Citizenship, Europe and ethnic boundary making among Russian minorities in Latvia and Lithuania

NATALKA PATSIURKO♦
CLAIRE WALLACE ♣

Abstract

This article uses Andreas Wimmer's model of ethnic boundary making to examine ethnic boundaries among the Russian-speaking minorities in Lithuania and Latvia, two countries with contrasting integration policies. We argue that the exclusive integration policies of Latvia, particularly with regard to citizenship, result in the 'hardening' of ethnic boundaries for minorities, while the more inclusive policies in Lithuania lead to boundary 'softening'. The article examines the influence of national policies, the policies of the Russian government and the European integration as external factors of boundary making, but also considers exogenous factors such as the role of the civil society, sense of identification, and the different experiences of generations. We conclude that whilst endogenous and exogenous factors have shaped ethnic boundaries in different ways in the two countries, these boundaries are blurring because Europe opens up wider possibilities for work and study and younger generations are less likely to be excluded from participation by language or citizenship. In both countries, increasingly hybrid and fluid identities are replacing reified and essentialist ones that are based upon the previous Soviet-style constructs.

Keywords: Russian minorities; Baltic countries; identity; ethnic boundaries; civil society, nationalising states

Introduction

After the collapse of communism, the position of ethnic minorities in the post-Soviet countries became increasingly politicised and their citizenship rights a topic of international discussion (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000). In particular, Russian-speaking minorities were seen as stranded and marginalised in the nationalizing states of the former Soviet multi-ethnic empire, while the policies of national governments started to prioritise native languages and citizens over minorities (Smith, 1996). Within the former Soviet Union, this

♦ Natalka Patsiurko, Research Fellow, Department of Sociology, University of Aberdeen, Edward Wright Building, Dunbar Street, AB24 3QY Aberdeen, United Kingdom.
E-mail: natalka.patsiurko@abdn.ac.uk.
♣ Claire Wallace, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Aberdeen, Edward Wright Building, Dunbar Street, AB24 3QY Aberdeen, United Kingdom.
E-mail: claire.wallace@abdn.ac.uk.

prompted one of the largest migration movements of the post-war period, when ethnic Russians moved back to their 'homeland', as did Ukrainians and other nationalities (Pilkington, 1998).

The Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) were a particular flashpoint in these tendencies. Independence from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s encouraged strong nationalist movements in these emerging democracies, while they had to establish new relationships with bigger and far more powerful neighbours, including the Russian Federation. The position of Russian speakers as the largest minority in the region became particularly volatile in this situation. Many feared at the time that the seeds of ethnic conflict would flourish within the Baltic nationalising states, with Russia closely watching its minorities abroad (Popovski, 1996; Brubaker, 1996; Smith and Wilson, 1997). Tensions between the Baltic states and Russia continued during their accession to NATO in 2002 and remained strong during the Russian retaliatory 'cyberwar' against Estonia for removing Russian war-time monuments in 2007. The internal ethnic tensions, on the other hand, were smoothed with the incorporation of the Baltic states into the EU, since accession agreements put minority citizenship rights and integration as necessary preconditions of the EU membership (Galbreath, 2006; Sasse, 2008).

The question is how these conflicting influences of the nation states and international actors affected the integration of Russian minorities into the Baltic countries. Much of the earlier literature assumed that similar nationalising tendencies of the Baltic states in the post-Soviet period would lead to the same difficulties in minority integration (Brubaker, 1996; Smith, 1996; Laitin, 1998). However, this literature did not take into account the emerging policy differences within the three countries, nor did it discuss actual influences of the EU on the situation of minorities. In this article, we argue that differences in the granting of citizenship and the institutional accommodation of ethnic diversity led to significantly different outcomes for minority inclusion in the Baltic region. These differences were already observable in the official statistics by 2008, when Latvia assumed dubious leadership in Europe on the number of 'non-citizens', or factual residents without citizenship status. Their number reached more than 365,000 people, while the corresponding number for Lithuania was around 6,000 (see Table 1). Our argument reaches similar conclusions and illuminates substantive differences in perceptions of citizenship emerging among minorities in the region, based on qualitative research conducted in the two countries in 2010.

The article compares Russian minorities' reactions to citizenship policies in Lithuania and Latvia and explores how these policies affected ethnic boundary making and social inequalities in the two societies. Following Brubaker (1996), we consider policies of the residence states, influences of Russia as the ethnic homeland and influences of Europe as the factors shaping minority identities in the two countries. Adopting Wimmer's (2008) model of ethnic boundary making, we refer to these three factors – the influence of nationalising states,

the influence of Russia and the influences of Europe – as external factors of boundary making.

Table 1. Minority populations in the Baltic States

	Lithuania	**Latvia**	**Estonia**
Population (millions)	3.4 (2006)	2.3 (2006)	1.34 (2006)
% majority	83.4% (2001)	59.0% (2007)	68.6% (2007)
% Russians	6.3% (2001)[a] (second-largest after Polish minority)	28.6% (2006)[b] (largest minority)	25.6% (2007) (largest minority)
Size of Russian population	219,789 (2001)[a]	652,200 (2006)[b]	343,040
Non-citizens (2008)[c]	5,900[c]	365, 417[c]	110, 315[c]
Cities/regions of concentration	Visaginas, Southeast	Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Riga, regions of Latgale, Peiriga	Narva, region of Ida-Virumaa

Sources: Rechel (2009), except *a*: Matulionis et al. (2011a), *b*: Matulionis et al. (2011b), *c*: Sawyer and Blitz (2011).

Under the internal factors, we examine the role of minority civil-society institutions, ethnic identity and generational differences in the process of boundary making. By considering internal and external factors in conjunction with each other, we reveal processes that may work towards the 'unmaking', or 'softening', of ethnic boundaries. We argue that emerging affinities with Europe and changing generational experiences may mitigate the exclusionary consequences of national policies and create a new sense of belonging in these communities.

Boundary making, identity and nationalising states:

Theoretical perspectives on Russian minorities in the Baltic states

Our argument is based on the idea that much of the foregoing discourse on ethnic minorities in the Baltic states uses a reified model of ethnic minority. According to this model, ethnic minorities are postulated to exist as 'natural' and immutable groups with firm boundaries and members' identification with the group is expected to become ever stronger over time. This tendency towards reification was present both in the Soviet state when the system institutionalised ethno-cultural nationality as a basic cognitive and social category (Brubaker, 1996: Ch.1) and in the Soviet and post-Soviet academic discourses on nationality. Hence, the post-Soviet discourse generally assumes that the language and citizenship policies of the newly independent states will solidify ethnic boundaries between groups and that the boundaries will necessarily

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persist. Thus, it subtly reproduces the Soviet-era reification of nationality in the post-Soviet period.

As an alternative vision, we see boundedness as situational and contingent, drawing upon Andreas Wimmer's theory of ethnic boundary construction (Wimmer, 2008). According to this theory, individuals and groups construct ethnic boundaries in different ways, depending on a combination of external (exogenous) and internal (endogenous) processes. We find Wimmer's theory particularly useful for conceptualising the new positioning of ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe because his notion of boundary making is based on shifting forms of political salience, social closure, cultural differentiation and historical stability. Wimmer sees boundary making as a process and, without resorting to essentialist categories and normative assumptions, identifies several boundary-making strategies at the individual level: expansion, contraction, inversion, repositioning and blurring.

A central point in Wimmer's argument is that individual strategies depend upon the institutional context in which boundary making operates, on power that ethnic actors have and the network of political alliances they form. The nation state, according to him, provides the most common institutional context for establishing ethnic boundaries, and while institutions and networks determine how salient ethnic divisions are, the power inequalities and the extent of political consensus determine the nature of the boundaries that emerge (Wimmer, 2008: 1001). In sum, for Wimmer, the internal factors of boundary construction are first and foremost associated with the institutions of the nation state and with the political interaction of ethnic groups.

Our perspective is in agreement with Wimmer's framework of institutional influences, but we deviate from his emphasis on the nation state – with parties, networks and power – as the centre of such internal institutional impact. Instead, we focus on the internal influences operating within the community rather than the nation state. In this way, we emphasise that in the post-communist context, state institutions are as much the evolving actors as ethnic communities themselves. Communities could be more or less ethnically oriented and have to devise boundary-making strategies both towards the majorities and towards the evolving state institutions at the same time as they reconfigure themselves. Hence, in an analysis of the shifting ethnic boundaries in the post-Soviet context, it makes sense to consider community-making strategies as internal influences and interaction with other actors (among them state institutions) as external factors. Contrary to Wimmer, we therefore consider the development of minority civil-society institutions – i.e. cultural, educational and social organisations of the community – to be the internal instrument of ethnic boundary making.

Two additional factors appear to be important in internal boundary construction by the communities: sense of ethnic identity and emerging generational differences within minority groups. We add these factors based on David Laitin's (1998) analysis of changing identities of Russian minorities in the

former Soviet republics. Although Laitin was much criticised for his rational-choice approach to identity (see Motyl, 2002), he made several important observations about identity change among Russians in the former Soviet Union which may still be relevant today.

First, Laitin documented the changing status of Russians in the former Soviet republics from the dominant group in the Soviet Union to a minority in the post-Soviet period (Laitin, 1998: 69). Russians in these republics had to come to terms with their new 'minority' status, which downgraded them from the quintessential 'Soviet citizens' to a minority group with the rights secondary to those of titular nationality. This was not an easy transition to make and the new nationalising discourse was deeply traumatic for these new 'minorities'. Second, the non-acceptance of minority status among Russians was partially due to their strong attachment to the Soviet identity, which for them represented the "hegemonic project that defined their cultural space" (Laitin, 1998: 91). Laitin's team found that the Soviet identity was very strong among the Russians in the post-Soviet republics. Having lost the privileged status of the Soviet people, Russian minorities were not automatically identifying with Russia as their homeland, but described themselves as 'Russian speakers' rather than Russians and emphasised their multicultural origins instead. Ethnic identity was not easily replacing the Soviet supranational self-understanding.

Thirdly, Laitin noticed two contradictory trends in the Russian identity in the post-Soviet states. On the one hand, he predicted that the Russians would generally assimilate into their residence states, while on the other hand he observed the emerging distinct identity of the 'Russian-speaking population'. This identity consolidated around the common language spoken by these groups and their sense of dislocation and acted as a principal counter-trend to assimilation. These observations prompt us to consider historical identity shifts as important internal factors of boundary making.

Finally, Laitin's research pointed to emerging generational shifts in attitudes towards the residence states, the language of communication and networks of relationships among the Russian speakers in the Baltics: younger people, with little experience of life in the Soviet system, were found to be more accommodative in their attitudes towards the requirements of the new states (Laitin, 2003). The entrance of the Baltic states into the European cultural space, Laitin suggested, also played a facilitating role in Russians' integration into the Baltic societies because the European future offered new incentives to accommodate. Hence, he saw age, rather than gender or class, as the most powerful differentiator between those able to assimilate and those unable to do so.

We found Laitin's arguments about historical and generational change of identities worth exploring and incorporated them into our model. Our research therefore examines how the sense of ethnic identity, the generational divides and the minority organisations operate within the communities and influence the internal boundary making of Russian minorities in Latvia and

Lithuania. Looking at these factors of boundary construction allows us to assess not only how the community is constructed, but also how it is changing.

Turning now to external influences on ethnic boundaries, Wimmer considers what he calls "exogenous shift" and "exogenous drift" as two principal external processes of ethnic boundary making (Wimmer, 2008: 1005). An exogenous shift occurs in consequence of major institutional changes in society, such as the formation of a nation state or a process of democratisation. An exogenous drift, by contrast, results from the diffusion of the new strategies of boundary making from the international stage, when the new discourses or ideologies of ethnicity spread from other countries.

A good way to discuss Wimmer's two types of external influences on ethnic boundaries in contemporary Eastern Europe is by employing Rogers Brubaker's triadic model of interaction between ethnic minorities, nationalising states and 'ethnic homelands' in post-communist countries (Brubaker, 1996). Brubaker argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the escalation of ethnic tensions in the post-Soviet states because minorities were caught between nationalising home and resident nations, each proposing their own vision of the newly emerging states. Brubaker saw the three entities – national minorities, nationalising states and national homelands – as political *stances* rather than as bounded groups and perceived them as powerful influences on the emerging political configurations in Eastern Europe. He described nationalising discourses in Estonia and Latvia as stronger than in other successor states and recently argued that the outcome of nationalising processes in these states also depended on the nature of boundaries between the ethnic groups and their generational divides (Brubaker, 2011).

We incorporate Brubaker's triadic nexus into our model of exogenous factors and consider how the residence states and Russia influence Russian minority identifications in Latvia and Lithuania. We are specifically interested in how policies of the residence states affect ethnic boundaries and how Russia as the kin state influences identity politics. We then explore how the triangle of tension between minorities, residence states and kin states is further affected by one additional dimension Brubaker did not consider: that of international organisations. NATO, the Council of Europe and the EU exerted significant influence on the Baltic countries when the latter aspired to membership (Galbreath, 2006). They also influenced Baltic minority policies during and after EU accession (Rechel, 2009). Hence, we additionally consider how the EU membership of the Baltic states has affected minority identities and boundary-making processes.

Focusing our analysis on the cases of Lithuania and Latvia, we argue that these countries illustrate the emergence of two divergent models of minority accommodation in the Baltic region. We explore to what extent differences in minority policies in the two countries lead to differences in Russian minorities' self-identifications, with particular focus on the effect of citizenship policies. We further examine whether these identity differences hold over genera-

tions. If emerging, such differences may contribute to the 'hardening' or 'softening' of ethnic boundaries between the Russian communities and the corresponding majorities and have an impact on minority integration in the Baltic societies.

While recognising that Wimmer's model of ethnic boundary making is more complex than presented here, we use it in a reduced way, not so much to demonstrate the nature of ethnic boundaries or the processes that lead to their manifestation as to show how ethnic boundaries shift and reconfigure under various influences, an argument that is still underexplored in the studies of post-Soviet minorities. We hope that the paper represents a step forward in this direction and that it challenges the reified view of ethnicity in post-Soviet countries.

The argument is developed in the following way. After a brief description of the methodology, we consider how ethnic boundedness is constructed exogenously through state policies. We then examine how the minorities themselves construct these boundaries endogenously. Finally, we discuss how ethnic boundaries are changing and dissolving under the influence of the internal and external factors.

Methodology

The following findings emerge from the research conducted within the FP7 Project *ENRI-East – Interplay of European, National and Regional Identities: Nations between States along the New Eastern Borders of the EU*.[1] The project focused on ethnic minorities in the EU border regions of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia and Hungary. This paper is based primarily on the life history interviews with members of two ethnic minorities: Russians in Lithuania and in Latvia.[2] We examine twelve in-depth interviews from each group using thematic analysis (see Guest et al., 2012) and trace generational differences in self-identification by stratifying respondents by age, gender and educational level.[3] In addition, our evidence includes five expert interviews with the leaders of minority organisations and government officials, a larger quantitative survey of the two minorities (800 respondents in each group) and reports on social histories of Russian minorities in the two countries. These additional sources allow for the triangulation of results and illuminate the life histories within the wider context of community development.

We consider the life history approach to be the best method to investigate the dynamics of ethnic and national identifications for several reasons. First,

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[1] FP7 SSH grant no. 217227, conducted between 2008 and 2011 (http://www.enri-east.net/en). We were members of the project research team.

[2] Interviews were carried out by project partners in the original languages. The transcripts were then quality-controlled, anonymised and translated into English. Here we rely mainly on the original transcripts in Russian and provide our own translations.

[3] The interviews quoted below reflect this stratification by abbreviating gender (Male/Female), level of education (Low/Middle/High) and age (Young/Middle-Aged/Old).

complexities of identity are best captured in qualitative work, while quantitative measures produce a hugely reduced presentation of identity's multi-dimensionality and fluidity. Nuances of self-understanding are better expressed directly in participant terms than through the reified research categories. Second, the qualitative approach looks at the intersection of biography and social change in a way that a present-oriented approach cannot and places personal histories in the context of significant historical events that affect self-identifications; here our perspective intersects with biographical accounts of European identity presented by Miller and Day (2012). Third, life histories capture changes in time and allow us to discern differences in the ways different generations understand themselves, thereby making it possible to see the intergenerational dynamics of identity.

Given the research design, it should be noted that in this article we primarily document boundary making by minority members and their leaders; ethnic boundary making by majorities feature only indirectly, through the interviews with governmental experts and the contextual discussion of the laws. Data limitations do not allow us to analyse ethnic boundary making as a reciprocal process between minorities and majorities, so we mostly document boundary making by the minorities themselves.

Exogenous boundary making among Russian minorities in Lithuania: Reactions to the residence state policies and influences of the ethnic homeland

Among the exogenous factors involved in boundary making, we consider the national policies of the residence states, the influence of the ethnic homeland (the Russian Federation) and the influence of the EU through its accession and integration policies. This section examines how national policies in Latvia and Lithuania and the influences of Russia shape ethnic boundaries as perceived by our respondents. The influence of Europe will be considered in the third section.

Baltic states influenced ethnic boundaries of their minorities primarily through citizenship and language policies (Popovski, 1996). These policies were quite different in Latvia and Lithuania, particularly in the accorded citizenship rights and in the institutional structures created to deal with national minorities. Their outcomes, superimposed on divergent ethnic composition of the two countries, were evaluated as vastly different by our respondents.

Citizenship policies were the first factor contributing to the difference in the nature of majority–minority ethnic boundaries in Lithuania and Latvia. In Lithuania, all residents at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union were entitled to citizenship. Combined with a particular ethnic make-up of the country, where minorities constituted less than 20% of the total population and no single minority predominated (see Table 1), this resulted in what we describe as 'inclusionary' policy, where the established ethnic boundaries were weaker. The citizenship issue did not come up in our interviews with mem-

bers of the Russian minority in Lithuania in 2010, and it was not seen as a problem. As one respondent remarked:

> *"Almost everybody here has a Lithuanian passport and is considered a Lithuanian. It makes no difference what language they speak or whether their culture is Russian or something else"* (*Lithuania, Interview 11, young man with a low level of education*).

In Latvia, by contrast, the citizenship rights were reset immediately upon the reinstatement of independence, and the new law gave automatic citizenship only to descendants of people who had settled in the region before the Soviet annexation in 1940. Procedures for naturalisation were established for others, where applicants had to demonstrate competence in the Latvian language and knowledge of the Latvian Constitution. Those who did not apply for either Latvian or Russian citizenship were designated non-citizens and excluded from voting and holding Latvian passports. We see this as an exclusionary policy, one which helped to harden ethnic boundaries between groups and caused resentment. Even in 2010, many respondents considered non-citizenship as a clear indication of discrimination:

> *The first encounter with the new order, how to say it, there was a feeling of fierce injustice, when passports were changed for the first time. When all people were divided into citizens and non-citizens. I have a friend, she is still my best friend, but it so happens that she now lives in Russia. She became a citizen of Russia, well, partly due to how she was treated in Latvia. [...] That was, let's say, the first disappointment in the new politics. People were divided, people were made inferior and that's wrong, in my opinion. (Latvia, Interview 6, middle-aged female with a high level of education).*

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Difference between the institutions that deal with national minorities further reinforced the ethnic divides created by citizenship policies. In Lithuania, the Committee for Nationalities was established in the early period of independence to represent all traditional minorities and provide a platform for communication between minorities and the government. Experts evaluated it as an efficient mechanism for resolving minority issues, although concerns about its reorganisation were expressed in 2010 when the Law on National Minorities was due to be changed. The institutional structure was different for Latvia, where, although the cultural development of nationalities was guaranteed upon independence, no separate governmental body was established to deal with minorities. Minority cultural policies were delegated to cultural ministries, but their economic and political rights were not addressed. Such absence of institutional mechanisms only reinforced the sharp ethnic boundaries that had been established by the restrictive citizenship law of 1994.

The transition to education in majority languages was mentioned in both countries, but it did not have the same salience as the problem of non-citizenship in Latvia. While both countries passed legislation requiring teaching to be conducted primarily in the national languages, many Russian speakers in Lithuania learned Lithuanian, but only the youngest generation of Russian speakers in Latvia acquired Latvian. Respondents complained that teach-

ing standards in Russian schools were poor, thus discouraging young people from learning the Russian language and history.

Moreover, linguistic divides were perceived as larger when they intersected with social and generational divides. Thus, in Latvia, the Russian-speaking minorities concentrated in certain regions and maintained linguistic distinctiveness by forming large working-class communities. The post-communist period disturbed these linguistic enclaves and shattered them economically, and the respondents in Latvia saw themselves as disadvantaged in linguistic, economic and social terms. [4] This was not the case with the Russian minority in Lithuania, which was better integrated, better educated and more urbanised, and its exclusion from citizenship was also smaller.

In addition to the nationalising policies of the residence states, the boundary making by the Russian communities was also influenced by policies of Russia as the 'ethnic homeland' (Schulze, 2010). Resurgent Russia in the 21st century is interested in hearing its minorities' complaints of discrimination, and many Russian leaders still regard the Baltic states as their sphere of influence. Russia continues to have economic interests in the region, such as the port of Riga, for its oil exports.

However, most Russian speakers in Lithuania and Latvia were rather sceptical about Russia's support for external minorities. First, both government and minority experts in Lithuania negatively evaluated the impact of the 'compatriot' programme promoted by the Russian government since 1999. One expert argued that the programme was designed specifically to consolidate Russians who actively identify with Russia as its citizens *(Lithuania, Expert 2)*. As such, the programme was seen as an instrument of exerting power over the Russian communities abroad with an imperial feel. This ideological bias of the programme, experts argued, sidelines most Russians in Lithuania, who by now consider themselves a traditional minority with primarily linguistic and cultural connections to Russia. Russian authorities are not interested in the cultural representation of Russians abroad and fund projects of immediate interest to Russia itself rather than to Russians in Lithuania.[5]

Experts also pointed out that the Russian Embassy in Lithuania as an institution does not foster cooperation between the two nations. Existing embassy facilities do not create spaces for community activities, and Russia is not interested in cooperating with minority leaders or funding its cultural activities *(Lithuania, Expert 1)*. Cultural activities of the Lithuanian minority, such as television and theatre, are funded mainly by the Lithuanian government.

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[4] It is therefore not surprising that in 2012 most residents of the Latvian Russian regions supported the referendum for making Russian the second state language in the country, while the population as a whole decisively rejected the proposal.

[5] For example, Moscow House, the promised housing for the Russian minority in Lithuania, was not built as of 2010, while the reciprocal Lithuanian house for Lithuanian minority in Russia was.

In Latvia, the government experts questioned the channels and transparency of Russian support for minority organisations and feared that funding went to more radical organisations within the community:

If we speak about Russia, there is this controversial question: What is being supported and how it is being supported? Because very often we know nothing about such official support, but we have speculations and assumptions that the government of Russia and various foundations support more radical organisations, support these political forces, but we don't know through what financial flows. (Latvia, Expert 1)

Both experts in Latvia described the minority's civil society organisations as mostly concerned with promoting Russian culture, with a few other social organisations of Russian pensioners. The latter defend the right of Russian residents to receive pensions from the Latvian state or help pensioners to go to sanatoria in Russia. These organisations are funded primarily by the communities themselves and not by the Russian or Latvian government. Overall, experts estimate that Russia's support for its minorities in the Baltic countries is much lower than, say, the support provided by Poland to its minorities in the region.[6]

Summarising on exogenous boundary construction, we find strong contrasts between the two countries. These contrasts amount to the hardening of ethnic boundaries, not so much due to intervening influences of the kin state, but more as the reaction to the controversial policies of the residence states. The influence of the restrictive Latvian citizenship policy is most notable in this regard: Russian residents in Lithuania feel more integrated, while those in Latvia feel excluded because they are denied citizenship. Older, less educated Russian speakers in both countries are even more excluded and are confined to the local Russian-speaking ghettos. The intervention by Russia is not evaluated positively by either community, because the kin state is considered to fund political rather than social projects. Finally, the Russian communities in Lithuania enjoy financial support from the Lithuanian state, while such support is not forthcoming in Latvia.

Endogenous boundaries: Ambivalent 'ethnic' identity and the influence of community organisations

Ethnic boundedness and a sense of belonging are created not only by the external influences, but also within the communities themselves. We consider this process as endogenous boundary making and examine the complexities of Russian identity in the Baltics and the ways Russian communities construct themselves through civil-society organisations.

Our research finds that the sense of ethnic identity in the two Russian communities does not create strict internal boundaries primarily for two rea-

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[6] It is important to note, however, that the experts we interviewed in both countries referred to minority civil society organisations only and may have underestimated Russia's influence in minority political representation, such as sponsoring political parties and activities.

sons: ambivalent *ethnic* identification within the community and ambivalent connection with Russia. A closer look at the internal cohesiveness of the communities we analysed reveals that they are not 'ethnic' minorities in the strictest sense. The two communities included individuals from all over the former Soviet Union who did not subscribe to Russian ethnic identity in a narrow sense: *"In those times, everyone was Russian, regardless of ethnic group"* (Lithuania, Interview 4, older female with a high level of education). Indeed, we found Laitin's 'Russian-speaking' communities, now increasingly labelled as 'Russian'. Most respondents talked about relatives from all over the former Soviet Union, while others spoke of belonging to historical Russian communities in the region predating the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

What these divergent communities have in common is the Russian language, and identification with language became one way of escaping narrow ethnic labels. Many respondents emphasised that they were not Russian, but members of a Russian-speaking minority. For example, when asked about what region on the map a young respondent identified with, she answered,

> *"Here, probably not just Russia. Slavs, all Slavs. Belarus is the 'Republic of Belarus' now, so if you go there, you can understand, speak and everything is fine. You feel you are not from Russia, but from a Russian-speaking environment"* (Lithuania, Interview 9, young female with a high level of education).

Another respondent replied in a similar vein, *"I am not a Russian from Russia, I am a Russian speaker"* (Lithuania, Interview 10, young male with a low level of education).

Another way to avoid ethnic identification was by constantly emphasising the difference between Baltic Russians and the Russians from Russia. Respondents observed that Russians in Latvia were more 'Baltic' in their orientation, more reserved than other Russians and 'in between' Latvia and Russia. Minority members carved a special identity niche for themselves, which emphasised their distance from Russia:

> *I consider myself to be a Latvian citizen. You know, my relatives from Russia wrote to me and actually asked: Who do I consider myself to be? Yes. And why don't I want to return to Russia? Such questions, yes. But how can I return there? I was born here, I know every little bush, every little hill in my area where I grew up, where I spent my entire childhood [...]. I spent it here in Latvia! I went to Russia several times, but I have nothing that connects me with it. I've been living my life here. I've spent all my life here and I can't imagine another country for me. I consider Latvia, Riga, to be my homeland, and not some kind of Russia. (Latvia, Interview 6, Middle-aged female with a high level of education)*

While avoiding identification with Russia, most respondents in both countries identified with the Baltic region. Furthermore, the Russian minorities wanted to be recognised as citizens of their respective residence states, and not as Russian residents abroad. One respondent stated, *"I am never ashamed to admit that I am Russian"*, *"I am Russian Lithuanian"* (Lithuania, Interview 8, Middle-aged female with a high level of education). Another asked, with a touch of irony,

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"Am I Russian or Lithuanian? I find it very difficult to answer: my father's relatives came to Lithuania 300 years ago!" (Lithuania, Interview 6, Middle-aged female with a high level of education)

These findings from in-depth interviews were reinforced in the ENRI-VIS survey, which showed Baltic Russians to be moderately attached to their residence country, to the region and to their minority group, while at the same time displaying low attachment to the 'ethnic homeland'. This may seem puzzling in light of the existing literature that portrays Russian minorities as mobilised and influenced by Russia, but is borne out in our qualitative interviews: Russians in the Baltics often identify with the region and their residence state and feel disconnected from Russia.

Our interviews suggest that the Russian identity in the Baltics is not reducible to a linguistic or Soviet one, nor can it be described as an ethnic identity in the narrow sense. Rather, it is becoming increasingly fluid and hybrid, as people redefine their connections with their residence states, Russia and the rest of the world. The inherent diversity of the Russian-speaking groups in the Baltics makes them more open to external influences, such as those of Europe. Our findings agree with Vihalemm and Masso's (2007) conclusion that Russians in the region more often describe themselves as Baltics, northerners or Europeans, a tendency that corresponds to their increasing employment in the EU (Hughes, 2005).

Civil-society organisations play an important part in the identity construction by the minorities in that they create the public sphere through which minorities interact with the wider society and shape boundaries of ethnic community. The Russian minority in Lithuania has a fairly developed network of over 60 civil-society organisations and is represented in the society by the Coordination Council of Russian Organisations. Many of these organisations, such as the Russian Cultural Centre, the first minority organisation founded in 1988, pursue cultural activities. Three weekly Russian newspapers are published in the country, and several internet portals exist for the minority, although experts note that the quality of these media is low. There are also television programmes and radio channels for Russians, but cable subscribers watch channels directly from Russia and the neighbouring Belarus. Minority media and organisations thus create a public sphere for minority activities, which allows the members of the minority to participate in the post-communist rebuilding of society.

In Latvia, however, civil-society organisations complained of being marginalised in the national politics and having little relationship with the majority. They included cultural and social organisations, as well as advocacy groups for the Russian minority. The membership of many organisations consisted of mostly older people (many younger people having migrated) and did not play an important role in strengthening the sense of community. The channels of communication between the Russian organisations and the government were few and declining, and minority grievances are often addressed by the political

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parties and minority political advocacy organisations. While in Lithuania Russian political parties are not currently represented in parliament, in Latvia they have representations in both the European Parliament and the national parliaments, even though broader political participation is undermined because non-citizens cannot vote (the party representatives are elected only by those minority members who are citizens). Russians in Latvia use many local minority media (Russian newspapers) and often watch satellite television channels from Russia. This media space is often seen as creating a further rift between minority and majority communities (Matulionis et al., 2011b: 19).

Summarising on endogenous boundary construction, we conclude that the Russian-speaking communities in both countries clearly position themselves as minorities within the residence states and want to be recognised as members of these societies. However, their sense of community is not reinforced by a strong sense of ethnic identity from within and is only partially bolstered by civil-society organisations and media. In Latvia, minority civil-society organisations are less integrated into the society, and minority representation is transferred to the political level, once again demonstrating more salient ethnic boundaries between the groups. The relationships between the majorities and minorities in both societies are nevertheless changing, as reflected in generational differences and in attitude towards Europe.

The blurring of ethnic boundedness: Generations and experiences of Europe

Having described exogenous and endogenous factors that contribute to ethnic boundedness among Russian minorities, we now turn to the factors which may loosen these boundaries or cause their disappearance in the longer term. These factors are the generational changes and the growing influence of the European Union.

For a long time, the literature has ignored the importance of generational change for changing relationships between minorities and majorities in Baltic societies. Only recently, Brubaker (2011), following Laitin (2003), has pointed to the importance of generational divisions for the persistence or the softening of ethnic boundaries in the former Soviet countries. However, studies still underestimate the influence of Europe as a changing factor on the map of minority allegiances. Our study found distinct generational differences among the Russian minorities in Lithuania and Latvia in terms of language competence, worldview, integration into the resident societies and experiences of Europe.

While generational change in the Baltic societies overall has been observed in other studies (Titma and Trapido, 2002; Vihalemm and Masso, 2007), we found that among the Russian-speaking minorities it took a particularly stark form. For example, there were clear differences in national-language competence between the generations and the countries. In Lithuania, many members of the older generation were in fact able to communicate in Lithuanian, alt-

hough they were not as fluent in it as the younger generation and did not use it as often. In Latvia, by contrast, the members of the older generation were much less able and less willing to use the national language. They were apprehensive about the citizenship policies and felt excluded from the majority society, while the members of the youngest generation were clear about Latvian being necessary for success and professional advancement and did not show any linguistic barrier.

But the generational differences did not manifest themselves in terms of language alone; rather, the entire life experience of the generations and their worldview reinforced age differences and the boundaries between majority and minority. The older generation in Lithuania vividly remembered the war, saw the Germans as the enemy and the Soviet forces as the liberators of the country and did not agree with the view of Russians as occupiers. Many of them had not travelled to Europe but had been all over the former Soviet Union and now expressed concern that Lithuania was a small country with little international influence. Diverse experiences of older generations in Latvia also connected them to the Soviet Union, made them less integrated into the country of residence and more cautious about Europe.

The youngest people in the two countries were schooled in the national languages, shifted between the two cultures relatively easily and did not have the black-and-white worldview of the older generation. The young showed little interest in travelling to Russia, but had often travelled to Western Europe and were oriented towards working and studying abroad. They were generally multi-lingual and considered English and other language skills as important for their future.

The sharpest difference distinguishing the generations is their experience of Europe. With the accession of the Baltic states to the European Union in 2004, many young people left Lithuania and Latvia to work abroad, often in the United Kingdom or Ireland. The literature suggests that the numbers of Latvian and Lithuanian migrants were disproportionately higher among the Russian-speaking minorities (Hughes, 2005; Aptekar, 2009). This may have been due to their experience of ethnic discrimination or due to the economic recession which hit Russian minorities more strongly than the titular nations (Aptekar, 2009; Aasland and Fløtten, 2001).

The youngest people in our study saw themselves as Europeans and were willing to travel, study and work in European countries. They were keen to present themselves as cosmopolitans for whom the wider Europe and the rest of the world were places to pursue their interests (Beck, 2006; Delanty, 2000, 2009). Although attached to their home country, they did not see their lives as confined by it:

> *Actually, I would like to go abroad. To study in a foreign language, in English. I have an option to go to Sweden or Ireland, my acquaintances told me about it […] I want to go abroad, there I would have greater opportunities and a chance to improve my language*

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skills. I simply want something more large-scale than sitting in Latvia until the end of my life. (Latvia, Interview 7, young male with a low level of education)

Older respondents had a different view: they blamed the EU for bringing economic ruin to Latvia and taking away the country's young. "Everyone has left" to work abroad, older respondents stated dolefully; migration to Europe became part of their reality and changed their communities.

Although differentiating the Russian communities by generations, exposure to Europe has also changed the minority–majority relationships in both countries by softening ethnic boundaries. The opportunity to see themselves as Europeans endowed our respondents with a new sense of belonging that compensated for exclusion from the national societies: *"I have a Lithuanian and European passport; I consider myself to be European" (Lithuania, Interview 7, older male with a high level of education)*, one respondent stated proudly. This suggests that while the majority–minority relations may be divided on the issues of ethnicity, the majorities and the minorities are increasingly united on the question of Europe.

Overall, our study shows that the identifications of the Russian minorities in the Baltics are changing under the influence of their complex relationships with Russia, the residence states, Europe and the internal changes within the communities themselves. In the community dynamics, the emerging generational differences are the most striking: the youngest respondents demonstrated increasingly fluid and cosmopolitan identities, their ethnic identity became weaker and their identification with the nation-state received a new significance due to the country's membership in the European Union and the new opportunities this presents. More generally, our analysis indicates that the ethnic identification of the Russian minorities in the Baltics is receding under the influence of internal and external factors, while other identities (e.g. European, local) are gathering momentum. Such changes in identification may explain why the actual polarisation between the ethnic groups in these societies has been much smaller than predicted by the nationalism literature of the 1990s. The changes may also significantly improve the possibilities for successful integration of minorities in these countries. However, successful integration may be stalled by the discriminatory policies of the states, as in the case of the citizenship law in Latvia, or by a stronger intervention by Russia, although this is unlikely given that the Baltic states are members of the EU and NATO.

Conclusions

In this article, we used Andreas Wimmer's (2008) theoretical framework to examine processes of ethnic boundary making among the Russian minorities in two neighbouring countries: Lithuania and Latvia. We evaluated how the policies of the residence states, the influences of Russia and Europe, the internal constructions of identity, minority organisations and generational divides contribute to shifting ethnic boundaries in these communities. We

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found that some of these factors, such as the exclusionary policies of the residence states, were making ethnic boundaries stronger, while others, such as the ambivalent sense of identity, influences of Europe and the generational divides, were potentially working to dissolve them. Yet other factors, such as influences of the kin state and the minority civil society, may work both ways to either soften or harden the boundaries.

Our research qualifies Brubaker's (2011) argument that strong but intergenerationally permeable ethnic boundaries in the Baltics lead to more assimilationist outcomes in the nationalising processes. More specifically, we showed that while the Lithuanian policies towards ethnic minorities were more inclusive, Latvia has pursued more exclusionary citizenship policies which have resulted in hardening ethnic boundaries and the polarisation of the two communities. The weaknesses of the minority civil society and the transfer of representation to the political arena have further reinforced ethnic boundaries in this country.

However, the polarisation between the majorities and the Russian minorities has also decreased over time, partly due to Russia's flawed efforts to manage ethnic relations and its failure to appeal to the kin groups abroad. Another factor that contributed to the softening of ethnic boundaries is the EU's conditionality, which forced Latvia and Lithuania to offer fuller rights to their ethnic minorities. More importantly, Europe offered 'exit' strategies to potential malcontents who could escape political, economic and social exclusion by finding employment and a new sense of belonging in Europe.

The differences between the native and the Russian-speaking communities are likely to erode still further as a result of generational changes. We found that the younger generation of the Russian minorities were more likely to speak the national languages and adopt a more cosmopolitan outlook because they saw opportunities for themselves beyond the boundaries of the nation state, in Europe and elsewhere. It is therefore likely that the striving for the new opportunities and a new sense of belonging will continue to blur ethnic boundaries between majorities and minorities in these societies, as both seek to become the new – and model – Europeans.

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