
UNIT 18 EMPIRES AND NATION-STATES-2: THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AND SOVIET UNION

Structure

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18.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn how:

- the Russian Empire was different from the other two Empires discussed in the previous Unit;
- the Russian Empire was able to integrate the minority nationalities within its fold; and
- the Soviet re-integrated these minority nationalities after they were separated from the Empire after World War-I.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, you have read how Ottoman and Habsburg Empires collapsed under pressure to maintain multi-national state systems and also due to challenges posed by rising nationalist movements. In this Unit we will discuss how Russian Empire was different from other two Empires and how even after breaking up under the impact of war, its successor state; the Soviet Union was able to unite most of its constituent units.

18.2 DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER EMPIRES

The Russian Empire faced all the hazards of multi-national composition in the era of nationalism; and victors sought to prise apart the pieces after a successful war. But it differed from the other two empires in many respects.

First, the Russian state modernized more effectively and did not lose too many wars until the great disasters of 1914-1918. It lost only the Crimean War of 1854-1856 against Britain and France; but there were no territories to seize and Russia was punished only by the demilitarization of the Black Sea for twenty years. The other major Russian defeat was in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905; but here Russia lost no more than half of the Sakhalin to Japan who was herself too exhausted to press for any more territory. Otherwise Russia maintained a high rate of victory, against Napoleon in 1812 and 1814-1815, in the Hungarian revolution in 1848, and the Ottoman Empire in 1812, 1829, and 1877-1878, all accompanied by innumerable diplomatic successes. Russia also conquered the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century, Central Asia from the 1820s to the 1880s, and the eastern seaboard of Siberia north of the Amur and Ussuri rivers in 1858-1860, besides conducting further imperialist penetration of Korea and of the Chinese Empire in Manchuria from the 1880s. The Russian Empire could not be so easily defeated in international conflict as much as the Hapsburg and Ottoman could be.

Second, unlike the others, the core nationality, the Russian, was far larger, as the following statistics indicate:

Nationalities in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union within frontiers of given year

	1719		1897		1989	
	In 1000s	%	In 1000s	%	In 1000s	%
Total	15,764.8	100.00	125,640.0	100.00	285,743	100.00
Russian	11,127.5	70.58	56,665.5	44.31	145,155	50.80
Ukrainian	2,025.8	12.85	22,380.6	17.81	44,186	15.46
Belorussian	382.7	2.43	5,885.6	4.68	10,036	3.51
Total						
East Slav	13,536.0	85.86	83,933.7	66.80	199,377	69.77
Volga Tatar	293.1	1.86	1,834.2	1.46	6,649	2.33
Chuvash	217.9	1.38	843.8	0.67	1,842	0.64
Mordovian	107.4	0.68	1,023.8	0.81	1,154	0.40
Cheremis	61.9	0.39	375.4	0.30	671	0.23
Votiak	48.1	0.31	420.8	0.33	671	0.23
Bashkir	171.9	1.09	1,321.4	1.05	1,449	0.51
Teptiar	22.6	0.14	117.8	0.09		
Total						
Volga/Ural	922.9	5.85	5,937.2	4.73	12,512	4.37
Estonian	309.2	1.96	1,002.7	0.80	1,027	0.36
Lativan	162.2	1.03	1,435.3	1.14	1,459	0.51
Finnish	164.2	1.04	143.1	0.11	69	0.02
Swedish	8.0	0.05	14.2	0.01		

Polish			7,931.3	6.31	1,126	0.39
Lithuanian			1,659.1	1.32	3,067	1.07
Jews			5,063.2	4.03	1,449	0.51
Moldavian/ Rumanian			1,121.7	0.89	3,498	1.22
Bulgarian			172.5	0.14	373	0.13
Gagaus			55.8	0.04	198	0.07
Total West	643.6	4.08	18,598.9	14.81	9,711	3.40

(Source : Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvlkerreich. Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, Verlag C.H. Beck, Manchen, 1992, Table 3, pp 323-325).

Russian demographic superiority was obvious; and with the Slavs, their supremacy was overwhelming. But the trend in late imperial times was downward owing to the expansion of the Empire and the inclusion of non-Russians throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Siberia, Transcaucasia, Finland, the Baltic, Poland., Bessarabia (Moldavia of the Soviet Union), and finally Central Asia. This was a source of nationalist anxiety to Russians, leading to xenophobia. The Russians and the Slavs were also the most developed, socially and economically, with the exception of the Baltic. It was empire with a dominating core; in the case of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, it was not always clear whether there was a core at all.

Third, the Russian imperial state or Autocracy enjoyed unrivalled advantage of possessing its own Russian Orthodox Church and the largest Orthodox Christian population in the world. This provided the state with an undivided religious loyalty. On the other hand, in the case of the other two empires, both the centres of the two religions (the Roman Catholic and Islamic) and the majority of the co-religionists were outside the empire. As a bonus, the Russian Orthodox Church was entirely subordinated to the state since the early eighteenth century and was run by a bureaucrat like any other ministry.

Fourth, in the Empire, the Russian nationality was the first to define itself in modern terms as a nation and to seek, on that basis, to make the rest of the Empire Russian. In the Habsburg case, the Germans of the Habsburg Monarchy could not hope to rule or dominate as German nationalists, although German nationalism had been defined from the beginning of the nineteenth century. German nationalism instead caused them to switch their loyalty to Prussia and later, the German Empire, which left no nationalism at all for the Habsburgs to defend. In the Ottoman case, Turkish nationalism at least did not lead to an outside loyalty as happened with the Germans of the Habsburg Monarchy. But Turkish nationalism developed late, only from the 1870s, after all Balkan nationalisms had worked out and in effect acquired independent states. Nor did Turkish nationalism aspire to turkify the non-Turks in the manner that Russian nationalism proposed russification. This is evidence of delayed modernization in Turkey proper, where political forces relied more on dynastic and historical institutions, despite the administrative modernization of the Tanzimat era (1839-1879).

Hence the fifth difference, the Russian Empire broke up only under the impact of World War, and not earlier, despite important defeats. Further, the post-imperial

revolutionary Soviet state was able to re-assemble most of the Empire into the Soviet Union, except for Finland, the Baltic, Poland and Bessarabia (Moldavia in the Soviet Union). But after the Soviet-Finnish War of November 1939 and March 1940, the Soviet Union regained parts of Finnish territory north of Leningrad. In October 1939, the Soviet Union annexed a vast tract of eastern Poland up to the present frontier with Poland. This was done by the so-called Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939, an agreement with Germany on the partition of Poland. In 1940, the Soviet Union summarily added the following territories: all of the Baltic; Bessarabia (Moldavia) which had been part of Romania 1918-1940; Bukovina, which had been Habsburg before 1918 and Romanian 1918-1940; and eastern Galicia, which had been Habsburg before 1918 and Polish 1918-1940. Most of this was lost to the German during World War II but recovered in 1944. With final victory in World War II, the Soviet Union acquired another two pieces of territory, one called East Prussia, between Lithuania and Poland, another, a chunk of Czechoslovak country south of Galicia. This re-assembly, carried out in two phases, revealed the potency of the Revolution that possessed also a Russian national core with which to work. It did not flow from decisions by the great powers, as with the multi-national states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

18.3 NATIONAL AWAKENINGS

The Russian process of national awakening started from the late eighteenth century to the 1840s when a modern literary language had flowered. It was epitomized by the poetic genius of Alexander Pushkin, N. M. Karamzini's *History of the Russian State*, Sergei Soloviev's encyclopaedic *History of Russia from Earliest Times* (29 volumes), and folklore philological research. It saw the emergence of a national intelligentsia which, from the 1840s, made it their business to debate the meaning and purpose of a Russian nation and Russian civilization. These were chiefly the Westernizers, V. G. Belinskii and Alexander Herzen, and the Slavophiles, K. Aksakov, I. Kireevski and A. Khomiakov. On behalf of the state, Sergei Uvarov, the minister for education, defined a Russian national identity and the need to russify the non-Russians as the best way to modernize, that is, to ensure centralization and homogeneity in administration, law, and social structure. One of the instruments of such homogenization, for the Russian state, was the Russian Orthodox Church.

However, the other main nationalities did the same for themselves almost at the same time. The 1820s saw literary, historical, and folklore scholarship identify the Estonian and Latvian cultures; the fifties saw newspapers in these languages; and political movements for national rights emerged in the seventies and eighties. The Lithuanian nation could be defined only by separating it from the Polish one, given their intimate existence in the Rzeczpospolita, the name of the Polish-Lithuanian empire of the 14th-18th centuries. While scholarship on its culture had long existed, the political programme of a separate Lithuanian nation emerged only in the 1860s, after the Polish insurrection of 1863. The case of Belorussia is curious. The existence of the Belorussian language was established only in 1807 and 1809; but from the next decade Jan Barszczewski launched a modern literature. However, Russians and Poles thought of Belorussians as Lithuanian because they were Roman Catholic by religion; it was only in the 1860s that Russian nationalists discovered or were convinced that Belorussians were almost the same as the Russians themselves in language and folklore. The modern and

national identity of the Ukraine was fixed similarly in the 1840s with the literary career of the national poet, Taras Shevchenko; the idea of a political destiny was propagated immediately thereafter, from the fifties. In the Volga region, the Tatars found their national historian in Shihabeddin Marzhani during the fifties; Abdul Kayyum Nasiri (1825-1902) fashioned the literary language; and from the 1880s Ismail bey Gaspraly (Gasprinskii) (1851-1914), a Crimean Tatar, promoted a further simplified language, a most influential newspaper, and the political programme, Panturkism.

With the simultaneous development of national identities over so much of the Russian Empire, loyalties would switch from the Emperor to each of these nations. Unity and security could no longer be founded on just loyalty to the Emperor (the same problem as for the Habsburgs); it would have to be based on attachment to the Russian nation. But this would be impossible for the emerging non-Russian nationalist; hence the only strategy of imperial integration that appeared possible was russification that is, making the non-Russian into a Russian by culture. This seemed feasible (unlike germanization in the Habsburg Monarchy) owing to Russian demographic and developmental supremacy. This took the form of imposing Russian language, Russian officialdom, and Russian Orthodox Church. We now see it to have been a futile endeavour; but in those days of beginning of nations, such things seemed possible, especially as the English were successful in Scotland and Wales, the official French had done the same in France only recently, and the Magyars were busy smothering Slovaks, Croats, and Serbs in Hungary. To the problem of integration was added the task of modernization. This required, as usual, centralization and uniformities. Russification seemed to provide the only strategy necessary for such homogenization, since a national centralization, as in the Habsburg model, was fatally contradictory, as already suggested. These were the options and considerations before Sergei Uvarov, the long-serving minister for education, who inaugurated the fateful process.

18.4 RUSSIFICATION OF THE POLISH CULTURAL SPACE

Russification in the West began by attacking the Polish language and religions associated with Polish cultural influence. These were the Roman Catholic and the Uniate. (The Uniate Church, established in 1596, combined the Roman Catholic and Orthodox faiths, but was hierarchically subordinate to the Pope in Rome, and hence regarded with suspicion in Russia). After the Polish rising of 1831, the Roman Catholic faith was severely persecuted, as Poland was a deeply Catholic country. Local self-administration was suppressed, the Russian language was imposed in administration, justice, and schools, the University of Vilna (capital of Lithuania) was closed, and Roman Catholic monasteries shut down.

In Ukraine, Belorussia (also known as White Russia and Belarus), and Lithuania also, similar anti-Polish cultural measures were imposed. All these regions had been part of the Rzeczpospolita, the Polish-Lithuanian Empire of the 14th-18th centuries, before their piecemeal annexation to the Russian Empire. Russian law replaced the Lithuanian Statute, and the Uniate Church, which had many adherents in Ukraine and Belorussia, was suppressed in 1839. The Orthodox Church carried out a great wave of proselytization among Lithuanian and Belorussian peasants, but without much success. However, the class structure was not touched, serfdom remained intact, and Polish magnates continued to enjoy their privileges. It was

a typical problem of such empires: nationalist and class policies moved in different directions and could sometimes even be contradictory. Early-modern empires could never be consistently nationalist.

Another such wave was mounted from the 1860s, after the Polish rebellion of 1863. The Roman Catholic religion was further repressed and Russian language imposed even at elementary school. However, owing to Belorussia and Lithuania being distinct from Poland, the Autocracy now played the typical game of playing one nationalism against another. From the 1860s, Russian nationalists encouraged the Belorussian language, issuing pamphlets in Belorussian urging peasants to call themselves Russian. At the same time local revolutionaries used the language to mobilize the peasants, while the Roman Catholic priests deployed it to hold off the Orthodox attack. The net result was a substantial development of the ignored and despised Belorussian language. Another wave occurred during the Revolution of 1905-1907. However, while Belorussian nationalism evolved as a major cultural force, it did not become one of comparable weight, as in the case of the other nationalisms. In that sense it was ideal for the Russian Empire: it developed a popular regional consciousness, it expelled Polish cultural influences, but it remained integrated to the Russian state.

The Lithuanian situation was more tricky for the Autocracy. Poles dominated jobs and especially the Church hierarchy in Lithuania; so Lithuanian priests emerged as good anti-Polish nationalists, especially from the 1860s. The Russian government was pleased, but such nationalism was directed as much against the Russians. Because the Russian government, as part of its russification policies, prohibited the employment of Lithuanians, large numbers entered the Church hierarchy instead. The Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church thus became a base for the intelligentsia, utterly nationalist, and bitterly hostile to both Russian and Polish nationalism. This was obviously a problem for the Russian state; but with it came a bonus also. Such Lithuanian nationalism was conservative and anti-socialist. The socialists of the region were organized in two parties, 1) in Josef Pilsudski's Polish Socialist Party (PPS) in 1892, and 2) the Social Democrats of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania in 1893. Both favoured a federating arrangement with Poland, whereas the Lithuanian conservatives and nationalists opposed the Polish connexion. Lithuanian nationalism was useful for acting as a check on the Russian Autocracy's two implacable foes, Polish nationalism and Polish socialism; but it also undermined the unity of the Russian Empire.

18.5 RUSSIFICATION IN THE BALTIC

The same situation arose in the Baltic countries, but with a different combination of religions and nationalities. The Baltic is now known as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; but before 1918 it was divided among historic provinces with very different boundaries, and parts of it were known as Estland, Lifland (Livonia) and Kurland (Courland). The ruling class was German, dating from the conquests of the 12th-13th centuries, the bureaucracy was Russian and German, and the peasants and common people were Estonian and Latvian. The Baltic German barons were Russian subjects and utterly loyal to the Emperor of Russia. They enjoyed the privileges of feudal nobility as in Europe although their serfs were freed in 1816-1819. The German language was used everywhere. They administered their own justice, and they controlled all education and professional employment. The Russian state preferred co-operation with them, and the system

worked very well. But Uvarov, the education minister, now warned that the special privileges of Baltic Germans were a threat to the Russian Autocracy (state). An influential body of Slavophile and nationalist opinion joined him in making this claim. The Baltic Germans had not committed any offence whatsoever: but the Polish rebellion revealed the power and menace of nationalism; and modernization required uniformity at all levels. Overnight therefore, the Baltic barons became suspect.

The first step was to convert the Estonian and Latvian peasants from Protestantism to Russian Orthodoxy, which would detach them from their German overlords (all Protestant) and attach them to the Autocracy (the Russian state) and Russia. An Orthodox See (seat of a bishop) was established at Riga (capital of Livonia, now of Latvia) in 1836 and by 1845-1847 about 100,000 of these peasants were converted. Most of them however re converted by the 1860s as they had not derived any benefit. Russian nationalists continued a noisy campaign against Baltic privileges; but the Emperor held them firmly in check, well aware of the danger of destabilization. But nationalism was a growing force which the Russian state itself used for imperial integration; and from the 1870s Baltic privileges began to be dismantled. The German barons ruled through a restricted property franchise in the Estates and municipal government; and all peasant (that is, Estonian and Latvian) petitions to extend the franchise were rejected. But in 1877 a wider property qualification was decreed for municipal elections, and non-Germans entered the political struggle for the first time. In 1892, the Russian municipal law was extended fully to the Baltic. From the 1880s, an intensive campaign of russification led to German officials being dismissed in large numbers, Estonian and Latvian petitions being upheld, and finally in 1888-1889, the ancient Baltic German privileges in the administration of justice, control of schools, and use of German language, collectively known as the Privilegium Sigismundi Augusti, were all suspended. Thus far the Autocracy could play local nationalisms against Baltic German privileges. But now, as revolutionary movements gathered momentum in the 1890s culminating in the great revolution of 1905-1907, Estonian and Latvian nationalism meant also peasant and worker revolutions. The Autocracy therefore came down on the side of class, that is, of the Germans. Thus policy operated on both sides, flirting with local nationalisms against the Germans, and sustaining German class interests against local peasants and workers. This contradiction could never be resolved.

18.6 RUSSIFICATION OF THE UKRAINE

The Ukrainian language had long been prohibited, and nationalist organizations like the Society of Saints Cyril and Methodius were suppressed (1847). The Russian language was imposed at all levels, and so many publications were prohibited that Ukrainian nationalism took to expressing itself through theatre. But Ukrainian nationalists fled across the border to Galicia, in the Habsburg Monarchy, where they found a warm welcome. The Habsburgs were busy stimulating Ukrainian nationalism among the Ruthenes of Galicia against the dangerous hegemony of Polish nationalism and culture, indeed, exactly as the Russian state promoted Lithuanian against Pole, and Estonian and Latvian against Baltic German. The Habsburgs were engaged in this game since the 1780s; it became more energetic after 1848. Thus Ukrainian nationalism, repressed in the Ukrainian territories of the Russian Empire, flourished in the Habsburg Empire. When Galicia was ultimately united with the Ukraine after World

War-II, this region remained the most nationalist, bitterly anti-Russian and anti-Soviet part of the Ukraine.

18.7 RUSSIFICATION IN FINLAND

Finland was part of the Russian Empire, but occupied an altogether special place. It was acquired in 1809 during the Napoleonic Wars from Sweden. It enjoyed a special constitution with some democratic rights, and was a Great Principality (also called Grand Duchy), not a mere province of the Empire. The country was under Swedish cultural domination such that the first purely Finnish grammar school appeared only in 1858. Thereafter it was Russian policy to promote the Finnish language and culture at the expense of the Swedish; and in 1902, both became official languages. But, from 1899, Russian-nationalist centralization caught up with Finland, as it had with the Baltic in the 1880s. Now the Russian language also was imposed; after 1907, the autonomies were attacked; and from 1910, the Russian Duma (parliament) legislated for Finland also. Once again, Finland's special constitution was attacked, not because of any nationalist sedition against the Russian Empire but because the nationalist strategy of imperial modernization and integration demanded it. Of course, it hastened the very result it was designed to prevent, the disintegration of empire.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In what respects was the Russian Empire different from the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires?

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- 2) Discuss the role of the Orthodox Church in the process of Russification of the minority nationalities.

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18.8 THE SOVIET REINTEGRATION

The War and defeat did not reduce the Russian Empire into a series of nation-states as they did the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. But parts of the Russian Empire in the West did become new nation-states (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Bessarabia/Moldavia as part of Romania) and the rest became national-states or Union Republics as they were called, within the Soviet

Union. In European Russia these were Ukraine and Belorussia; but, from 1945, all others except Poland also became Union Republics. Why was this process different from those of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and what did it consist of?

As has been seen, the Russian Empire faced many of the dilemmas and contradictions of the other two empires. But it might appear that despite war time failures, the Russian Empire was after all on the winning side, that of the Allies, and therefore it was not broken up like the others. That is not the case, however, since both the sides in the War, the Germans and the Allies, made every attempt to partition the Russian Empire and its successor Bolshevik state.

Russian armies were heavily defeated by German forces by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917; they then imposed the treaty of Brest-Litovsk on the Bolshevik government in March 1918 by which the western provinces of the Russian Empire were severed from the Soviet state. This applied to the Baltic, Poland, and Ukraine. The Ottoman government acted likewise in the Caucasus where the three independent states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were established in April-May 1918. The Ottomans overran Armenia; Azerbaijan and Georgia became Ottoman and German client states respectively. The German and Ottoman governments acted exactly as the Allies were to do at Versailles, partitioning the territories of their opponents and creating a series of satellite states.

But the Allies also assaulted the Bolshevik state in order to restore a government that would continue to fight the War in the East rather than make a separate peace with Germany as the Bolsheviks did in March 1918. Thus, once the Russian Civil War commenced in mid-1918, the British manoeuvred in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and in the north to overthrow the Bolshevik government. The Americans and Japanese pitched in at various times in various places. Their policies were confused and shifting, working for both partitioning the Empire and for its restoration. In the event, the British and Germans contributed enormously to the independence of Estonia (February 1919) and Latvia (February 1920). Lithuania won her independence in July 1920 on her own; but wartime German occupation helped significantly. Finland gained her independence by mid-1918 in a purely nationalist independence struggle against the Bolsheviks. All these events were the product of full-scale war between the different parties in which the capacity for nationalism to mobilize the winning coalition was tested to capacity.

Thus far the story is similar to those of the other two empires; but what about the Soviet Union? Here we are concerned with the European part of the Soviet Union; but they suggest how the rest of the Union was created and survived on the basis of a nationalist mobilization.

It consisted of the following elements, with variations in detail according to the Republic:

- 1) A national territory was identified on the basis of language, history, and culture, and it was made into a constituent Republic of the Soviet Union. In pre-revolutionary times there was no national territory, only a number of administrative provinces which bore no relation to nationality. The difference was akin to the colonial administrative divisions in India and the subsequent formation of the linguistic states of the Indian Union.

- 2) The language of the Republic was then made the official language for local use, and Russian became the language for communication with the rest of the Soviet Union.
- 3) Universal literacy campaigns were conducted with great energy such that more members of that nationality now knew how to read, write, and speak a single standardized version of their languages and could use it at all levels than ever before in history.
- 4) The full apparatus of education, from primary to post-secondary was established, so that members of the nationality could aspire to ever higher levels of scholarship and culture within their own cultural space.
- 5) All the national cultural institutions were created, that is, museums, theatres, publishing house, radio, and many newspapers.
- 6) As much as possible, people of the local nationality were given preference in local employment; this process was known as inativization or korenizatsiia.

All these, put together, were major achievements for nationalists. But the essential conditions they had to observe in the twenties were the following:

- 1) All citizens had to accept loyalty to the Soviet state and accept the dictatorship of the Communist Party, including its anti-religious militancy.
- 2) Security sensitive jobs were controlled by Russians, as in the intelligence and defence services, and there would always be some Russians near the top level of the leadership in the Republic.

The nationalists thus got far more than they could have hoped for in the Empire, and more than the counter-revolutionary regimes which sought to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Indeed, the main anti-Bolshevik forces in the civil war, the White armies, could think of no more than a restoration of russification and the Russian national domination of the Russian Empire. And the Allies supported these forces in the civil war. To the nationalist of the twenties, after all the twists and turns of revolutionary politics, the Bolsheviks offered nearly all short of international sovereignty; in addition, Bolshevik radicalism on behalf of peasants and workers won mass class support also. It was a socialism united with nationalism to mobilize the masses in the Union. The Bolsheviks, for the moment, had found the answer that the empires could not.

18.8.1 Belorussia

A Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was formed in March 1921. This was the first time that a Belorussian state had come into existence, albeit as a member of the Soviet Federation. Nationalists were displeased that Poland had annexed certain western districts; but in October 1939 even these were taken back by the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. The nationalists thus got their country in one piece.

This was followed by a Belorussification of culture in that territory, in lieu of the russification which had been pursued by the imperial Russian state. Thus the Belorussian language became the official language of this Republic; much

linguistic effort went into standardizing it; and Russian was even banned at certain levels of administration. A national culture was then created through the institutional arrangements described above with nineteen newspapers and periodicals and a vast amount of teaching, research, and publication. Exiled nationalists were impressed. In October 1925, the Belorussian National Republic government in exile dissolved itself in favour of the BSSR as the only lawful government of Belorussia. Famous nationalist leaders like Lastouski and Dovnar-Zapolski, who were not remotely socialist, returned home.

18.8.2 Ukraine

The Ukraine is the test case of nationalist accommodation in the Soviet Union, for it was fiercely nationalist with many separatist tendencies, as well developed as Russia proper, and with a history that coincides with Russia in important respects. A Ukrainian national state came into being, larger than the seventeenth century Cossack state beloved of the nationalists. Its population was more literate than ever before, with Ukrainian the official language of the state, and with a convincing ukrainization of culture and the professions during the twenties. By the wartime deals of 1939 and 1945, Ukraine, for the first time in its history, gathered all Ukrainian-speaking territories into a single Ukrainian state. An Ukrainian intelligentsia appeared, occupied all the top cultural positions, took over the leadership of the country, and gained control of the mass media, newspapers and radio. By 1926, half the bureaucracy was Ukrainian; by 1927, half the Communist Party had become Ukrainian. This was no mean achievement given that only 70% of the country claimed Ukrainian as their mother tongue.

18.8.3 Minority Nationalities

Similar accounts could be given of the lesser nationalities like the Tatars, Bashkirs, and other Volga peoples, or the several small ones in the Caucasus. Each of these now gained control of a territory, the possibility of developing its own language and culture, the opportunity to engage in local regional or national politics and to make a legitimate career in it, and most of all, protection from Moscow against a local dominant nationality in areas of mixed nationality.

There is an important additional feature to be noted in this nationalities policy. Certain nationalities gained special privileges or rights despite being a minority in their historic territories. Thus the Tatars, Kalmyks, Karelians, Mordovians, and certain Caucasian nationalities were minorities in the Autonomous Republics or Autonomous Regions assigned to them. Yet their language and culture were promoted, they enjoyed special employment opportunities, and they could make political careers locally, all of which would have been impossible in a pure democracy where majority alone decides.

18.8.4 The Stalinist Thirties

These were the arrangements by which the Soviet Union stabilized in the twenties and solved the intractable problem of multiple national compositions. But it had required major concessions to nationalists who were not socialists and were bitterly opposed to Bolshevism. The 1930s saw a cataclysmic change. This was the decade of Stalin's forced industrialization, collectivization, mass purges, labour camps, appalling man-made famines, and the final dictatorship of a security apparatus masquerading as the Party.

The special concessions of the 1920s were revoked. Now nationalism was to be permitted in the form made notorious by the slogan 'nationalist in form, socialist in content.' All the non-socialist, or rather non-Party line, thinking of the nationalists was denounced. They could promote their culture and pursue their careers within their respective Republics and regions only if they followed the Party line in its details. It was a thorough going imposition of uniformity and centralism that far exceeded the fantasies of tsarist or imperial bureaucrats and ideologues. What the tsarist Autocracy had expected from russification, the communist bureaucrats now demanded from Stalinist socialism. It was an ideological and cultural homogeneity through Stalinist socialism, but not through russification. A new Soviet culture, and a new Soviet civilization, parallel to say European civilization, was to be created. In this the Russian was just one component, if the largest; but any Russian culture that hoped to be anti-Soviet or religious was attacked as much as any other such nationalism. Thus nationalists everywhere, including the Russian, were persecuted. On the other hand, the national republics, languages, cultural institutions, intelligentsias, and political leaderships, all continued to flourish, but strictly within the ideological and political mould of Stalinism.

Repressive as such a regime was, non-Russians could still aspire to development and leadership, but only through the Communist Party. This was the principal difference from russification before 1917: then non-Russians could not, in principle, hope for a place in the nationalist Russian Empire. Now it was always possible to become a communist and thereby be equal to other nationalities, including Russians, while developing a national culture; but before 1917 it had not been possible to become Russian by promoting a non-Russian national culture. Thus the Stalinist offensive, despite its astonishing violence, was not threatened by nationalist resistance. A significant wave of nationalism swept the Ukraine for example during the War during the German invasion; but German horrors converted them speedily to Soviet patriotism. Thereafter, astonishingly, the Soviet Union remained nationally calm until the great perestroika reform of the late 1980s when the Union was breaking up. The Soviet Union had found the means to create a multi-national state by mobilizing nationalism rather than suppressing it. It furnished the greatest single exception to the European international system of nation-states canonized by the French Revolution. But it also demonstrated that both the modern state and modern international relations system must be founded on nationalism, although not necessarily the nation-state.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How was the Soviet Union different from the Russian Empire?

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- 2) What changes regarding nationalities were introduced in the Soviet Union under Stalin?

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18.9 LET US SUM UP

In the preceding discussion, you have seen that the Russian Empire differed from the other two Empires in terms of its more effective modernization, relatively lesser losses in wars, the demographic superiority of the Russians in relation to other nationalities, the supportive role of the Orthodox Church thereby ensuring religious loyalty of the majority of its subjects, enforced cultural and linguistic unification of the minority nationalities and the leading role of Russian nationalism. Even after the Empire broke up under the impact of the World War I, the Soviet Union, in a span of twenty years or so, was able to re-unite most of its constituent units in a single nation-state.

18.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 18.2
- 2) See Sections 18.4, 18.5.18.6 &18.7

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 18.8
- 2) See Sub-section 18.8.4

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS COURSE

- George Rude : *Revolutionary Europe*
- E.J. Hobsbawm : *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*
- William Doyle : *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*
- Carlo m. Cipola (ed.) : *The Fontana Economic History of Europe, Vol.3*
- Tom Kemp : *Industrialization in Nineteenth Century Europe*
- E.J.Hobsbawm : *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*
- E.J. Hobsbawm : *Nation and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality.*
- Benedict Anderson : *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*
- Ernest Gellner : *Nations and Nationalism.*
- C. Tilly (ed.) : *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*
- Vandana Joshi (ed.) : *Social Movements and Cultural Currents 1789-1945*