

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS: LOOKING AHEAD

With this issue *Nationalities Papers* has reached the venerable age of twenty-five years. Over the course of its quarter century, the journal has evolved from a modest in-house publication of a small but dedicated association of scholars, mostly post-World War II émigrés from Eastern Europe, in particular Ukraine. Since those humble beginnings in 1972, *Nationalities Papers* under the auspices of the Association for the Study of Nationalities has proudly attained international recognition. But, along with this enviable status it has had to assume the accompanying responsibility of charting courses that will keep it on the professional cutting edge, thematically and methodologically. The positive reception of the publication since becoming a quarterly, especially the praise accorded its special topic issues, suggests that the journal, on the whole, is meeting the multifarious requirements of its growing and complex international readership.

Looking back, however, is an opportunity not only for self-congratulation but also for self-examination, which, in turn, calls for an on-going guiding vision for the future. What lies ahead? The journal's response to the terminal years of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and their impact on the multinational populations there seems to have been generally correct. Most of the central problems were anticipated in time to encourage articles and entire issues either focused on the present (with a solid historical orientation) or centered on the past (but having significant contemporary relevance). This balance between a dual emphasis on history and the present, especially in matters ethnic, has been the hallmark of *Nationalities Papers'* editorial policy for the past ten years, despite understandable pressure to bow to the dictates of "presentism," prompted by a stream of dramatic events since the advent of Gorbachev.

Anymore than twenty-five years ago we knew little of what would happen in the coming years; no less enlightened and informed do we stand before the next quarter century. To say the future is "pregnant with change" is to state a truism; nevertheless the near cliché serves as a sobering moderator. What should *Nationalities Papers* be prepared to do? Obviously there will continue to be an academic need for the journal, but it will be the central assignment of future editors to steer a flexible enough course without compromising *Nationalities Papers'* mandated identity and role.

Are there, therefore, reliable indices suggesting at least the broad outlines of directions in which the present is heading with regard to questions of ethnicity within the journal's geographic parameters? Indeed there are. One clue lies in history. It is hard to go wrong when giving preference to the past. Somehow it does shed light on the present and provides keys to unlocking the future. An old and reliable guideline is to keep in mind that the immediate future is never a *tabula rasa*. Traditions,

prejudices—the usual gamut of elements that make for a basic structural continuity—provide some assurance of what problems the next years will bring.

What does that mean for this journal? For one, there is the continuing, though decelerating, decline of Russian influence, the uneven emergence, though less monolithic, of a US presence from Bosnia to Central Asia, and the resurgence of Chinese influence. Within that context numerous ethnic problems will play themselves out: the struggle to resuscitate minority languages; the radical nationalist tendency towards mono-ethnicity; the steady rise of religion as a major player, mainly fostering intolerance; very uneven economic growth, creating haves and have-nots often along ethnic fault-lines; ethno-related rivalries for control of vital raw materials, above all of oil and natural gas; increasing rejection of minorities, unless checked by international efforts, ranging from the economic to the military; renewed attempts at ethno-driven secession and the accompanying potential for extreme violence; and the latter's predictable spin-off—festering border disputes.

All these add up to a significant degree of volatility that, like a volcanic eruption or a tectonic shift can be anticipated but not predicted. Nevertheless, awareness of seismic activity and movements in tectonic plates can alert one from day to day of impending dangers and other possibilities and probabilities. The drama of ethnicity from Eastern Europe through Siberia to the Pacific will remain more than of parochial or passing interest. The interaction of these peoples—as majorities and minorities, in ever changing circumstances—will by no means diminish, capturing the imagination and attention of more than academics, of more than just historians. Linguists in search of obscure and endangered languages and dialects, as well as oil officials searching for assurances of profit on their investments, need to be aware of the intricate ethnic dynamics in the territorium that is the bailiwick of *Nationalities Papers*.

It is the hope of *Nationalities Papers* to serve its readers in the coming quarter century even better than it did in the past twenty-five years.

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