RUSSIA´S PASSPORTISATION POLICIES

IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-SOVIET DE FACTO REPUBLICS

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of International Relations

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in International Relations

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Budapest, Hungary
2020

Word Count: 11,754

Abstract

The mas conferral of Russian passports to the populations of post-Soviet de facto republics, so-called passportisation, gained the scholar attention mostly after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. The fact that the majority of the South Ossetian residents possessed Russian citizenship, which most of them acquired just few weeks before the outbreak of the war, served as the main justification for Russia to militarily intervene South Ossetia and subsequently even to mainland Georgia in order to protect its de jure citizens in the unrecognised republic.

Passportisation is regarded by nationalism literature as one of several instruments of kin-state politics that the regional hegemons employ in order to support the rights and the status their ethnic minorities abroad. I argue though that in the cases of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, of Donbas, Russia´s passportisation policies were initiated and shaped mostly by Russia´s concerns over its own territorial integrity, the probability that a de facto state would be re-captured by its former domestic homeland, and the geographical proximity, respectively the possibility of an open military access to the unrecognised territory. The thesis will also introduce the reader into the discourse over Russia´s identity concepts which undoubtedly shaped also Russia´s citizenship policies. Paradoxically, Russia´s geopolitical goals contradicted its own domestic discourse, what is properly reflected even in the Kremlin´s decision to distribute its passports to unrecognised states in large quantities despite the anti-immigration sentiment of the Russian public provoked by two Chechnyan wars in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Acknowledgements

The idea to devote my thesis to Russia´s foreign policy and to Brubaker´s concept of kin-state politics would not become the reality if I had not met Professor Erin Jenne and had not taken her two classes on Foreign Policy Analysis and Nationalism, Populism and Conflict Resolution in Eastern Europe in the first year of my MA studies at Central European University. These two courses were among the most exciting and rewarding courses I took during my entire university studies. Professor Jenne is one of the most inspiring academics I have ever met and probably the first professor who taught me and whose articles I found cited in the most relevant international journals on international relations. I would like to thank her for all her enthusiasm about my project and her encouraging emails which made me continue to work on the topic which appeared to be much more complex than I expected at the beginning. I would like to thank both, professor Erin Jenne and professor Thomas Fetzer, for their endorsement letters thanks to which I can continue in my post-gradual studies at the College of Europe in Bruges and explore the area of European Neighbourhood Policy even more extensively.

My great thanks belong also to my parents - my dear mum and dad. Since my childhood, both of them have been the most inspiring examples of the person I want to be in the future. Their constant support for everything I have done and for everything I have decided for in my life is something I will never cease to be thankful for and I wish I would be able to return at least part of it back to them later on in my life.

Central European University broadened by views on life in the way I would never expect any university to be able to. What is more, it gave me an opportunity to meet the people who did not just become my closest friends but who made me to think about the world differently. One of them is undoubtedly Tetiana Horban. Her passion for life, her convictions for which she is willing to fight and endlessly argue, but especially her constantly supporting and cheering nature were the traits which has been accompanying her since the first time I met her at CEU.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Introduction

The factor of Russian passports in Russia´s foreign policy caught the public attention primarily when Russia unexpectedly invaded Georgia´s de jure territory in August 2008.[1] Bolstered by the official justification for protecting Russian citizens on the territory of South Ossetia and Abkhazia,[2] Russia stopped the Georgian offensive in South Ossetia and subsequently invaded the significant part of Georgia proper. The "weaponizing" character of Russian passports[3] became a hot topic for nationalism and post-Soviet literature. The massive conferral of Russian passports to internationally unrecognised de facto state, so-called Russian passportisation,[4] became the subject of numerous, usually critical articles on Russia.

There are several theories which aim to explain Russia´s passportisations strategies. The kin-state theory depicts Russia as the kin state, the external homeland for its minorities in the post-Soviet space and assumes that the main factor driving Russia to pursue passportisation policies is to reunite 25 million of Russians scattered in the post-Soviet republics.[5] The kin-state theory does not explain though why Russia passportised also the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose population is highly heterogenous and consisting of many non-Russian ethnicities, such as Abkhazians, Armenians, Georgians, or Ossetians.

The geopolitical theory[6] assumes that Russia applied passportisation policies in order to create its own buffer zone against hostile pro-Western governments. However, this theory does not fully explain the timing of Russia´s passportisation. Following this theory, we would expect

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[1] Kristopher Natoli, "Weaponizing Nationality: An Analysis of Russia´s Passport Policy in Georgia," *Boston University International Law Journal* 28 (2010): 389.
[2] Dmitry Medvedev, "President´s statement on the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia," August 26, 2008, accessed May 24, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/27/world/europe/27medvedev.html.
[3] Natoli, 389.
[4] Vincent Artman, "Documenting Territory: Passportisation, Territory, and Exception in Abkhazia and South Ossetia," *Geopolitics* 18 (2013): 683.
[5] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57.
[6] Natoli, 389.

that Russia would confer a significant number of passports to every pro-Russian de facto state right in the first years after its establishment in the early 1990s. This was not the case though, taking into consideration the fact that, by the end of the 20th century, when every de facto state, except the Donbas republics, enjoyed almost a decade of its statehood, there was only a fraction of residents who actually acquired Russian citizenship under Russia´s open-door policy. The geopolitical theory does not explain why Russia finished passportisation of Abkhazia in 2003, of South Ossetia in 2004, or did not finish passportisation of Transnistria at all.

Lastly, there is the biopolitical theory[7] which assumes that Russia passportised the residents of de facto republics in order to stop its rapid demographic decrease of population. Although this theory might seem plausible nowadays, with the most recent case of granting citizenship to the Ukrainians in Donbas,[8] it directly contradicts anti-migration mood which was so widespread in Russia at the beginning of the new millennium when passportisation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia gradually started to take place. According to the biopolitical theory, there would be no logic behind passportising Caucasians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the time when Russia was experiencing such a strong anti-Caucasian and anti-Muslim hatred[9] and could not cope with the inflows of post-Soviet non-Russian migrants to its territory.[10]

I argue that Russia´s passportisation strategy is rather flexible and conducted on an ad hoc basis, depending on Russia´s perceived imminent security threats in its neighbourhood. It is not based upon kinship solidarity, does not aim to fully passportise every pro-Russian de facto republic just for the sake of crafting an ally within its sphere of influence, nor does Russia distribute its passports with a prime intent to increase its own population. Russia is pragmatic

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[7] Andrey Makarychev, Alexandra Yatsyk, "Imperial Biopolitics and Its Disavowals: Russia, Georgia, and Spaces In-Between," *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 7, no. 1 (2018): 4.
[8] Deutsche Welle, "Putin wants to make "new Russians" out of Ukrainians," May 31, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/why-putin-wants-to-make-new-russians-out-of-ukrainians/a-48995869.
[9] Human Rights Watch, *The Rise of Xenophobia in Russia*, August 1998, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/russia/srusstest-03.htm.
[10] Oxana Shevel, "The Politics of Citizenship Policy in Post-Soviet Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, no. 1 (2012): 128.

in its passportisation policies and it utilises its citizenship provision in order to solve imminent security crisis without a necessary use of its military capabilities. I posit that there are three independent variables which might positively or negatively affect the dynamics of Russia´s passportsation policies in its neighbourhood. These variables include: (1) the open diplomatic and military access to the local population, (2) military capabilities and ambitions of the former domestic government to recapture its lost territory, and (3) Russia´s security concerns over its own territorial integrity. To test my hypothesis, I will analyse and compare the cases of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Donbas. I will try to trace the presence or the absence of my independent variables and prove that without these variables on the place, the distribution of Russian passports would develop slowly despite a high demand from population.

The first section of the thesis will briefly introduce the reader to Brubaker´s concept of kin-state politics and basic citizenship studies which are essential for better understanding of Russia´s passportisation policies. It will explain why the concept of dual citizenship is so attractive for the residents of unrecognised states and provide a basic discussion on the polemic of dual citizenship between two schools of thought. The second section will strive to explain how the Soviet concept of ethno-national federalism reflected in the Russian discourse on citizenship policies from the early 1990s. Subsequently it will introduce four models or Russia´s nationhood and trace them back in Russia´s citizenship policies. The third section will already analyse the case studies of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Donbas. It will focus on the motives which led these territories to declare independence on their domestic governments, the changes in their ethnic composition after separatist wars, and the causes which affected Russia in its passportisation policies toward the particular territories.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Kin-State Politics and Citizenship Studies

1.1 The Nationalising States, the Foreign Homeland, and the Minorities in-between

Ethnic boundaries of neighbouring states rarely align with virtual state borders drawn on maps. This usually leads to international tensions over rights of minorities, accusations of ethnic discrimination, or suspicions of disloyalty against national minorities.[11] It all leaves place to the pool of kin-state politics pursued by regional powers in order to enhance the status of their co-ethnics abroad. The concept of ethnically motivated interventions, known as *kin-state politics*, could be placed into a broader field of nationalism studies. Brubaker, as one of the most influential scholars in this field, analyses kin state relations through the triadic nexus of relations between the nationalising state, the national minorities, and the external homeland. Whereas the nationalising state and the national minorities share the same territory, the external homeland acts in this context as a foreign agent monitoring the situation of its co-ethnics abroad and vigorously protesting or even intervening on their behalf in internal affairs of the neighbouring state.[12]

Brubaker identifies a range of policies which *nationalising states* employ in order to enhance the status of its dominant, state-bearing nationality. These policies usually include the promotion of language, culture, positive demographic ratio against other groups, or many other economic and political privileges on the expense of the underrepresented groups of national and cultural minorities in the country.[13] Some authors believe that harsh nationalist policies derive naturally from the often conflictual character of domestic political competition in the majority of post-colonial or post-communist societies which ultimately results into ethnically

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[11] Kjetil Duvold, "Beyond Borders: The Return of Kin-state Politics in Europe," *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 19.
[12] Brubaker, 57.
[13] Ibid., 57.

motivated tensions and violent reprisals against certain politically uncomfortable minorities.[14] Nationalising states tend to find themselves in a some form of political transition which can either lead to democratisation or stronger authoritarianism. The political transition which affects the economic and social disorder in the country can also aggravate its more belligerent behaviour towards other states in the neighbourhood. Surprisingly, the states which experience even democratising transition tend to be much more aggressive than many other stabilised authoritarian regimes in the world.[15]

Brubaker´s triadic framework is further extended by Jenne, who analyses the dynamics and radicalisation of demands required by the *national minorities* towards the central government. She finds out that the intensity of support from the external homeland positively correlates with the assertiveness of minority demands against the centre. Vice versa, if the national minorities lack external support, they are more likely to compromise and accommodate policies of their domestic government.[16] This view is supported by several other authors who jointly conclude that the post-war survival of de facto state states is intimately linked to the existence of kin states.[17]

The nationalist agenda of governments suppressing the rights and status of the national minorities can aggravate the minority´s *kin state* which can determine to conduct various kin-state interventions into domestic affairs and territorial sovereignty of the nationalising state. The ultimate goal of kin-state policies is to incorporate the rest of co-ethnics and other affiliated groups from the neighbouring country into a broader sphere of economic, political, or cultural

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[14] Stephen Saideman, "Inconsistent irredentism? Political competition, ethnic ties, and the Foreign policies of Somalia and Serbia," *Security Studies* 7, no. 3: 53.

[15] Edward Mansfield, Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 6.

[16] Erin Jenne, "A Bargaining Theory of Minority Demands: Explaining the Dog that Did not Bite in 1990s Yugoslavia," *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 729.

[17] Helge Blakkisrud, Pal Kolsto, "Dynamics of de facto statehood: the South Caucasian de facto states between secession and sovereignty," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12, no. 2: 290.

influence led by the kin state which often plays the role of a regional hegemon.[18] The primal foreign interests of the kin state usually rest in *biopolitics* which can be defined as "a specific type of people-centric policy that distinguishes itself from geopolitical strategy"[19] and whose goals are aimed at strengthening relations and ultimately acquiring the population from a neighbouring state.[20] The policy linked with the massive distribution of citizenships and passports, also known as passportisation, describes one of several biopolitical instruments, which can the kin state deploy in order to consolidate influence in its neighbourhood[21] and to gain discursive claim over the local population[22] affected by this policy. As Artman rightly summarises, "although, in theory, states allowed to extend citizenship to whoever they please, passportization exists in something of a legal gray area, because it effectively deprives states of their sovereignty over a significant portion of their population".[23]

1.2 The Polemics about Dual Citizenship

Citizenship represents a category undeniably associated with any type of the nation state in the world. It can be easily defined as some kind of membership which assigns the individual to a particular political and geographic community.[24] Citizenship as such represents a natural instrument of the state with which the state can legally include but also exclude any specified group of individuals.[25] Citizenship can be acquired by birth, through the principle of *jus soli* (place of birth) or *jus saguinus* (from parental origins), or both. For persons who were not able

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[18] Marlene Laruelle, *The "Russian World": Russia´s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination* (Center on Global Interests, 2015), 3.
[19] Makarychev, Yatsyk, 4.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Artman, 689.
[22] Ibid., 685.
[23] Vincent, Artman, March 14, 2014, accessed May 25, 2020, http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/3/ukraine-russia-crimeapassportizationcitizenship.html.
[24] Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg, Gökçe Yurdakul, "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State," *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008): 154.
[25] Ibid., 155.

to acquire citizenship through birth, the only viable option is to gain it through the process of *naturalisation* which is often defined by the authorities of a particular state.[26] A period of continuous legal residency, knowledge about the country, or speaking its dominant language represent minimum requirements.[27] However, many of general requirements can be overcome by acquiring citizenship under simplified procedure which exempts certain groups of persons chosen by the state authorities.

The domestic governments do not represent the only authority which is able to distribute citizenship and passports to the population under its territorial sovereignty. By the end of the 20th century, the issue of dual or multiple citizenship broadened the discussion on citizenship and passports by another heavily politicised issue.[28] Dual citizenship represented a clear breakthrough with the past where "individuals were expected to express loyalty exclusively to a single sovereign".[29] During the 19th and the early 20th century, dual citizenship was seen as a threat to state sovereignty and it was generally rejected on the basis of the perceived incompatibility of divergent political allegiances, seemingly compared to polygamy in matrimonial life.[30] The change started to take shape after the World War II. The lack of working force, the professionalisation of militaries, the increase in regular migration, or economic interdependence and decolonisation, they all contributed to the gradual shift towards a more favourable view on the institution of dual citizenship.[31] Nowadays, the benefits of dual citizenship outweigh most of the disadvantages perceived in the previous century. Whether it is multiplied diplomatic protection, reduction of travel restrictions, or claiming more attractive socio-economic benefits, such as higher pensions and better jobs or easier access to education,

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[26] Ramesh Ganohariti, "Dual Citizenship in De Facto States: Comparative Study of Abkhazia and Transnistria," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 1 (2020): 181.
[27] Bloemraad, Korteweg, Yurdakul, 155.
[28] Joachim Blatter, "Dual citizenship and theories of democracy," *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 6 (2011): 769.
[29] Ganohariti, 175.
[30] Szabolcs Pogonyi, "Dual citizenship and sovereignty," *National Papers* 39, no. 5 (2011): 685.
[31] Ganohariti, 175.

healthcare, and export markets,[32] double citizenship facilitates daily life of the considerable number of people in many countries around the world.

The benefits and constraints of dual citizenship gain a radically different meaning in the case of the so-called *de facto* states – the political entities whose political leadership, despite the lack of international recognition, controls the territory that it is claiming[33] and has the ambition to build state structures to demonstrate its legitimacy.[34] In the most of cases, the de facto states emerged as a result of the incomplete and contested state-formation of their post-communist parent states in the turbulent 1990s.[35] Every post-communist de facto state allows dual citizenship.[36] However, the motives which lead them to do so differ dramatically from those of their internationally recognised counterparts. Although, nowadays, the de facto states can issue their citizenship and passports in the same manner as other recognised entities, the passports of de facto states are considerably weaker in their value.[37] Being largely depended upon the international recognition, the citizenship and the passports issued by unrecognised de facto states considerably constrain the capacities of their population to travel freely or at least cross the international borders without unnecessary constraints. Being unable to legally crossed the borders of other states thus puts these people into the category of almost stateless citizens.[38] Although there are some cases when acceptance of passports is not necessarily dependent upon the recognition of that state,[39] having dual citizenship from the internationally recognised state considerably facilitates international travelling necessary for searching for jobs or better education and state benefits abroad.

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Pal Kolsto, "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 6 (2006): 725-26.
[34] Ganohariti, 176.
[35] Eiki Berg, Martin Mölder, "Who is entitled to "earn sovereignty"? Legitimacy and regime support in Abkhazoa and Nagorno-Karabakh," *Nations and nationalism* 18, no. 3 (2012): 527.
[36] Ganohariti, 177.
[37] Ibid., 179.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Andrew Grossman, "Nationality and the Unrecognised State," *The International Comparative Law Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2001): 861.

The literature on the effects of dual citizenship on sovereignty of recognised states can be roughly divided into two major camps. The first group of authors believes that the introduction of dual citizenship marks the beginning of the end for conventional nation-based citizenship which, in their eyes, is losing political, economic, and symbolic relevance.[40] The first camp generally holds that in the post-nation-state world, dual citizenship can represent a virtual bridge between national and supranational citizenships.[41] They hold that dual or multiple citizenship erodes the symbolic relationship between the individual and the state and undermines the concept of exclusivity of national citizenship conventionally associated with the nation state. The possession of foreign passport may also demonstrate the will of citizens to politically distant themselves from the decisions or ideology of their homeland governments.[42]

The opposing group of authors argues that dual citizenship represents the way how the kin states increase their sovereignty abroad[43] on the expense of the states which decide to allow their citizens to apply for dual citizenship. The concept of dual citizenship is thus seen rather as a zero-sum game than a win-win situation for everyone involved. Naturally, the second stream of literature does not support the assumption that the status of the national citizenship deteriorates, right on the contrary – the fact that there is a discussion about dual citizenship proves that national citizenship still matters. Moreover, it is believed that, in some case, dual citizenship can ultimately contribute to the violations of territorial sovereignty, norms of democratic equality, or popular sovereignty by enfranchising non-resident citizens.[44] The kin state can, indeed, act as a disruptive element seeking to exacerbate the critical situation in its neighbourhood. It can support its foreign minorities either directly – through material and

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[40] Thomas Faist, Jürgen Gerdes, Beate Rieple, "Dual Citizenship as a Path-Dependent Process," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 4 (2004): 913.
[41] Ibid., 915.
[42] Artman, 693.
[43] Pogonyi, 686.
[44] Pogonyi, 686-87.

financial support,[45] or indirectly, through passportisating policies which can gradually challenge the monopoly of sovereign of the domestic government or ultimately serve as a justification for military intervention to protect the rights of certain national minorities.[46]

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[45] Idean Salehyan, "Transnational Rebels: Neighbouring States as Sanctuary for Rebel Groups," *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 218.
[46] Natoli, 391.

Chapter 2: Russian Concepts of Nationhood

2.1 Ethno-National Federalism: The Final Destiny of the Soviet Union?

In nationalism studies, there is an established tradition to classify nation building projects of forming nation states into the two broad streams of civic and ethnic nationalism. While *civic nationalism* portraits "the nation as a community of a state´s citizens united by territory of the state and loyalty to the state´s political institution",[47] *ethnic nationalism* sees "the nation in terms of some inherent ethno-cultural characteristics, such as ethnicity, language or religion".[48] The ambiguity of this division is enhanced even more by geographical, one could say by post-colonial perception about the world in which "Western" civic nationalism is celebrated for its tolerance, liberalism, and the overcoming of ethnic divisions, whereas the "Eastern" ethnic nationalism tends to be condemned for its bellicose, xenophobic and authoritarian traits.

Falling into the conformity of seeing the world just in this black-and-white spectrum, we would omit rare cohabitation of both concepts in the context of the Soviet Union. Established in 1922, the Soviet Union was supposed to overcome national identities, which were in the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, seen purely as a capitalist construct strangling humanity´s progression towards a supra-national communist future.[49] The Soviet Union was not indeed constituted as a nation state although it was built upon 15 Soviet republics which were formed on the classical nation-state basis. The soviet version of ethno-national federalism represented, at least on the paper, a compromise between the civic concept of the supra-national Soviet people and the ethnic principle represented by 15 Soviet nation-states. The Soviet initial

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[47] Oxana Shevel, "Russian Nation-building from Yel'tsin to Medvedev: Ethnic, Civic or Purposefully Ambiguous?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 2 (2011): 180.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Scott Littlefield, "Citizenship, Identity and Foreign Policy: The Contradictions and Consequences of Russia´s Passport Distribution in the Separatist Regions of Georgia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 8 (2009): 1464.

effort to combine both concepts was appreciated even by Brubaker who underlines that "no other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalising, even in some cases inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level …".[50]

Naturally, the Soviets did not invent their concept just from gracious belief in humanity´s potential on their territory. In theory, Soviet ethno-national federalism was supposed to provide the Soviet Union with effective measures how to cope with future national upheaval ignited by rapid modernisation,[51] urbanisation, and industrialisation of nationalities on the Soviet territory. It could be expected that culturally and economically emancipated nations would require some degree of self-administration, what was supposed to be facilitates by the Soviet 4-tier pyramid of autonomous statuses. The Soviet Union was not organised as a Russian nation state despite the fact that the Russian nationals, culture, and language held undoubtedly dominant positions in the Soviet Union.[52] On the top, there were 15 sovereign Soviet republics which included on their territory 20 autonomous republics, 8 autonomous oblasts, and 10 autonomous districts.[53] Although the Soviet republics had some degree of constitutional supremacy over them, each of national-subunits enjoyed certain political, economic, or cultural competencies in their own hands. The numerous sub-national units were formed on the basis of nationalities and cultures, in a similar way as the Soviet republics. Paradoxically, what appeared to be the revolutionary invention of the Soviet Union, posed as the final nail in its coffin. With socio-economic decline and open criticism introduced by Gorbachev´s *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the idealist mosaic of ethnicities, cultures, and religions shattered into the battlefield of historic cleavages and ethnic cleansings which traumatised the entire Soviet space for decades to follow after the fall of the USSR in 1991.

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[50] Brubaker, 28.
[51] Philip Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (1991): 196.
[52] Brubaker, 28.
[53] Zhenis Kembayev, "Development of Soviet Federalism from Lenin to Gorbachev: Major Characteristics and Reasons for Failure," *Review of Central and East European Law* 43 (2018): 412.

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the new geopolitical reality which emerged with it in the early 1990s served as a textbook example of Brubaker´s chessboard of triadic relations between (1) the nationalising states, (2) the spoilt ethnic minorities, and (3) the kin state representing the external homeland for threatened minorities. Brubaker identifies a range of policies which nationalising states employ in order to enhance the status of its dominant, state-bearing nationality. These policies usually include the promotion of language, culture, positive demographic ratio against other groups, or many other economic and political privileges on the expense of other national minorities in the country.[54] In the post-Soviet case, the role of *nationalising states* was naturally played by the post-Soviet republics in Russia´s neighbourhood. Every post-soviet republic was largely heterogenous yet conceived by their political centres as patrimonies belonging to the dominant ethnic groups.[55] *National minorities* in newly established post-Soviet states faced substantial pressure from widely spread nationalist agendas pursued by dominant titular nations. These seen the minorities´ desire to belong to a different nation[56] than the one they were ascribed to after the USSR dissolution as challenging the legitimacy of vigorously contested statehood and fundamentally illegitimate to nation-building efforts.[57] The Russian Federation, with more than 25 million of ethnic Russians residing in the newly emerged post-Soviet republics,[58] its economic and military might unparallel in the region, and relative geographic proximity to each of the newly established states positioned the only legal successor of the USSR into the role of an undisputable candidate for *the kin state* in the post-Soviet space.

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[54] Brubaker, 57.
[55] Ibid., 45.
[56] Ibid., 48.
[57] Ibid., 50.
[58] Ibid., 45.

2.2 The Concepts of Russia´s Nationhood: Rossiiskaya or Russkaya Russia?

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Russian Federation, as the only legal successor of the USSR, found itself in a classical dilemma which, according to Shevel, faces every post-imperial state which has to deal with a substantial loss of its former territories. At the times of forming new post-imperial citizenship laws, these states rarely manage to resist the temptation to look at the new post-imperial reality through their old patrimonial lenses.[59] Although they still prefer the civic over the ethnic character of their citizenship laws, they tend to (un)intentionally overlook the fact that their territory is now limited by the borders which do not serve the administrative purposes anymore. As Shevel rightly emphasises, while civic nationalism, in its border-limited form, generally does not pose the threat for neighbouring states, civic nationalism of the state that continues to see its neighbourhood in the frames of its former imperial patrimony may by perceived by others as irredentist and threatening.[60]

The Russian Federation seemed to fall right in the middle of this trap. However, besides reflecting on its post-imperial syndrome, it firstly needed to cope with a much more essential and fundamental matter - with its own "Russian" identity. In Shevel´s words, during the centuries of its impressive history, "Russian identity developed neither as an ethnic identity nor as a territorial identity tied to the territory of the Russian republic within the USSR".[61] The Russian Empire conquered simply too many nations and extended too widely to become content with the limited, ethnically defined territory, solely inhabited by the Russian kin, the phenomenon which could be observed in the majority of contemporary European states. On the other hand, since the Russian Empire conquered such a diverse set of ethnicities, cultures, and

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[59] Shevel, 180.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 181.

religions, it was virtually impossible to craft a nation which would assimilate that mosaic into something what would resemble the civic nation of France, the United Kingdom, or Italy.

This ambiguity reflected into the foundation of two meta-theories about Russia´s identity: the concept of (1) the civic *Rossiiskaya* nation which transcends the ethnic and religious divisions and sees the nation as an integrated group of fellow citizens united by the Russian language, the Russian Orthodoxy, and loyalty to the state institutions and (2) the ethnic *Russkaya* nation that understands Russia as the heterogeneous community of more than 150 not necessarily conflicting nationalities which cohabite Russia alongside the ethnic Russians who should be entitled to leading positions due to their enormous contribution to the Russian state.[62] "Russia for Russians" could, however, seriously threaten territorial integrity of the Russian state. Although the non-Russian minorities represent altogether just 20% of the total population,[63] due to Russia´s ethno-federal structure that very much resembled its Soviet predecessor, the areas which are governed by non-Russian autonomous nations cover roughly over a half of the Russian territory (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The ethnic map of the Russian Federation

Source: https://pbs.twimg.com/media/D84B3-eXsAAsKnF.jpg

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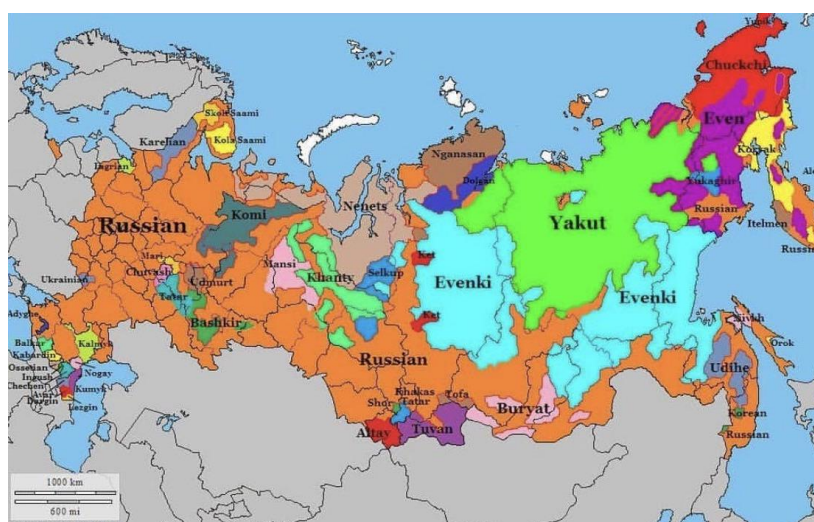
[62] Ibid.
[63] The 2010 Census in Russia, accessed May 15, 2020, https://www.rusemb.org.uk/russianpopulation/.

What seems as a compromise between the civic Rossiiskaya and the ethnic Russkaya nation is the model of (3) Russia as the community of *Eastern Slavs*. The prism of the Eastern Slavs could be understood as a more inclusive version of the Russkaya nation. It presents the Russian nation as a pan-ethnic nation of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians without a need to question whether the three branches of East Slavs are separate ethnicities or all part of one fluid pan-Slavic group.[64] However, although the community of Eastern Slavs may seem as a peaceful and more inclusive concept than the purely Russians-cantered concept, it tends to evoke a lot of anxiety for both western neighbours of the Russian Federation. Whether is Ukraine or Belarus, neither of these countries is enthusiastic about being potentially framed just as one of several branches of pan-Slavic (Russian) kin. The authorities in Ukraine and gradually even in Belarus strongly oppose Russia´s pan-Slavic ideals, regarding it as a sign of Russian imperialism which neglects the reality of the post-Soviet political developments in the region.

Last but not least, there is a model of (4) Russia protecting *Russian speakers* (Figure 2) in the world. This concept could be also described as a geopolitical version of the civic Rossiiskaya nation. The least conflictual for Russia´s domestic politics, however, the most threatening for other states with Russian-speaking minorities on their territories.[65] Whereas, in the state setting, the civic principle tends to overcome ethnic division and serves as an integrational and inclusive force, its transborder overreach captures a much more assertive role, which could, especially from the stance of neighbouring states, directly resemble kin state irredentist ambitions. Russia as the community of Russian speakers could be embedded into the model of the *Russian World* – a largely inclusive, politico-cultural construct which aims to include Russian speakers regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or religion.[66] The Russian world

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[64] Shevel 2011: 188.
[65] Shevel 2011, 181.
[66] Laruelle, 1.

represents an empty vessel, "a geopolitical imagination, a fuzzy mental atlas in which different regions of the world and their different links to Russia can be articulated in a fluid way".[67] Brubaker in his work also emphasises that the idea of the external homeland does not need to be always the actual physical homeland of minorities´ ancestors. Brubaker asserts, that "external national homelands are constructed through political action, not given by the facts of ethnic demography".[68] Whether its Shevel´s community of Russian speakers, Laruelle´s Russian World, or Brubaker´s politically rather than ethnically defined external homeland, all of them define the way how has been Russia regarding its close neighbourhood since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Figure 2: The community of Russian speakers in Russia´s neighbourhood

Source: https://gdb.rferl.org/A55E1980-6A61-4A55-9C0D 05B27BC1DA87_w1080_h608_s_b.gif

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Brubaker, 58.

2.3 Russia´s Open-Door Policy of the Early 1990s

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused a massive geopolitical earthquake in the entire Eurasian space. The post-Soviet reality and the consequences it brought caught unprepared every former Soviet republic, however, in the case of Russia, the collapse of the Soviet Union was especially painful. Besides the collapse of economy, the massive decline in living standards, and wild privatisation that spawned Russian oligarchy, the Kremlin also faced another great peculiarity - the loss of 25.3 million of ethnic Russians (Figure 3) and additional 11.2 million Russian-speakers to the newly established post-Soviet countries in its neighbourhood.[69] One of the ways how to consolidate the Russians crumbled all over the post-

Figure 3: The ethnic Russians in post-Soviet republics
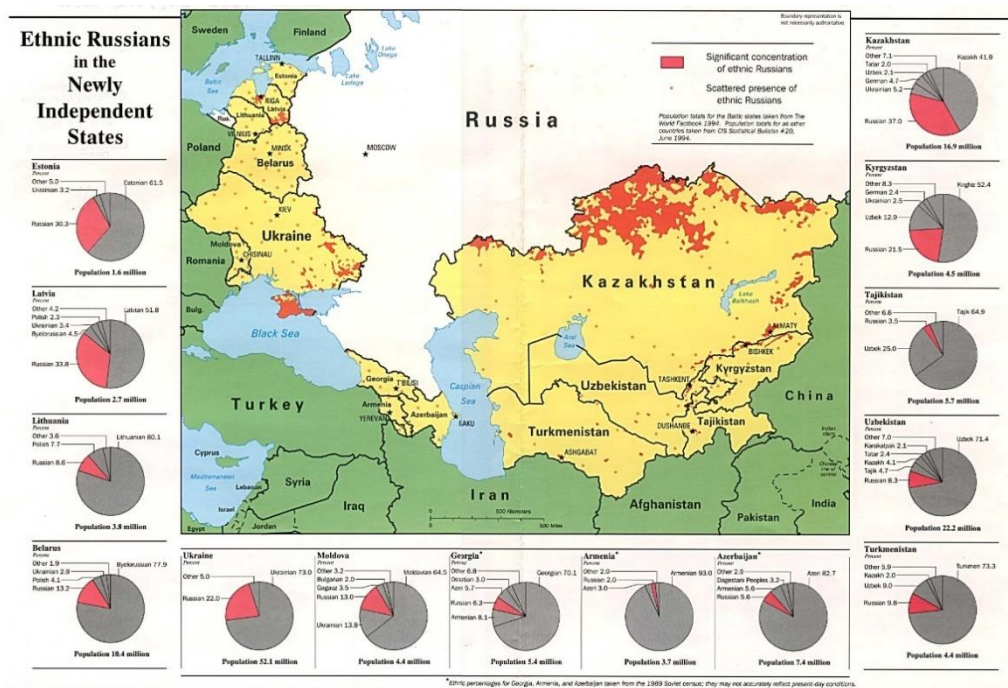
Source: https://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/russians_ethnic_94.jpg

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[69] Shevel 2011, 112.

Soviet space was to introduce highly inclusive citizenship policies. It was though that thanks to open citizenship laws, Russia would encourage ethnic Russians living in other post-Soviet states to acquire Russian citizenship and return back on the Russian soil. In this belief, in the final weeks before the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Soviet Republic introduced the 1991 Federal Law on Citizenship.[70]The 1992 Law on Citizenship defined the Russian nation as all former Soviet citizens, regardless of the fact in which post-Soviet state they resided at the time when the law entered into force. Every former Soviet citizen had the right to acquire Russian citizenship under simplified procedure. Naturally, all permanent residents of the Russian Federation received Russian citizenship automatically without any formal procedures.[71]

The 1992 Law on Citizenship, often referred as Russia´s open-door policy of the 1990s, clearly fit into the civic character of the *Rossiiskaya* nation, with a substantial overreach into the imagination of Russia as the nation of *Russian speakers*. The new legislative on citizenship had obvious post-imperial traits. It did not recognise the existence of international borders of other post-Soviet sovereign states, nor took any measures to restrict its focus only on more than 25 million of ethnic Russians in the neighbourhood. Indeed, it focused on the entire post-Soviet population of nearly 150 million residents living in 14 post-Soviet republics. Within the first years of its operation, Russia´s open-door policy became more effective and "welcoming" than it was initially wished by the public and the political elites which proposed it. The Russian Federation was not the only post-Soviet country which suffered from the harsh reforms which were necessary to take in order to build market-based economy, actually, the majority of other post-Soviet republics suffered even more.

It is by no surprise that there was a substantial number of non-Russian residents who wished to acquire Russian citizenship in order to get access to the larger Russian job market,

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[70] The law entered into force in February 1992, it will be later addressed as the 1992 Law on Citizenship.
[71] Federal Law No. 1948-1-FZ, November 28, 1991.

receive Russian state benefits, or simply enjoy better quality of life than in their domestic republics. This reality resulted into the immense interest for Russian citizenship and the influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries. According to Shevel´s estimates, there was around 400,000 – 500,000 successive applicants for Russian citizenship annually,[72] which were the numbers highly sustainable for a still fragile economy of the Russian Federation. What is more, the initial belief that these people will be the "lost" Russians was far from the reality of multi-ethnic groups of immigrants.

2.4 The 2002 Law on Citizenship: The End for Massive Immigration?

With hundreds of thousands of new arrivals from the post-Soviet countries, Russia´s open-door policy started rapidly falling from the public´s favour. Besides pragmatic concerns over Russia´s limited resources for welfare programs,[73] there were also more nationalist or even xenophobic voices attributing the rise of unemployment, criminality, or polarised society to the arrivals of non-Slavic immigrants from the Caucasian and Muslim countries. This discourse war enhanced even more significantly with two brutal wars in Chechnya and numerous insurgencies in the Northern Caucasus. The situation in the early 2000s was heavily criticised even by Human Rights Watch which raised awareness over the media-nourished fear from darker-skinned non-Slavic minorities coming from the former USSR which were often thrown together as "individuals of Caucasian nationality" and associated with bandits, drug and arms dealers, or ethnic terrorists.[74]

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[72] Shevel 2012, 122.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Human Rights Watch.

Tightening of the rules on citizenship seemed as essential for keeping the social order which slowly started to get out of the grip in Russia.[75] During his first year in the Presidential office, young and ambitious Vladimir Putin put the reform, and thus tightening of citizenship policies on the top of his priority list. In the presidential draft of reformed citizenship laws from April 2001, Putin suggested to significantly limit the possibilities of former Soviet citizens for acquiring Russian citizenship under simplified procedure. Putin´s initial proposal suggested that only those former Soviet citizens who were actually born on the territory of the Russian Federation but later move to a different post-Soviet country may be eligible for Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure.[76] The former Soviet citizens who were born in 14 other Soviet republics were practically equated with other non-Soviet foreigners. Such a drastic measure against neighbouring post-Soviet population was unprecedented and criticised heavily by the Communist parliamentarians in the Russian Duma. Supported by the public opinion, it clashed with the civic idea about the civic nature of Rossiiskaya nation and navigated much closer to the ethnically framed Russkaya Russia, or at least to its milder, Eastern Slavic form. Communists could not put up with the fact that the Putin´s proposed draft would exclude the rest of former Soviet compatriots from any kind of simplified procedures, placing them on the same level with real foreigners from other countries. Liberals, on the other hand, criticised the fact that Putin gave up to xenophobic and racist opinions in the society and neglected people living in poverty coming from less economically developed post-Soviet countries.[77]

After the weeks of heated debate, Putin and the Communists found a compromise. Putin´s presidential draft which planned to gran simplified procedure for Russian citizenship acquisition just to the persons born on the Russian soil was expanded also to those former Soviet

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[75] Wilson Center, "The Current Crisis in Dagestan and Chechnya: Will the Federation Emerge Intact?," November 18, 1999, accessed May 23, 2020, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-current-crisis-dagestan-and-chechnya-will-the-federation-emerge-intact.
[76] Shevel 2012, 129.
[77] Ibid.

citizens whose parents were born in the Russian Federation and, what is more, to all *stateless persons* inhabiting the regions which separated from the former Soviet republics.[78] The final version of the Law on Citizenship from 2003 seemed to accommodate everyone. The Putin administration managed to tighten citizenship policy by excluding the considerable number of former Soviet citizens whose parents were not Russians, whereas the Communists were satisfied with more inclusive version of simplified procedure for former Soviet citizens with Russian parents and stateless persons from de facto states. As we can observe in the Figure 4, Putin´s effort to significantly reduce the immigration to Russia proved to bear fruits from his first years in the office, enhanced by the adoption of tightening 2003 Law on Citizenship.

Figure 4: The arrivals to Russia (1992-2009)

Source: Shevel 2012, 128.

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[78] Federal Law N 328-FZ, November 11, 2003.

Chapter 3: Russia´s Passportisation Policies in De Facto Republics

3.1 Abkhazia and South Ossetia: A Textbook Example?

3.1.1 The Prelude to the Ethnic Conflicts

During the Soviet times, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Figure 5) were part of the Georgian Soviet Republic. Although both were regarded as autonomous entities, the degrees of their self-administration differed. While Abkhazia enjoyed the status of an autonomous republic, South Ossetia was defined just as an autonomous oblast. Paradoxically, while the South Ossetians represented a constant majority in their oblast (66%),[79] the Abkhazians (17,8%), regarded as the titular nationality of their autonomous republic, represented, together with ethnic Russians (14,6%) and Armenians (14,4%), just one of several minorities in the population dominated by ethnic Georgians, whose share achieved nearly 44% in the 1989 Soviet Census.[80]

Figure 5: The Map of Georgia and Separatist Territories
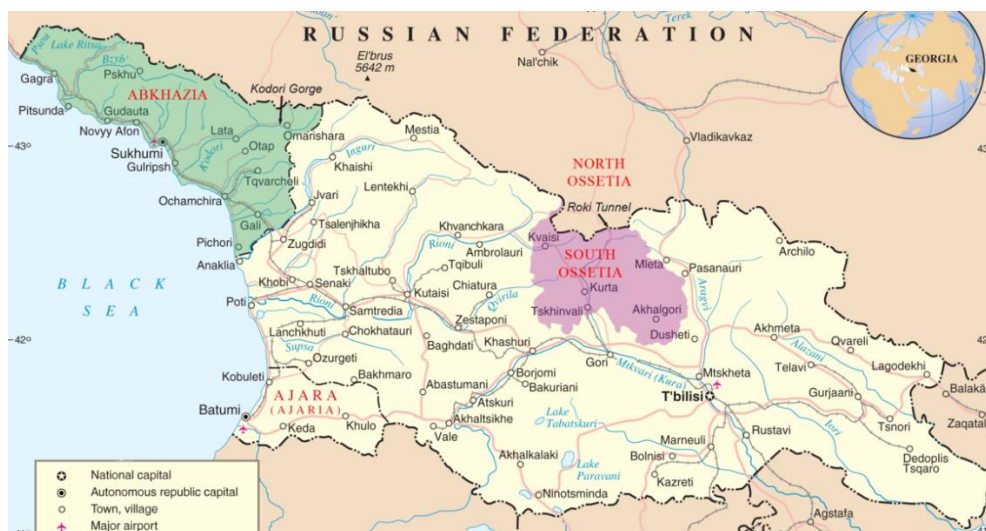
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/91/Georgia_high_detail_map.png/1200px-Georgia_high_detail_map.png

[79] Ethno Kavkaz, "Naselenie Yuzhonoy Osetii (1989 g.)" (Population of South Ossetia from the 1989 Soviet Census), accessed May 19, 2020, http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnsossetia.html.

[80] Ethno Kavkaz, "Naselenie Abkhazii (1989 g.)" (Population of Abkhazia from the 1989 Soviet Census), accessed May 19, 2020, http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html.

Naturally, Abkhazians heavily criticised this fact and ascribed it to the divide-and-rule policies of the Soviet Union´s Georgian-born leaders, Josip Stalin and Lavrentiy Beria, who pursued forceful "Georgianisation" of Abkhazia and encouraged non-Abkhazian nationalities to move and settle in the Abkhazian territory.[81] Georgians countered this narrative by pointing to the fact that there were special "Abkhazian" quotas which encouraged political (over)representation of Abkhazians to a greater extent than it was reflected in the demographic composition of Abkhazia.[82] Indeed, the demography of Abkhazia and grievances which stemmed from it were in the heart of perceived injustice from both sides for decades prior to the conflicts in 1990s.

Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatism started to mount already with the introduction of controversial language policies in the late 1980s. The State Program for the Georgian Language, adopted in 1989, was designed to enhance the position of Georgian primarily among minorities and included the enhanced coursework on Georgian language, compulsory examination in Georgian for university applicants, or the introduction of special courses on Georgian history and literature.[83] Although, at that time, Georgia was still part to the USSR, its leaders already started to pursue Brubaker´s model of the nationalising state with the primal intent to secure a stronger position of the Georgian titular nation and its language in the future independent state. The creation of a branch of the Tbilisi State University in the Abkhazian capital, Sukhumi,[84] just highlighted that direction and ignited inter-ethnic tensions even more.

The relations between Tbilisi and the autonomous territories started to deteriorate even more with the dissolution of the USSR. The participation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in spite of an explicit warning from Tbilisi, in the 1991 Soviet Referendum just emphasised

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[81] Crisis Group Europe, *Abkhazia Today*, September 15, 2006, 4.
[82] Susan Stewart, "The Role of the United Nations in the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict," *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 2 (2003): 6.
[83] Peter Roudik, *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus* (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 110.
[84] Crisis Group Europe, 5.

diverging geopolitical interests of the autonomous territories and Georgia proper. The 1991 Soviet Referendum offered a series of questions which basically asked Soviet citizens whether they wish to preserve the USSR. While it was boycotted by the majority of Georgians, the minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia overwhelmingly supported the idea of the continuity within the frames of the Soviet Union.[85] Just two weeks afterwards, Tbilisi held its own referendum on Georgian independence from the USSR which was yet boycotted by both autonomous regions. It is possible to conclude that Abkhazia and South Ossetia, by their approval of the Soviet referendum and the boycott of the Georgian independence referendum, officially declared their intention to remain within the USSR.

When Georgia declared its independence on the USSR in April 1991, it did so aware of the fact that the minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not want to participate on this decision. With the election of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his pro-ethnic Georgian tendencies,[86] relations between Tbilisi and the autonomous territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia deteriorated drastically and culminated into the series of separatist conflicts with South Ossetia in 1991-92 and Abkhazia in 1992-93. It is important to add that Russia proved to be a significant external actor in both conflicts. By the regular provision of equipment, ammunition, and training to the separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia,[87] Russia acted as a conventional kin state but, paradoxically, also as a broker of ceasefire between the separatists and the Georgian government. The deployment of Russian peacekeepers[88] resulted into the freezing of the conflict and the establishment of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian de facto republics that remained highly dependent on the Russian Federation.

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Stewart, 2.
[87] Crisis Group Europe, 6.
[88] Ibid.

3.1.2 Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Frames of Russia´s Open-Door Policy

The residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia decided to refuse Georgian citizenship right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.[89] This made them practically stateless from their own will even before both separatist wars, what is in a stark contrast to the events in the Baltics where the ethnic Russian were explicitly denied Estonian citizenship despite their will to acquire it.[90] The fact that Abkhazian and Ossetian were denied international travelling did not change even with the establishment of de facto republics and the introduction of Abkhazian and Ossetian citizenship, which were not recognised by any other country in the world. These citizenships were practically hollow in their nature and could mostly serve for active and passive voting rights, or for the issues covering property rights, taxation, and state services.[91]

Russia´s open-door policy from the 1990s represented an attractive opportunity how to obtain internationally recognised travel documents, an access to the Russian job market, or Russian state benefits which would improve greatly the lives of people in the war destroyed towns and villages of both separatist territories. What is more, within the inclusive open-door period, Abkhazians and South Ossetians, as former Soviet citizens, were allowed to acquire for Russian citizenship under simplified procedure. Through various ad-hoc organisations, such as the Congress of Russian Communities in Abkhazia, or informal networks between South Ossetians and their North-Ossetian ethnic counterparts,[92] the citizens of de facto republics started to acquire Russian citizenship without any significant administrative support from Russia. Still it may appear slightly underwhelming that, given the opportunity to enjoy simplified procedure, in the period of 1992-2002, Russian citizenship was acquired just by 50% of South Ossetian and 20% of Abkhazian residents.

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[89] Toru Nagashima, "Russia´s Passportization Policy toward Unrecognized Republics," *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 3 (2019): 188.
[90] Littlefield, 1472.
[91] The Constitution of Abkhazia, November 26, 1994, https://unpo.org/article/697.
[92] Nagashima, 188.

I would suggest that this outcome could be explained through the closer look at the demographic structures of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian republics. Although the post-war population of South Ossetia experienced some decrease, it is ethnic structure remained relatively intact, with South Ossetians representing 64% of the local population of 70,000.[93] Given traumatic experience from the ethnic conflicts with Georgians in the 1990s, South Ossetians were legitimately more interested in Russia´s security guarantees than the local groups of ethnic Georgians who may still wish to possess Georgian citizenship. This could explain the 50% ratio of the South Ossetian residents who acquired Russian citizenship – majority of whom may be ethnic Ossetians (64%).

Abkhazia´s population suffered after the 1992-93 separatist war drastically more – from the pre-war population of 525,000[94], it reduced by more than a half to roughly 215,000,[95] due to drastic ethnic cleansings, military skirmishes, and especially roughly 250,000 forcibly displaced people, the majority of whom were ethnic Georgians who fled back to Georgia.[96] Contrary to South Ossetia, the post-war demographic composition of Abkhazia changed from the ground, with ethnic Abkhazians (44%)[97] achieving the relative majority in a multi-ethnic state. Although we do not have date about the ethnic composition of applicants for Russian citizenship, we can assume that ethnic Abkhazians (44%) and ethnic Russians (11%) would be among those most interested. Ethnic Georgians (21%) and Armenians (21%) could be, at that time, still hesitating, due to the proximity of their ethnic homelands. What is more, although the Abkhazian authorities allowed dual citizenship in the combination with Russian citizenship, it restricted if for the holders of Georgian and Armenian passports.[98] Thus I would argue that

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[93] Between the 1989 Soviet Census and the 2003 Census, the population in South Ossetia decreased from 98,000 to 70,000. See: Littlefield, 1465.
[94] Ethno Kavkaz, "Naselenie Abkhazii (1989 g.)".
[95] Littlefield, 1466.
[96] Crisis Group Europe, 23.
[97] Littlefield, 1466.
[98] Rachel Clogg, "The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Abkhazia: Managing Diversity and Unresolved Conflicts," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 2 (2008): 312.

the complicated ethnic composition of the Abkhazian population and the limited scope of Abkhazia´s legislature on dual citizenship led to a relatively small proportion, just 20%, of people who decided to apply for Russian citizenship during the open-door period of the 1990s.

3.1.3 What made Russia to Passportise Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

If the Russian public, in the early 2000s, felt so anxious about the persons of Caucasian origin, why did the Kremlin not just allow but actively pursued passportisation policies in the Southern Caucasus? To answer this question, we need to look at the region and relations between Russia and Georgia from a larger perspective. In a simplified view, it is possible to say that Abkhazia and South Ossetia found themselves as "geopolitical hostages"[99] in the entire passportisation process. Shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia´s territorial integrity was challenged by two Chechnyan wars which considerably destabilise the entire Russian region of North Caucasus. The first war in Chechnya began in December 1994, barely a year after the Abkhazian separatist conflict in which North Caucasus volunteers from the Chechnya-based Confederation of Mountain Peoples represented one of the most decisive elements in both, Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts.[100] Paradoxically, the Chechens, just few months after their involvement in separatist campaigns in Georgia, uprised against the Kremlin. In this case, it was Georgia which was accused by Russia from alleged support to Chechnian groups. From the outset of the Second Chechnyan war in 1999, Russia charged the Georgian authorities with allegations from harbouring Chechen groups on Georgian soil, particularly in the Pankisi Gorge region.[101] The region directly bordered Chechnya and was inhabited by Kits – an ethnic group

[99] Crisis Group Europe, 7.
[100] Thomas Goltz, "The Paradox of Living in Paradise: Georgia´s Descent into Chaos," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia´s War in Georgia*, ed. Svante Cornell, Frederick Starr (New York: Armonk, 2009), 24.
[101] Tracey German, "The Pankisi Gorge: Georgia´s achilles´ heel in its relations with Russia?," *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 1 (2004): 29.

related to the Chechens. The Kremlin demanded the Georgian governments several times to allow Russian military operation in the Pankisi Gorge region, what Tbilisi regularly refused. In summer 2002, Russia even threaten Georgia to launch unilateral military operation without Georgia´s consent which could be regarded as an invasion.[102]

Figure 6: Pankisi Gorge and the Territories in North Caucasus

Source: https://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/40069000/gif/_40069096_caucasus3_map203.gif

Although, ultimately, the Russian invasion to the Georgian region was not realised, the entire conflict took its heavy toll on Russo-Georgian bilateral relations. The fact that Russia decided to start passportisation of Abkhazia in June 2002, roughly at the same time as the Kremlin unsuccessfully demanded Shevardnadze´s government to allow anti-Chechen operations in Georgian, does not seem so arbitrary anymore. It is possible that the initial plan of President Putin was to press on the Georgian government and not to passportise the entire Abkhazian territory. Although passportisation of Abkhazia did not make the Georgian government to change its stance on Russia´s anti-Chechen intervention, it undoubtedly complicated the probability of successful re-capturing of Abkhazia which was gradually more inhabited by the residents with Russian citizenship and Russian passports.

The "Chechen" explanation would challenge a more mainstream theory which argues that Russia initiated passportisation of Abkhazia in order to undermine Georgia´s NATO

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[102] Ibid., 27.

ambitions.[103] However, before summer 2002, when passportisation of Abkhazia took place, there were no clear signals from the Georgian officials that Tbilisi would openly apply to NATO membership in a near future. Actually, the first open application for NATO membership came from President Shevardnadze in November 2002,[104] half a year after Russia´s passportisation of Abkhazia and numerous threats to invade Georgia´s Pankisi Region. Nagashima offers an alternative explanation which assumes that Russia´s passportisation policy was realised in order to deter Georgia from launching re-capturing military operations[105] in the future. In his view, passportisation served rather as a pre-emptive measure which should avoid further destabilisation of the already disrupted region than as a means of pressure on "disobedient" Georgian government, as I suggested above.

The motives which led the Kremlin to initiate passportisation of South Ossetia seem much more transparent. In November 2003, Georgia experienced the well-known Rose Revolution which, ultimately, brought its leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, to the presidential office. Besides pledging to realise various economic and democratic reforms, Saakashvili set as the main goal of his mandate to re-gain central government authority over separatist regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and, in a lesser extent, even less problematic Adjara.[106] In May 2004, combining the organisation of popular demonstrations with military exercises near Adjara´s border, Saakashvili managed to successfully drive out Adjara´s strongman, Aslan Abashidze, from Georgian territory and make him find refuge in the Russian Federation.[107] Saakashvili non-violent action to re-integrate Adjara was undoubtedly impressive even for the Kremlin which became seriously concerned that the "Adjara scenario" could replay even in Abkhazia

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[103] Littlefield, 1469.
[104] Eduard Shevardnadze, *Statement for the 2002 Prague Summit*, November 21, 2002, https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm.
[105] Nagashima, 193.
[106] Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests," in *Georgia After Rose Revolution*, ed. Gabriel Monson (New York: Nova, 2009), 3.
[107] Artman, 688.

and South Ossetia. In the call between Putin and Saakashvili, as Illarionov refers, the Russian President warned Saakashvili that after non-intervening on Russia´s behalf in Adjara, Tbilisi must not expect any similar "gifts" in the case of South Ossetia or Abkhazia.[108] In order to take some preventive measures, in May 2004, just few weeks after the events in Adjara, Russia began passportisation of South Ossetia in a similar fashion as it did in Abkhazia in June 2002.[109] The proportion of the Abkhazian residents with Russian passports raised from 20% until June 2002 to 80% by January 2003,[110] what is approximately 130,000 passports allocated in 8 months under the 2002 Law on Citizenship. In the case of South Ossetia, it was naturally slightly less, from 50% until May 2004 to 98% in September 2004, that is roughly 35,000. In total, Russia granted almost 250,000 passports to the residents of both territories until the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008.

The war with Georgia in 2008 had two important repercussions for the concept of Russian citizenship in Russia´s close abroad. Firstly, it was the fact that Russia based its intervention on the proclaimed protection of Russian citizens[111] residing in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It was not decisive that, in both territories, there was barely 15% of ethnic Russians, followed by ethnic Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians, or Georgians. With Russia´s passportisation, all of them became "Russian" citizens and Russia was determined to protect them by force, neglecting international state borders of other sovereign states. Secondly, after the cease of gunfire in Georgia, the Russian Federation and some of its closest allies officially recognised the Abkhazian and South Ossetian Republic as the first and only de facto republic in the post-Soviet space.[112] This, practically, exempted the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from simplified procedure in Russia´s 2002 Law on Citizenship. The fact that

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[108] Illarionov, 55.
[109] Ibid., 56.
[110] Nagashima, 188.
[111] Medvedev, August 26, 2008.
[112] Wikipedia, "International recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," accessed May 24, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/27/world/europe/27medvedev.html.

Abkhazians and Ossetians could not be considered as stateless persons anymore just underlined the fact that Russia was satisfied with its passportisation results. Indeed, there was hardly anyone who would not be able to call oneself Russian after the 2008 War in South Ossetia.

3.2 What Went Wrong with Passportisation in Transnistria?

3.2.1 The Lost Kin on the Bank of the Nistru River

Transnistria, another separatist state located on the left bank of the Nistru River (Figure 7), looks on the first sight as falling into the very same category of the post-Soviet de facto states which emerged in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Transnistria, indeed, shares numerous aspects with our previous cases – Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Similar to the Georgian breakaways regions, even Transnistrian separatism was initially ignited by language policies of the nationalising domestic state. In the effort to restore the Romanian identity of Moldova and potentially even to reunite both Romanesque countries, by the end of the 1980s, the elites in Chisinau decided to make Romanian the official language of the country and replace the Cyrillic alphabet with its Latin version.[113] The explanation for such a staunch opposition against this law in Transnistria could be found in the ethnic composition of this region. Transnistria represented a genuinely multi-cultural state, where the Moldovans (40%), Ukrainians (28%), and Russians (25%)[114] represented the groups of roughly same proportions. As most local Slavic population could not speak Moldovan, they were seriously concerned that the new language laws would diminish their cultural rights and, more importantly, threaten their professional and social status[115] earned during Russification in the Soviet era. Despite the

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[113] Magdalena Dembińska, Julien Iglesias, "The Making of an Empty Moldovan Category within a Multi-ethnic Transnistrian Nation," *East European Politics and Cultures* 27, no. 3 (2013): 416.

[114] The 1989 Soviet Census in Transnistria, accessed May 24, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1989_Census_in_Transnistria.

[115] Ion-Marius Nicolae, "Transnistria – A "Bridge Head" of the Russian Federation for Attacking Ukraine," *Series on Military Sciences* 10, no. 2 (2018): 140.

boycott of the Moldovan elites in Chisinau, Transnistria participated on the 1991 Soviet Referendum, where it supported the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union together with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[116]

Figure 7: The Map of Moldova and Transnistria

Source:
https://lh4.googleusercontent.com/proxy/WDPOjK3dZxyJsAnMdQswRh6C6cW3bB9y4C05sLuJcmNc094RC4
VYyQmUyiD1It0Umv1AMaaAPzrbuCDZpH28BtEh1KFc2aELUwD0ufcwf5ZA5R0=s0-d

The tensions between the elites in Tiraspol and Chisinau led to the 1992 Transnistria separatist war, however, compared with the Georgian wars from the 1990s, the outcomes of this war were considerably different and practically decisive for the future of passportisation in Transnistria. First of all, although the assistance of the Russian army was present even in the Transnistrian case,[117] the armed conflict with Chisinau was not fuelled by ethnic hatred[118] or

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[116] Wikipedia, "The 1991 Soviet Referendum," accessed May 22, 2020,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Soviet_Union_referendum.
[117] Dembińska, Iglesias, 413.
[118] Ibid., 415.

any kind of intentional ethnic cleansings as it was during the Abkhazian or Ossetian wars. The fact that, according to the 2004 Census, the Transnistria population, compared to the Soviet census from 1989 even slightly grew, from 546,000 to 555,000 citizens. The ethnic "triumvirate" of Moldovans (32%), Russians (30%), and Ukrainians (29%)[119] did not differ dramatically from the 1989 Soviet census as well. The percentual decrease of Moldovans in the new de facto states could be ascribed mostly to the fact that some ethnic Moldovans decided to renounce their former citizenship and apply for the Russian or Ukrainian alternative.[120]

3.2.2 Too Far for Being Passportised?

In 1995, the Transnistrian government introduced the option of acquiring dual citizenship from all recognised states,[121] including Moldova, what was in a stark contrast to Abkhazia and South Ossetia which restricted the combination of their de facto citizenship with the citizenship of Georgia and the only way how to receive dual citizenship was in the combination with Russian passport.[122] The 1995 Law on Dual Citizenship had pre-eminent influence on the efficiency of Russian passportisation. Indeed, there was a considerable number of Transnistrians who desired to acquire rather Ukrainian than Russian citizenship[123] which would deliver them similar state benefits and job opportunities. More importantly, working in neighbouring Ukraine seemed as a much cheaper and more sustainable way, considering its geographical proximity. Moldova, with its economy and military capabilities, posed also as a much lesser threat for re-capturing their former territory – in contrast to economically stronger

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[119] The 2005 Census in Transnistria, accessed May 24, 2020,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Census_in_Transnistria.
[120] Nagashima, 194.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 187.
[123] Ibid., 194.

and militarily better prepared Georgia. The need for security guarantees from Russia was thus significantly lower and less pressing on the local residents to apply for Russian citizenship.

Considering all these factors, the fact that by 2001, just 12% of the Transnistrian residents held Russian passports does not seem so unexpected. At that time, there was already 20% of the Abkhazian and 50% of the Ossetian residents[124] who decided to acquire Russian citizenship within Russia´s open-door policy from the 1990s. The reality on the ground did not change much even after the introduction of the controversial 2002 Law on Citizenship in Russia. According to the recent estimates, there is around 200,000[125]-250,000[126] (37%-45%) of Transnistrians who managed to acquire Russian until the present day. As Nagashima highlights, while just in one month, in June 2002, in Abkhazia, Russia granted citizenship to 150,000 residents, in Transnistria, Russia has been distributing 200,000 passports for nearly 30 years.[127] The fact that one third of Transnistrians are actually ethnic Russians and the entire nation is Russophone, proudly endorsing the Russian Orthodox Church and the Cyrillic alphabet, seemingly contradicts the logic of Russia´s kin state politics – at least in citizenship perspective. Naturally, Transnistria, similarly to South Ossetia and partly even Abkhazia, is economically dependent on Russia´s "humanitarian aid" and remittances, which Russia willingly provides.[128]

Still, the pace of Russian passportisation of Transnistria is surprisingly slow and regularly criticised until the present day even by Transnistrian authorities.[129] The Russian government usually tries to explain the slow pace by the fact that passport requests exceed the capacities of the Russian Embassy in Moldovan Chisinau.[130] Reflecting on the experience with

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[124] Ibid., 195.
[125] Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, "Russian passports handed out in Transnistria as "tension rises"", June 15, 2015, accessed May 22, 2020, http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1434310866.
[126] Warsaw Institute, "Russia Hands Out Passports to Its Diaspora," February 18, 2020, accessed May 22, 2020, https://warsawinstitute.org/russia-hands-passports-diaspora/.
[127] Nagashima, 195.
[128] Nicolae, 142.
[129] Russian News Agency, "Transnistrian authorities will request Russia to ease citizenship rules," May 30, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, https://tass.com/world/1060935.
[130] Nagashima, 195.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, when the Russian Consulate in Sochi managed to deal with 150,000 passports application in one month, the explanation of Russian authorities seems substantially flowed. Although Russia was not allowed by Moldova to open its official representation in the Transnistrian capital, Tiraspol, it is hard to believe that the Kremlin would not manage to transport more passports through diplomatic correspondence to the Embassy in Moldova and subsequently redistribute them among the Transnistrian population.

The second, more pragmatic explanation suggests that the Kremlin simply does not have the interest to "product" and protect Russian citizens on the territory which does not border with the Russian territory.[131] Indeed, if Russia even wanted to avoid a potential Moldovan invasion to Transnistria, it would need to pass either the territory of Moldova, which would, obviously, object, or Ukraine, what is even more absurd in the current situation. Transnistria, indeed, would not provide Russia with any kind of a buffer zone against NATO involvement, as it is in the case of Abkhazia or South Ossetia, nor pose as a means of exerting pressure on the Moldovan government, which does not seem so uncomfortable as the government in Tbilisi. Still, having an unresolved territorial dispute on its territory, Moldova, as well as Georgia, would not be able to successfully apply for membership in the European Union, nor NATO, which can still play into the Russian cards.

3.3 Donbas: The Renaissance of Russia´s Passportisation Policies?

The war about the future of Donbas could be regarded as the most destructive conflict on the European continent since the Balkan wars in the 1990s. The conflict over clashing geopolitical identities, separatism of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics, and Russia´s irredentist ambitions cost lives of more than 10,000 victims and produced nearly 1.5 million internally displaced

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[131] Nicolae, 145.

people.[132] Despite the constant development and the complexity of the war in Ukraine, it is possible to find some similarities between separatism in Donbas and similar campaigns in Georgia and Moldova from the early 1990s.

What all these conflicts have in common, is the fact that all of them were marked by certain post-Soviet sentiment among separatists, who did not cease seeing Russia as the main security and welfare provider in the region. The ethnic tensions over language rights were also present in most cases, although, in the case of Ukraine, the role of ethnicities was partly overshadowed by larger, geopolitical identities. Indeed, the ethnic and linguistic boundaries are much more complex and blurred in the context of Ukraine.[133] Although in the last 2001 census,[134] there was 78% of the residents who identified themselves as ethnic Ukrainians and 17% of those who felt as ethnic Russians, from the ethnic Ukrainians, 15% claimed that their mother tongue is Russian. Thus, neither ethnicity nor language are reliable predictors of loyalties.

As Hamilton summarises, the conflict in Ukraine is rather a clash between the European and the post-Soviet identity of Ukraine. Whereas the European part of Ukraine sees the Soviet period as a violent interruption of Ukraine´s natural integration into a European state,[135] for its eastern, post-Soviet counterpart, the Soviet experience evokes glorious fight against German Nazism and the economic welfare under Soviet industrialisation and socialist policies.[136] The region of Donbas belongs, naturally, to that eastern face of Ukraine. As it was in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria, even in the case of the Donbas republics (Figure 8), Russia skilfully exploited conflicting preferences about future geopolitical affiliation between eastern

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[132] Council on Foreign Relations, "Conslict in Ukraine," May 22, 2020, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine.
[133] Robert Hamilton, *Five Years of War in the Donbas*, October 2019, 5.
[134] The 2001 Census in Ukraine, accessed May 24, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Census_(2001).
[135] Hamilton, 6.
[136] Ibid., 8.

Ukraine and pro-western central government and through direct military and financial support[137] ignited the conflict which has been traumatising Ukrainian society for more than 6 years.

Figure 8: The Map of the Occupied Territories in Ukraine

Source: https://reconsideringrussia.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/ukraine-crimea-donbas.png

However, military support from Russia is not the only trait which links all post-Soviet separatist conflicts altogether – Russian passportisation is a no less important factor. In late April 2019, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, signed a decree which offered all Ukrainians who lived in Donbas before the outbreak of war in April 2014, as well as those who currently reside on territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk separatist republics an opportunity to apply for Russian citizenship under simplified procedure. Putin justified his action by "humanitarian

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[137] The Guardian, "New evidence of Russian role in Ukrainian conflict," August 18, 2019, accessed May 24, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/18/new-video-evidence-of-russian-tanks-in-ukraine-european-court-human-rights.

reasons" and by "the protection of human rights and freedoms" of the population suffering war in Donbas.[138] Putin´s passportising decree could ultimately affect around 4 million people who, according to Ukrainian estimates, lived on the territory before the outbreak of war in 2014.[139] During his statement just few days after the issue of the decree, Putin mentioned that he is considering offering Russian passports to all Ukrainians, regardless the region they come from.

By January 2020, Russia provided eastern Ukrainians with the first "delivery" of 200,000 Russian passports. While 136,000 (68%) of them were granted to the citizens of un-recognised republics, the rest was distributed among Ukrainians coming from other regions of the country,[140] what is possibly even more threatening for Kyiv. In response to Russia´s passportisation policy, the Ukrainian government, even before the first delivery of passports, stated that it will not recognise any passports issued to the residents of the occupied territories.[141] It is worth noting that just the first delivery of 200,000 passports to Ukrainians equals to the amount of passports Russia has distributed among Transnistrians since 1992 and exceeds 150,000 passports granted to the Abkhazians in June 2002. It is undeniable, that with Ukraine, Russia revived its passportisation policies which seemed to disappear with South Ossetia.

There are two major theories behind Russia´s passportisation efforts in eastern Ukraine. The first one assumes that the intake of Ukrainians should prevent the dramatic decrease in Russia´s demography. In his February speech, Putin openly admitted that by 2035, Russia´s population can shrink by 8 million people - from 147 million to 139 million inhabitants. The

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[138] Deutsche Welle, "Vladimir Putin stirs Russia-Ukraine tensions with passport offer," May 3, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/vladimir-putin-stirs-russia-ukraine-tensions-with-passport-offer/a-48596989.
[139] Deutsche Welle, "Ukraine: The forgotten victims of Donbass," February 16, 2018, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-the-forgotten-victims-of-donbass/a-42597692.
[140] Unian, "About 200,000 Donbas residents obtain Russian citizenship in 2019," January 2, 2020, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.unian.info/war/10817084-about-200-000-donbas-residents-obtain-russian-citizenship-in-2019-russian-media.html.
[141] Hromadske International, "Ukraine to Consider Russian Passports of Donbas Residents Illegal," May 8, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/ukraine-recognizes-russian-passports-of-donbas-residents-as-illegal.

main factors of this trend could be ascribed to low natality and emigration and the passportised Ukrainians could represent one of the most effective short-term solutions.[142] Another, more cynical approach sees Russia´s current efforts in the light of its actions in South Ossetia. As it was in the case of passportisation of Abkhazians and Ossetians, it is believed that Russia is actively creating the pretext for future open military intervention, justified by the alleged protection of "Russian citizens" residing in the Donbas territory today.[143]

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[142] Deutsche Welle, "Putin wants to make "new Russians" out of Ukrainians," May 31, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/why-putin-wants-to-make-new-russians-out-of-ukrainians/a-48995869.
[143] BBC, "Russia offers passports to people in eastern Ukraine territories," April 25, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48045055.

Conclusion

Although it could be though that with the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the passportisation efforts of the Russian Federation toward unrecognised territories gradually disappeared, the most recent developments in Ukraine prove that Russia´s policy of the citizenship conferral continues to represent an important element of Kremlin´s foreign policy. With 200,000 passports redistributed to the Ukrainian residents, Russia began to use its citizenship as an instrument of its geopolitical interests once again. Although the second wave of Russian passports was not announced yet, there is a widespread perception that the Donbas region could become a new Ossetia for the pro-western authorities in Kyiv.

The thesis aimed to disclose the factors which contributed to a various degree of Russia´s passportisiation policies in the post-Soviet space. I argue that Russia´s own security concerns, the probability of being recaptured by the former government, and the geographic proximity to Russian borders represent the main independent variables which may affect Russia´s decision to passportise certain territory. Abkhazia represented the first separatist territory where Russia decided to employ its passportisation strategy despite the anti-Caucasian public discourse which raged back home in response to the war in Chechnya. The Abkhazian territory was in a close proximity to the Chechnyan territory what made the stability in Abkhazia a significant security concern for the Kremlin. Moreover, by gradual passportising of Abkhazia, Putin could exert sufficient pressure on the disobedient government in Tbilisi which was otherwise reluctant to allow Russia to conduct anti-Chechen operations in its territory. Although the Georgian government did not change its stance on Russia´s intervention even after the Kremlin initiated passportisation, by providing Abkhazian residents with sufficient number of passports, Russia assured that the future ambitions of Tbilisi to recapture Abkhazia would become much less probable. Naturally, Abkhazia was in a close proximity to Russia´s consulate in Sochi what made the entire process even more efficient.

South Ossetia with its relatively small population did not appear to have such a significant effect od Russia´s security considerations as it was in the case of Abkhazia. However, whereas recapturing of Abkhazia by Shervardnadze in 2002 did not appear as highly probable due to Georgia´s own domestic struggles, Saakashvili, who succeeded him after the Rose Revolution, appeared much more determined to repeat his success story from Adjara also in the South Ossetian context. In 2004, Russia was seriously concerned that Georgia could recapture back the Ossetian territory and by passportisation it decided to avoid this scenario. Again, the proximity to the Russian consulate in Sochi facilitated the entire process. South Ossetia represented also the unprecedented case when Russia actually justified its foreign invasion by the defence of its passportised Russian citizens abroad.

By the case of Transnistria, I tried to portray the factors which might lead to unsuccessful or at least undesired passportisation. Although Transnistria, with its large population of ethnic Russians, respectively east-Slavic Ukrainians would appear as the most suitable candidate for Russia´s kin-state politics, in 30 years from the establishment of Transnistria, Russia granted only 200,000-250,000 of its passports, what is roughly the same number as it distributed among Abkhazians and Ossetians in the period of 5 years. Moreover, it covers barely 50% of the Transnistrian population. The failed passportisation, despite the most vivid kinship relations, could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, stabilised Transnistria did not represent any significant security concern for Russia. There were no military groups in its neighbourhood which could directly threaten Russian territorial integrity nor there was any real chance that Transnistria could be re-captured by Moldova which has its own economic problems and a costly war with Transnitria would probably completely devastate its small economy. Last but not least, in contrast to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the military access to Transnistria would be virtually impossible if Russia did not plan to directly violate territorial sovereignty of Transnistria´s neighbouring states.

The case of Donbas seems as the most resembling the scenario from South Ossetia. Although there are no paramilitary groups in Donbas which could directly threat Russia´s imminent security concerns, the probability that the Donetsk and Luhansk republics would be without Russia´s support recaptured by Ukrainian army is even more pressing than it was in the case of the frozen conflict in South Ossetia. With Russian citizens inhabiting Donetsk and Luhansk, Russia could justify its open military intervention to eastern Ukraine and thus ultimately end up the protracted conflict in Donbas´s favour. The fact that Russia directly borders both republics and thus could immediately intervene in the case of Russian casualties makes the case of eastern Ukraine a highly attractive target for Russia´s passportisation policies. With Russian speaking population on the ground, the passportisied residents of Donbas could also appear as a short-term solution of Russia´s demographic problems.

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