic hierarchies described earlier. Since the beginning of postcommunist restructuring, a growing interest emerged in kin-states to develop cross-border relations with external kin populations. The constitutions of several states, including Albania, Croatia, Hungary, and North Macedonia, contain commitments to care for the well-being of kin living abroad. Many governments, such as in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Slovakia, adopted legislation to provide benefits to ethnic kin living abroad. Although the constitutional clauses and benefit laws adopted in kin-states differ in their specific content (ranging from cultural and economic benefits to nonresidential citizenship), their common characteristic is that they support the preservation of a shared national identity and foster a relationship between a kin-state and those outside its borders who define themselves in some sense as co-nationals.[37]

The Hungarian state's nation-building strategy after 1990 is a robust example of trans-sovereign nationalism in the region. Close to three million ethnic Hungarians live in Hungary's neighboring states. In an integrated Europe, they compose one of the largest historically settled minority groups. Meanwhile, the population of Hungary has declined steadily since the 1980s, from over 10.7 million people ~~in the 1980s~~ to just under 10 million as of 2011. After 1990, the democratically elected leaders of Hungary were keen on strengthening ties with Hungarians living in neighboring states, but they were aware that territorial revisionism was an unacceptable proposition if they wanted to join an integrated Europe. Instead of pressing for border changes, they created a network of institutions that link Hungarians living in neighboring countries to Hungary while encouraging them to remain "in their homeland" and, in effect, withstand assimilation where they reside. To complement these cross-border institutions, the Hungarian government expressed support both for EU membership for Hungary and its neighbors and for Hungarian minority demands for local and institutional autonomy in their home states. According to the logic of these policies, if Hungary and all its neighbors became EU

members and the EU provided a supranational, decentralized structure for strong regional institutions, then Hungarians could live as though no political borders separated them.

Although the "virtualization of borders" appeared attractive to many Hungarians, the idea found little appeal among majority political parties in neighboring countries. Seven states neighboring Hungary include ethnic Hungarian populations, and five of these states were newly established after the collapse of communist federations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the majority national elites in both newly created and consolidating national states were deeply reluctant to weaken their sovereignty and accommodate multiple nation-building processes in their territories. Thus, Hungarian efforts to unilaterally "virtualize" borders triggered tensions between Hungary and its neighbors, particularly those engaged in establishing newly gained independence. The adoption in June 2001 of the Law Concerning Hungarians Living in Neighboring Countries (commonly known as the Hungarian Status Law)—which defined all ethnic Hungarians as part of the same cultural nation and on this basis offered a number of educational, cultural, and even economic benefits to those living in neighboring states—triggered significant attention from policy makers in the region, European institution officials, and scholars of nationalism.[38] The governments of Romania and Slovakia, the two states with the largest Hungarian populations, expressed concern that the legislation weakened their exclusive sovereignty over ethnic Hungarian citizens and discriminated against majority nationals in neighboring countries. Although these neighboring governments themselves had adopted similar policies toward their own ethnic kin abroad, controversy over the Hungarian Status Law brought Hungary's relations with these neighbors to a dangerous low point. The fact that all these governments were keenly interested in EU membership eventually helped them compromise. Hungary signed a bilateral agreement with Romania and altered the language of the law in response to European pressure in 2003. Yet the controversy over the Hungarian Status Law foreshadowed the challenges of reconciling European integration with the continuing power of divergent and competing national aspirations. By the end of the 2000s, trans-sovereign nationalism became "normalized" as part of the set of nationalist strategies described earlier, employed in varying combinations by state centers and substate political actors.

Although less coherent than the Hungarian kin-state's policies, the Polish government has also solidified its engagement with external ethnic kin populations after EU accession. The "Karta Polaka" or "Pole's Card" was introduced in 2007. Individuals who can demonstrate their Polish origin and can speak Polish are eligible to receive one. The cardholder receives prerogatives not available to ordinary visitors to Poland, such as a reduced waiting period to apply for permanent residency, exemption from having to apply for a work permit, reduced fares on public transportation, and free admission to state museums. The Polish Senate has institutionalized government support for Polish minority institutions abroad through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This funding plays a major role in sustaining Polish minority institutions (e.g., schools, cultural and social organizations).

Democracy and Its Discontents

The entry of most CEE states into the EU beginning in 2004 was a watershed for the region. It rewarded a decade and a half or more of often painful efforts to transform the

formerly communist states into free market liberal democracies that respect individual freedoms and human rights, a precondition for EU entry. It recognized the region's rightful place in "Europe" after nearly half a century of separation behind the Iron Curtain. CEE populations were overwhelmingly in favor of joining the EU and taking advantage of opportunities for travel and work. For the first time ever, Europe was free and undivided.

At the same time, however, EU membership loosened constraints on the behavior of parties, elites, and governments in the region. In the relationship between nationalism and democracy, EU membership brought some unforeseen changes. If liberal democracy had to gain primacy during the pre-EU accession period, then once EU membership was achieved by a large number of CEE states in the wave of the EU's Eastern Enlargement project (2004–2007), the commitment to liberal democracy weakened and nationalism evolved and strengthened. Democratic commitments weakened due to a confluence of factors. First, those commitments were probably never as deep as they were made to appear during the period of EU conditionality. Although all CEE states made the requisite reforms to create liberal democratic market economies, normative commitments to the resulting institutions remained weaker. Unlike in more established democracies, *liberal* democracy was not viewed as the only possible game in town. Second, after accession, Brussels moved on to other problems, such as corruption, and lost interest in overseeing further political developments in the domain of minority protection beyond funding to help the Roma population. Third, even if Brussels had maintained its oversight, the penalties to CEE for deviating from liberal democracy were considerably fewer post-accession than pre-accession. The West European political elites who created and initially sustained the EU were so convinced of the superiority of liberal democracy that they neglected to incorporate a formal procedure for ejecting countries that no longer met EU standards. The penalties for deviation are not trivial; they include freezing a member state's voting privileges and withholding funds to assist economic development. But even these require unanimous approval from all the other member states and fall well short of the loss of membership. In practice the weakness of EU institutions in enforcing the democratic norms they advocated during the pre-accession period became visible, signaling to political actors in the rest of the region that less democracy and more nationalism were in fact acceptable, so long as states maintained peace in the region.

Two international crises gave nationalists (and other opponents of liberal democracy) throughout the region further ammunition with which to advance their agendas. The first was the global financial crisis of 2008–2009. The most obvious effect of this was that it put a halt to several years of sustained economic growth and caused great hardship throughout the region. Mass conflation of democracy with prosperity meant that nationalists and other critics of the economic and political reforms could effectively attack incumbent politicians and claim that they had been right all along about the dangers of adopting Western-style systems. In countries with mature capitalist systems, people generally accept the reality of periodic economic contractions and the difficulties that go with them. There is little mass demand for a radical overhaul of the system. That is not the case in CEE. When market capitalism was introduced after 1989, mass publics in the region imagined that once the tribulations of the transition were over, their countries would eventually become as rich and democratic as Germany or Sweden. Like true believers

who are mugged by reality, the financial crisis disabused people of this illusion. This made populations more open to radical solutions.

The second crisis was the mass influx of refugees fleeing conflict and hardship in the Middle East and beyond in 2015. The overwhelming majority of refugees sought asylum in Germany, Sweden, and elsewhere in Western Europe. Many CEE (and also West European) political elites nonetheless were able to instrumentalize the crisis. They encouraged popular anti-migrant sentiment with inflammatory rhetoric and attempted to position themselves as defenders of "Christian national traditions" against foreign Muslim "invaders." They could do this for three reasons. First, although the migrants did not intend to stay in CEE, many traversed through it to reach their destinations. The sight of thousands of migrants crossing borders made the perceived threat concrete rather than merely theoretical. Second, the EU wanted its member states to share the burden of settling the migrants, so quotas were instituted. The obligations of CEE were relatively small (in the low thousands of migrants), but elite opposition was able to portray this as a Brussels diktat that went against the will of the people. Third, these countries had very limited experience with immigration. Migration had been a normal feature of life in the region for centuries before communism, resulting in a multiethnic demography that became forcibly altered by the violence of the Holocaust and forced population movements during and after World War II. During the communist period, these countries were sources of out-migration, a trend that accelerated after the collapse of communism (see chapter 6). Lack of experience with immigrant integration remains a significant legacy of communism in CEE, and it makes these societies highly vulnerable to protectionist nationalism.

Protectionist nationalism, espoused on both the left and right sides of the political spectrum, differs in important ways from the ethnic nationalism we have thus far discussed. First and foremost, it redefines the "enemy" from being the local politicized national minority group (e.g., ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia or ethnic Poles in Lithuania) to non-Europeans of a different religion, as well as their liberal allies at home, in the EU, and elsewhere. Second, the "threat" is no longer the challenge to majority cultural dominance from minority autonomy but instead the attack on "Christian-national traditions" posed by Muslims. The migrant crisis is a prime example of how politics can make strange bedfellows. On one side of the debate stood nationalists from across CEE, who are normally at loggerheads with each other, and a minority of other politicians who thought opposition to migrants was a winning political strategy. On the other side stood their largely liberal and left-wing opponents, Brussels, and other proponents of liberal policies, such as the Hungarian-American Jewish philanthropist George Soros.

In sum, political elites in CEE exploited the confluence of forces buffeting liberal democracy in the region—the loss of EU interest in and ability to significantly sanction undemocratic government behavior post-accession, a financial crisis that shook popular confidence in the market system and liberal democracy itself, and a migrant crisis that brought (or at least threatened to bring) thousands of foreigners into these countries. The result has been increased nationalism and democratic backsliding, though in varying degrees across the region.

The front-runners in this process have been Hungary and to a lesser extent Poland. Although in these countries there are no significant internal national minorities to target,

Photo 3.2. Demonstrators against refugees and immigrants in Warsaw, Poland, at a protest organized by the National Radical Camp and Korwin party on April 10, 2016.

leaders in both countries have nonetheless invoked a "threat to nation" discourse, where the "threat" is "liberalism" and its supporters, broadly understood, rather than neighboring ethnic groups. Both the Fidesz party since 2010 in Hungary and the PiS party since 2015 in Poland have sought to overturn the hegemony of the postcommunist liberal state, which in their view has weakened national identity and thwarted the popular will. The details of their attacks on the liberal democratic state, which have put them both at odds not just with the EU and other international institutions but also with their own liberal and leftist oppositions, can be found in the Poland and Hungary country chapters (chapters 11 and 13, respectively). Here we focus on the nationalist component.

There are three aspects to the nationalist attack on the liberal state. One is liberalism's perceived disdain for conservative values and national traditions. Postcommunist liberal freedoms brought not just the right to speak one's mind and travel but also sexual minority rights, wide access to abortion, and multiculturalism. These are anathema to those who seek to preserve ethnic nationhood and traditional values. For example, Fidesz and PiS are both opposed to same-sex marriage, child adoption by same-sex couples, and sexual minority rights generally. Politicians from both parties have attacked such minorities in order to win conservative votes. In Poland, where the Roman Catholic Church is a conservative bulwark, PiS and others have demonized sexual minorities as "pedophiles," "sodomites," and a "threat to the nation."[39] In Hungary, Fidesz changed the constitution to outlaw same-sex marriage and establish the family as the basis of the nation. It forbade the ability of transgender people to change the sex listed on their birth certificates. Prominent Fidesz politicians and their allies have expressed opposition to pride parades and various other LGBTQIA movements, have likened adoption by same-sex couples to pedophilia, and in one case openly admitted to being homophobic.[40]

The second is liberalism's fondness for free markets, which immiserate many and ignore national borders. In the quarter century separating the collapse of communism and entry into the EU, the primacy of neoliberal economics across the political spectrum meant that macroeconomic stability came at the expense of social welfare. Governments privatized state-owned businesses, often to foreign interests, or in the case of Hungary, to parties close to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This cronyism and concomitant corruption have led some to refer to Hungary as a "mafia state."[41] These businesses then cut their costs by throwing people out of work, thus increasing unemployment. Governments cut public services such as mass transportation and health care to balance budgets. Meanwhile, inflation has eroded the standard of living for pensioners and those in low-skilled jobs. Both Fidesz and PiS responded by intervening in the market. Fidesz has sought to regain state control over the economy by, among other things, instituting discriminatory taxes on foreign-owned businesses and restricting foreign investment in so-called strategic sectors, such as energy, finance, transportation, and agriculture. Fidesz has been zealous in regulating businesses, such as taxi service and the sale of tobacco, for the "national interest," and it favors "nation-friendly" policies such as financial incentives to boost Hungary's low birthrate. In Poland, PiS has sought to remedy the ills of the market system with generous welfare benefits. Poland lacks the economic cronyism of Hungary but is no less concerned with fostering national solidarity. Policies include generous cash subsidies for families that have children and annual bonuses for pensioners, along with a promise to increase the minimum wage.

Finally, nationalists attack the liberal state by removing, or at least attempting to remove, impediments to the ability of the ruling party to implement public policy. One of the distinguishing features of the liberal state introduced after 1989 was the separation of powers. Rather than investing all political power in one institution (as had been the case under communism), reformers spread power over several institutions, such as an elected legislature, an executive branch, and especially an independent and impartial judiciary with the power to declare government actions unconstitutional. The idea, of course, was to put limits on the power of a transitory parliamentary majority or executive to implement illiberal and antidemocratic measures. All would be held accountable by a free press. These rules worked fine for Fidesz and PiS when they were out of power. For example, while the Hungarian Socialist Party was still in power, the current Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, famously referred to the constitution as a "shield" to protect the people. But once in power, Fidesz and PiS saw both the judiciary and the press as obstacles to achieving their illiberal policy preferences.

After its landslide victory in the 2010 national parliamentary elections, Fidesz was gifted with a supermajority in parliament, giving it the power to change even the constitution without opposition consent. The party used this power with vigor. It successfully packed the Constitutional Court with partisans and ultimately wrote and ratified a new constitution. It muzzled the opposition through administrative chicanery. It denied opposition platforms advertising and broadcasting licenses. It instituted fines for publishing "biased" news, where a Fidesz-controlled commission was charged with determining such bias. Ultimately, Fidesz-friendly outlets dominated TV, radio, and newspaper sources. In Poland, the PiS government after 2015 enjoyed an absolute majority in the parliament and sought to copy the Fidesz example by creating a "Budapest on the Vistula." However, PiS's parliamentary majority, while sufficient to pass ordinary laws, was insufficient to legally rewrite the rules of the game, as Fidesz had in Hungary. Consequently, opposition to PiS's illegal efforts to intimidate and neuter the judiciary has been more successful than in Hungary. Whereas in Hungary Fidesz's changes will endure even should it lose a future election, in Poland, PiS's changes can still be undone if a different party comes to power.

With the judiciary and press effectively out of the way, Fidesz set about implementing its nationalist vision, branding itself as a "savior of the nation" and trailblazer of "illiberal democracy" in Europe. The popular appeal of exclusivist ethnic nationalism was already apparent in the strong showing of the vehemently xenophobic Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) in the 2009 European Parliament elections, as well as in this party's increasing success among the Hungarian electorate (obtaining parliamentary seats for the first time in the 2010 elections and gaining 20 percent of the votes in 2014). A series of acts adopted by the Orbán government after 2010 codified this ethnic understanding of the nation. An amendment to the citizenship law made it easier for ethnic Hungarians living abroad to become Hungarian citizens and gain nonresident voting rights. The new Hungarian constitution adopted in 2011 included provisions that made members of Hungary's large Roma minority more vulnerable to discrimination. After 2015, the government successfully instrumentalized the Syrian refugee crisis to brand itself as the defender of the nation and of European Christianity. In the same spirit, a set of laws adopted in 2017 undermined those nongovernmental organizations

Photo 3.3. Thousands protested in Budapest on April 12, 2017, against legislation targeting civil society organizations and the highly regarded Central European University. Demonstrators on Heroes' Square formed a giant heart around the word "civil," signaling the centrality of nongovernmental actors in protecting democratic freedoms.

and institutions that represent and encourage critical attitudes about ethnic exclusivism and populist nationalism (e.g., the Central European University of Budapest and human rights nongovernmental organizations).[42]

Notwithstanding the close relationship between nationalism and democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland, nationalism is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of such backsliding. In Slovakia and the Baltic states, for example, restrictive minority policies continued (actually worsening in the case of Slovakia[43]) after EU accession, but no nationalist party has achieved the electoral success of Fidesz in Hungary or PiS in Poland, and there has been less of a challenge to the liberal democratic state. In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, there has been a notable centralization of power under President Andrej Babiš, but without an accompanying discourse on Czech nationalism.[44]

We conclude our discussion with Estonia and Latvia, where ethnic Russians constitute substantial minorities and the post–EU accession period has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, once NATO and EU membership had been achieved, these countries, like others in CEE, were freer to turn to less minority-friendly strategies. On the other hand, neighboring Russia's hands-off strategy in the years leading up to the Baltic states' NATO and EU memberships began to give way to a more aggressive posture in defense of ethnic Russian minorities. The 2014 invasion of Ukraine drove home President Vladimir Putin's willingness to intervene outside Russia's borders. He seized Crimea, which was majority ethnic Russian, and ultimately presided over a rigged election that resulted in Russia annexing the territory. Estonia and Latvia (and Lithuania,

which has far fewer ethnic Russians) feared that they, too, were vulnerable. Russian ethnic minorities were not just a matter of domestic politics but acquired a security dimension. The Baltic response has been to pursue nation-building policies under increased NATO protection. Since the Crimea annexation, NATO has deployed soldiers, weapons, and other equipment in the Baltic states to deter any potential Russian aggression. All three states have continued to restrict Russian-language rights and have instituted policies to limit and control the ability of Russophone minorities to gain effective political representation and maintain their culture. Yet differences in the policies adopted toward Russophones since the 2014 Crimea crisis reflect higher degrees of "securitization" in Latvia and greater willingness to accommodate in Estonia, indicating that political actors in state centers have significant power to choose between minority exclusion and accommodation (see chapter 9).[45]

Continuing Tensions between Nationalism and Democratic Governance

Tensions between ethnic nationalism and democracy continue to shape politics in CEE in important ways. Ethnic conceptions of political nationhood remain dominant despite a mismatch between ethnic and political boundaries, creating a continuing source of conflict over the criteria for who belongs in a state and under what terms. Members of majority ethnic populations whose understandings align with dominant nationalist ideologies have a different perspective on the democratic performance of their states than members of permanent minority populations. The continuing divisiveness of ethnopolitics reveals how deeply the legacies of the region's modern history influence the strength and sustainability of democracy today.

The contemporary political map of this region was created through postwar rearrangements involving shifts in state borders and ethnic hierarchies. CEE societies have lived under externally designed regimes that were either imposed (as was communist one-party rule) or adopted by local elites (as was liberal capitalism after 1990). Along the way, competing national aspirations emerged as powerful sources of political mobilization. It was against this backdrop that the end of state socialism triggered the collapse of ethnonational federations and that postcommunist states institutionalized ethnic nation building. Contrary to the situation after World War II, however, post-1990 international norms did not allow for the physical removal of ethnic "others." Instead, the EU developed an Eastern Enlargement project to incentivize CEE governments to democratize and adopt inclusive policies toward minorities. Longing for Western recognition and European membership, however, did not replace the appeal of ethnic nationalism—even if much of the region avoided the devastating wars that broke out in the former Yugoslavia, which in some cases derailed democratization for over a decade.

Thirty years after the beginning of historic state and regime transformations, the unrealized hopes of liberal democracy and EU integration make CEE societies vulnerable to political entrepreneurs who use ethnic nationalism to reinforce insecurities and weaken resistance to authoritarian rule. Developments across Europe in the 2010s, such as the strengthening of racist and nativist discourse, ethnic justifications behind Russia's

annexation of Crimea and support for secessionists in eastern Ukraine, the securitization of the presence of Russophones in the Baltic states, and the xenophobic nationalism used by populist political leaders that "lead" democratic backsliding in countries that were former front-runners of democratization—are among the most conspicuous manifestations of the way the politics of ethnic demography can undermine democratic governance.

Support for the EU remains strong, and formal democratic structures are in place in much of CEE; but their meanings and applications vary across the region. Moreover, understandings about the scope of democracy diverge within states, in some cases creating deep political cleavages that weaken societies. Moving forward, the challenge for people in CEE is to build more broadly legitimate forms of democracy that can generate interethnic solidarity, and strengthen the sphere of social organizations that can help to hold governments accountable, while also accommodating the complex matrix of nation-building aspirations that characterize this ethnically diverse region.

Study Questions

1. Explain the "Janus-faced" character of nationalism and the way it has influenced postcommunist democratic development in Central and East European countries. In what ways can we say that nation-building policies have been both forward looking and, at the same time, turned to the past?
2. Bearing in mind the significance of preexisting institutions, national composition, and the choices made by political elites, what seems to set apart the violent ethnic politics of the former Yugoslavia from the largely peaceful evolution of majority-minority conflicts in the rest of Central and East Europe?
3. Most ethnic minorities in Central and East Europe have kin-states in the region, and most governments have enacted legislation to extend various kinds of benefits to ethnic kin living abroad. Discuss the reasons why kin-state nationalism is controversial in this region and how it affects the evolution of democratic government and European integration.
4. Democratization and entry into the European Union were supposed to decrease the salience of nationalist competition in Central and East Europe, yet they seem to have had the opposite effect in some countries. What explains this apparent paradox?
5. Liberal democratic backsliding is occurring in many Central and East European countries, but the hardest hit are Hungary and Poland, two relatively prosperous countries that were at the forefront of market and democratic reform in the years after the collapse of communism. How does nationalism figure into this puzzling outcome?

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