ABSTRACT. This article deals with the European minorities in the period between the two world wars and with their final expulsion from nation-states at the end of World War II. First, the tensions which arose between the organised minorities and the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy are accounted for primarily by the argument that the various minorities located within the successor states had already undergone a comprehensive processes of nationalisation within the Habsburg Empire. Therefore they were able to resist assimilation by the political elites of the new titular nations (Czechs, Poles, Rumanians, Serbs). A second topic is that of the use made of the minorities issue by Adolf Hitler to help achieve his expansionist aims. The minorities issue was central to the international destabilisation of interwar Europe. Finally, the mass expulsion of minorities (above all, Germans) after the end of the war is explained by strategic considerations on the part of the Allied powers as well as involving the nation-state regimes. It is argued, against a commonly held view, that German atrocities during the period of occupation had little to do with the decision to expel most ethnic Germans from their territories of settlement in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The article shows that it is necessary to treat national minorities in the first half of the twentieth century as a single phenomenon which shares similar features across the various nation-states of East-Central Europe.

KEYWORDS: Europe 1918–1949; Habsburg Empire; mass expulsions; national minorities; territorial revisionism; World War II
years immediately following, when more than 12 million Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland. In addition, many Hungarians were expelled both from Czechoslovakia and from Yugoslavia, while in the course of what was called ‘Operation Vistula’, the Ukrainians in Poland were resettled either in the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic or the new Polish western territories. The Poles living east of the ‘Curzon Line’ (on former Polish territory that became part of the Ukrainian SSR) either fled to Poland in the wake of Ukrainian partisan violence or were forcibly resettled (Snyder 2003a: 168–201). The few Jews who had survived the Shoah also left the newly acquired (West) Ukrainian territories, and eventually Poland itself, where many of them had been the object of anti-Semitic persecution verging on the old pogroms (Gross 2006; Kaminski and Zarin 2006). The Italians of Istria, which the terms of the peace treaty between Italy and the Allies had allotted to Yugoslavia, and the Rumanians of the northern Bucovina,1 which was allotted to the Soviet Union, abandoned these lands en masse.2

In most cases, the expulsions and mass exoduses were a result of the realignment of national borders (the Italian–Yugoslav border, the German–Polish border along the Oder-Neisse Line), or the restoration of borders to their position prior to the Munich Conference and Vienna Arbitrage Awards (the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian borders) or their ultimate confirmation (the Curzon Line between the Ukrainian SSR and Poland). In 1945, the Allies were in agreement that ethnic homogeneity in border areas was a prerequisite for international stability in Central and South-eastern Europe (Kittel and Möller 2006) and acted accordingly (Brandes 2005). From then on, the mixed ethnic populations which the states of East-Central Europe had inherited from their multi-ethnic predecessors became largely a thing of the past, and these countries appeared to move closer to the ideal of ‘ethnically pure nation-states’ (Beer 2004; Mann 2005); it was ironic that this should occur in this part of Europe almost at the same time as ‘internationalist’ communist regimes were being established.

Only in the last few decades have historians and the mass media begun to explore these issues deeply. With the break-up of the Soviet bloc and, above all, with the ethnic cleansing accompanying the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation, there has been renewed interest in the historical dimension of the process of ‘ethnic simplification’ (Barkey and Von Hagen 1997; Roshwald 2001) as it took place in the Balkans before the eyes of a shocked public (McCarthy 1999). At the same time, intense debate began in Germany about the commemoration of the German victims of World War II, a debate soon overshadowed by the question of how it could be possible to commemorate German victims without taking into consideration German responsibility for the outbreak of war and unspeakable crimes against humanity. Because of this difficult dilemma, the focus of the debate soon shifted to the issue of ‘proper memory’, while the factual and interpretative dimension of these historical events took second stage.3
Here I wish to consider mass expulsion from the perspective of a European history of the twentieth century, with specific focus on the fateful interplay between nationalist tensions in the successor states of the multi-ethnic empires and the extremely precarious international order created by the Treaty of Versailles. In doing so, I intend to take into consideration the following main factors: (a) the national and political aims of the organised minorities allotted to the successor states; (b) the nationalisation politics of those states; (c) the international situation; and (d) the impetus to territorial revisionism which emanated from Nazi Germany.

These mass expulsions need to be placed within a complex interpretative framework in which the long-term factors are given proper consideration, rather than tracing the antecedents only to World War II and German atrocities in the occupied territories. Detlef Brandes (2001) has convincingly argued that Allied strategic and political considerations were central to the decision to carry out the mass resettlements, and not any idea of ‘collective punishment’. Admittedly, German crimes against the civilian population in the Protectorate and in Poland exacerbated that population’s resentment, resulting in bloody acts of revenge (Lemberg 1994: 88), but this was not the reason for the complete expulsion of the German population. Actually, the German minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland were accused not so much of having colluded in the crimes against humanity as having helped to dismantle the Czechoslovak and Polish states, which had left both national societies deeply traumatised (Brandes 2001: 5–53, 419–20; Naimark 1999: 335–6). However, the most important documentary findings in Brandes (2001) which clearly disprove the claim that the expulsion of the Germans was primarily an act of revenge have barely been considered.

The process of ‘unmixing people’ and building a homogeneous national state on the basis of a treaty first occurred in the aftermath of World War I as a consequence of Greece’s defeat in the Greek–Turkish war. At the Lausanne Conference in 1923, international negotiators (including Fridthof J. Nansen, League of Nations representative for the refugees of Asia Minor), together with the representatives from Turkey and Greece, decided that the Moslem population should leave Greece and move to Turkey, while the Christian population in Turkey should settle in Greece. This first example of compulsory population transfers displays features which recur in subsequent expulsions.

The exchange was implemented after a bloody war accompanied by atrocities against the civilian population; the Greek–Turkish war had followed the dissolution of the multi-confessional Ottoman Empire. This ‘unmixing of people’ had already occurred within the Ottoman Empire, accompanying nation-state formation which began with Serbia and Greece in the 1820s. Thus, the terms of the Lausanne treaty represented the final step in a process of ‘disentangling’ of people. At least one and a half million Muslims abandoned the Balkan Peninsula and sought refuge within the Ottoman Empire just during the crisis of 1875–78 (Sundhaussen 1997: 86–90;
McCarthy 1999: 109–16). From the Greek Revolution until the Greek–Turkish war the number of Muslim refugees is estimated at about 5,400,000 (McCarthy 1999: 338–40).

The terms of the Peace of Lausanne were to have long-term consequences. It is true that the compulsory exchange of population took place in areas of Asia Minor and of the Balkan peninsula which were not considered as being equivalent to civilised Europe, but the Peace of Lausanne was signed at an international conference by representatives of the European powers entrusted with the revision of the Treaty of Sèvres. The compulsory exchange decided at Lausanne was to have crucial significance in World War II, when British politicians and government advisers in particular pleaded in favour of removing millions of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia, using the argument that Lausanne had shown that such a plan would work (Brandes 2001: 36, 68, 122, 145, 168, 216, 280, 381).

New nation states and the heritage of multinational societies

In his illuminating articles on the relationship between state and territoriality, Charles Maier (2000, 2005) has shown how with the spread of the railroad, new communication networks and modern administrative structures in the period from 1870 to about 1970, space became increasingly more compact, and a dynamic economic and political resource. It helped if populations within national borders were as homogenous as possible in order that space could be deployed and mobilised appropriately in order to realise the state’s new goals. Ernest Gellner (1983) had already put forward similar arguments in his analyses of the development of national societies, although he had given more emphasis to the key roles played in a modern communication society by a standardised language and a homogenous culture.

In the states of Western Europe, the new demands placed upon a population led to the nationalisation of classes hitherto hardly touched by the state, such as the peasants (Weber 1976). In East-Central Europe, by contrast, national societies had already developed below the level of the state in the territories of those new or significantly enlarged ‘nation-states’ established after World War I. Now these states attempted similar policies of nationalisation (Cohen 2007).

Within the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, the structuring of political milieus along ethnic lines had begun in the second half of the nineteenth century. After being defeated in war in 1859 and in 1866, the Habsburg Monarchy promoted broad measures of institutional, political and economic modernisation. A constitution was introduced, which granted the basic freedoms of opinion, press and association. Political parties were founded and they participated in elections for the Parliament, diets and local bodies. However, the Monarchy had no project to nationalise society (Judson 2005). Here such processes started from the bottom. The mobilisation of the lower
classes led to a conflict-ridden nationalisation with which the Habsburg state was unable to cope, much less transform into a positive resource. Gary Cohen (2007), however, states that in the last decades of the Habsburg Monarchy the mobilised nationalistic groups showed a basic allegiance towards the dynasty and the Austrian state and their accompanying symbols. He therefore challenges an interpretation of the national conflicts in the Habsburg Monarchy as exclusively destabilising.

Stourzh (1991: 18–22) distinguishes between the national clubs and associations, the national umbrella organisations and, in his view, the most serious problem, the Hapsburg state’s recognition of different nations as political entities. Rusinow (1992) interpreted the nationalisation of the rural and urban lower classes primarily as a result of the mobilisation of traditional peasant society, which put an end to ethnic segregation in the Habsburg Monarchy. In the course of increased rural–urban migration, traditional urban groups suddenly found themselves sharing their space with urbanised masses of peasant origin; the divisions between the ‘nations’ were blurred, different lifestyles collided and the old elites were slowly pushed aside by the newcomers in the competition for government posts, offices and privileges. The militant promotion of national belonging proved to be a mighty vehicle for airing personal resentment or articulating social or cultural demands (Rusinow 1992: 246–8). The coexistence of different nation-based networks, which served the autonomous mobilisation of parts of society and the formulation of nationally based claims, was not propitious for the establishment of a modern state seeking to enforce centralised sovereignty in an increasingly complex (industrial) society (Maier 2005). The various national groups now sharing the same space came to be organised into different networks which, in terms of their self-image and goals, were incompatible with the principle of the national homogeneity of a state population.

More than twenty-five years ago, Arno Mayer (1981) advanced the controversial argument that right up until World War I, the landowning elite continued to maintain a significant amount of power throughout Europe. Subsequent developments in East-Central Europe in the inter-war period would seem to lend at least partial support to this view. The formation of new nation-states in the inter-war years did indeed coincide with the emergence of new elites, and the disempowerment of the ‘foreign’ big landowners was a common phenomenon in these cases. The displacement of these foreign elites was an aspect of nation-building in the new states that took place together with the modernisation of society and devolution of political power (Giordano 2001, 2002).

Modern theories of nation have only rarely been applied to the states of South Eastern and East Central Europe. It would, therefore, be worth examining the question of how the idea of a ‘resource community’ (Lange-wiesche 2006) based on the principle of equality was from the start at the heart of the process of the expulsion of ‘alien elements’ (Blanke 1993: 44). By the end of World War I the nationalisation process had advanced so far at the
sub-state level that in the successor states, the minority national groups could no longer be absorbed into the titular nation. These states were thus a long way from being those materially and morally integrated societies which, in their ideal form, were the expression of a modern nation.

**Difficulties with the nation-state**

The relatively late consolidation of space in contrast with Western Europe proved to the new political elites that the old *master nations*, and also other strong minorities such as the Ukrainians in Poland, were, with the help of their well-developed, autonomous networks, in a position to resist the full development of state sovereignty by the new rulers. Furthermore, some minorities were supported in their attempts by their respective neighbouring states, such as Hungary and Germany.

The border changes introduced at the end of the First World War were far more radical than the adjustments made in 1945. Yet such changes did not give rise to the forced population transfers that took place from the same territories between 1944 and 1949. Not that there were no mass exoduses. By 1921, at least 600,000 Germans had left Poland and 300,000 Hungarians had fled from territory which had become part of Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Serbia (Mócsy 1983). Similar migratory movements involved the Poles and Baltic populations, which left the Soviet Union. By 1926, eighty-five per cent of Germans in Poznan and Pomerania had left (Brubaker 1997: 164). Ten years after the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, the German population in the territories ceded to Poland had fallen by a half (Blanke 1993: 32–53; Brubaker 1997: 159–69; Dövényi 1997: 7; Krekeler 1995; Skran 1995: 31–2). In the course of the international economic crisis, an undetermined number of Ukrainians and Belorussians from Poland and Slovenes and Croats from Italy emigrated to the Americas, as well as, in the case of the Slovenes and Croats, to Yugoslavia. In these cases, it is hard to make clear-cut distinctions between economic and nationalist motives (Italo-Slovenian Cultural and Historical Commission 2001: 134–5).

However, as Rogers Brubaker (1997) noted, no generalising connection exists between the reorganisation of political space based on national criteria and the subsequent ethnic simplification of the local population. Many additional factors influenced the decision of those population groups which were not members of the new ‘titular’ nation to stay or leave. These included the amount of violence used against minorities in creating the state, the rootedness and demographic compactness of the minorities, their urban or rural nature, the minority policies of successor governments, the integration perspectives in their ‘mother country’ and the chances for any effective minority protection strategy. Taken together, this can explain why most Germans in Poland left the country while the majority of Germans in the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland initially remained (Brubaker 1997: 164–7). The
decision to remain did not, however, mean that the members of the minority identified themselves with the majority. As Eugen Lemberg pointed out in 1966, the members of the non-hegemonic group could ‘at best behave loyally: it was impossible for them to identify themselves with this state in their self and corporate image, in their national consciousness’ (Lemberg 1966: 148) (see also Haslinger and Puttkamner 2007).

With the exception of Estonia, the new ‘nation-states’ that emerged with the Treaty of Versailles (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Baltic states) implemented a consistent programme of nationalisation. Understandably, the new national elites were interested in limiting the traditional privileges of the master nations (Germans, Hungarians and in part Russians) and developing the language, culture, economic power and political influence of the titular nations. This goal was realised in a variety of ways (education policy, agricultural reforms, police action, admission or non-admission to certain occupations) short of obviously discriminatory legislation. The latter method was applied only to the Jews as from 1938. These new states were attempting ‘to undo historical patterns of discrimination’ (Brubaker 1997: 169) and radically reform social and ethnic power relationships. The result was that the full enjoyment of civil rights was now dependent on being a member of a particular ethnic group (Mann 2005: 64–7). Unfortunately, the successor states were initially just as multinational (and multicultural) as the old multi-ethnic empires. According to Hannah Arendt, the situation at the end of World War I was such that the liquidation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had only served to enable a host of similar experiments to start on a dwarfed scale (1973: 261; see also Lemberg 1995).

The political elites in post-war Europe had no plan for integrating into government and society those minorities which had previously been members of the majority in their respective countries. The prevalent concepts of the state and nation made this all the more difficult. The historian Carlile A. Macartney, from 1928 Secretary to the Minorities Committee of the League of Nations Union and expert for the British Foreign Research Department in the 1930s and 1940s, came to the conclusion already in 1934, in a comprehensive analysis of the problem of minorities, that a nation-state and a self-confident minority were incompatible. Macartney (1934: 422–3) outlined three viable solutions for the minority question in Europe: the shifting of borders; the resettlement of the minority outside that state or a redefinition of the basis of legitimisation of the state. He came to these conclusions despite the fact that the League of Nations had developed a sophisticated system of petitions and committees to provide a minimum standard of protection for minorities (ibid.: 273–423).

Thus, a problem had emerged only a few years after the end of the war that would have long-term (Hupchick 2003: 152–6) effects on the course of European history, namely the failure to establish a universal form of citizenship in East Central and South-eastern Europe (Struve 2004). To paraphrase Hannah Arendt (1973: 234–5), the state had become an instrument of the
nation and the nation took the place of the law. The spread of the Western model of the nation-state system to all of Europe on the basis of the Paris treaties forced a quarter of all Europeans to live under a state model that was not applicable to them (ibid.: 271–2). The clauses in the peace agreements which obliged the new states to respect the cultural and religious identity of minorities could do little against this fact (Bamberger-Stemann 2007).

The role of territorial revisionism

The drive to revise the Paris treaties derived much of its legitimacy from the presence of millions of fellow-countrymen on the other side of the new borders and represents an unbroken thread between 1918 and 1939. It justifies the term ‘Thirty Years’ War’ being re-applied to this period,10 namely a ‘Thirty Years’ War’ of nationalities which only concluded with the end of the expulsions in 1948–49.

The new order established at the Paris Peace Conference had two fatal weaknesses. First, successor states contained millions of people from the previously dominant nationalities. They had now lost their traditional political pre-eminence and the role they had enjoyed in the state bureaucracy but their social and cultural status was still superior to members of the new titular nations. Second, Germany, although humiliated and weakened by the harsh peace conditions laid down at Versailles, was still the major power of the continent and actively pursued an – initially peaceful – foreign policy designed to revise the borders set by Versailles, a policy supported across the political spectrum. After Hitler’s seizure of power, Germany’s revisionist policy was radicalised and the turn to Nazism among organised German minorities abroad was unmistakable. Traditional conservatism or Catholicism or loyalty to the workers’ parties continued to be felt in all countries where German minorities lived (Mann 2004: 261–85), but the younger generation in particular was drawn to National Socialism (Kittel and Möller 2006: 252–7), not only because of its national radicalism but also because of its social programme (Jaworski 1991; Blanke 1993). In Rumania, for example, the Volksdentsche (ethnic German) self-help movement under Fritz Fabritius founded the National Socialist German Renewal Movement in 1932, an organisation that stressed solidarity and equality among the German minority, distancing itself decidedly from the traditional position of the ‘old guard’ (Roth 1994; Zach 1994). With the global economic crisis and the undeniable success of Nazism in Germany, many East Central European countries reoriented themselves toward Germany. This was accompanied by the intensification of rampant anti-Semitism including the adoption of anti-Semitic legislation in 1938, the year in which Nazi Germany celebrated its greatest diplomatic triumphs.

A few years after the coming to power of Nazism, an alliance of ‘revisionist’ states was formed, revolving around the German axis (Mann 2004: 244–55). After the Munich Agreement had granted Nazi Germany the
Sudetenland on the basis of the nationality principle, both Poland and Hungary in turn annexed pieces of Czechoslovak territory. Following the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Hungary annexed the subcarpathian Ukraine (Ruthenia). In 1940, thanks again to German support, Hungary obtained northern Transylvania, an area inhabited predominantly by Hungarians, from Rumania (Deletant 2006: 22–5; Mann 2004: 244). Finally, courtesy of its alliance with Germany, Bulgaria was able to annex southern Dobruja from Rumania (Deletant 2006: 25)11 and then, in 1941, eastern Macedonia from Yugoslavia and western Thrace from Greece. The outbreak of war had seen the resurrection of the alliance of the central powers, with the addition of Italy, now on the side of the Germans. In the first phase of the conflict, this alliance brought about the final destruction of what was already a hollow ‘order of Versailles’ to its own advantage. Rumania in turn moved into the German orbit after the Soviet Union (in accordance with secret agreements made as part of the Hitler–Stalin pact) had annexed Bessarabia and part of Bucovina (Hillgruber 1994: 10).

As Alfred Rieber (2000: 17) pointed out, the hope of acquiring territory regarded as belonging to one’s own nation was the most important impetus for these countries to enter a coalition with Germany. The Soviet Union used the map of territorial gains with similar aims and great diplomatic skill, for example in the return of Vilnius to Lithuania or the de facto verification of the border on the Oder and Neisse in favour of Poland.

Both on the eve of Munich and during the crucial phase of the German–Polish crisis (from spring 1939), Hitler declared repeatedly that Germany had the right to protect fellow Germans who were being persecuted. On 12 September 1938, the Führer concluded his speech at the Nazi party congress in Nuremberg with the – clearly exaggerated – claim, in reference to the Sudeten Germans: ‘If these tormented creatures fail to see any of their rights recognised or to find any help, they will find it from us. These people’s situation of legal deprivation must end!’ (Domarus 1962–1963: 901). Blanke (1993: 207) points out that before the invasion of Poland, Hitler also claimed that the German minority needed protection: ‘Hitler cited mistreatment of the German minority as a justification for his attack on Poland in 1939, and so for World War Two itself.’

One might regard such views as unimportant, given that Hitler’s ambitions to acquire Lebensraum went much further than border revisions that would allow him to bring into the Reich those German minorities settled in the so-called ‘Polish Corridor’. Hitler’s arguments are nevertheless still of some interest since they met with a degree of approval and sympathy, especially from Great Britain. Even after Great Britain had guaranteed Polish independence, British diplomats continued to put pressure on Poland to concede to Hitler’s requests regarding Danzig and the Polish Corridor. Not only were Great Britain and France resigned to a radical revision of the Versailles Treaty, but this revision, carried out in the name of the defence of minorities, was acknowledged as legitimate and reasonable (Taylor 1965: 190–336).12
The Hitler–Stalin Pact of August 1939 was also presented to international public opinion as an attempt to rectify unfair borders established at the Paris Peace Conference. In his famous speech before the Reichstag on 6 October 1939, Hitler listed the following objectives as being necessary to establish a ‘far-sighted ordering of life in Europe’:

1. Demarcation of the boundary for the Reich, which will do justice to historical, ethnographical and economic facts.
2. Pacification of the whole territory by restoring a tolerable measure of peace and order.
3. Absolute guarantees of security not only as far as Reich territory is concerned but for the entire sphere of interest.
4. Re-establishment and reorganisation of economic life and of trade and transport, involving development of culture and civilisation.
5. As the most important task, however, to establish a new order of ethnographic conditions, that is to say, resettlement of nationalities in such a manner that the process ultimately results in the obtaining of better dividing lines than is the case at present.

In addition, Hitler stated that the east and south of Europe were to a large extent filled with splinters of the German nationality. In their very existence lay the reason for continual international disturbances. In an age dominated by the principle of nationalities and of racial ideals, it was utopian to believe that members of a highly developed people could be assimilated without trouble. He concluded that:

It is therefore essential for a far-sighted ordering of life in Europe that a resettlement should be undertaken here so as to remove at least part of the material for European conflict. Germany and the Union of Soviet Republics have come to an agreement to support each other in this matter (Domarus 1963: 1383).

The Hitler-Stalin Pact involved the transfer of ethnic German populations out of the Soviet sphere of influence and the resettlement of Ukrainians and Belorussians from East Prussia and from the part of Poland that would be occupied by the Germans.

In just a few weeks, the German minorities in the Baltic and the Germans of Volinia and Galicia were brought ‘Heim ins Reich’ (home into the Reich). They were followed in 1940 by the Germans of Bessarabia, Bucovina, Dobrujia and Lithuania. In the space of just a few months, the German Foreign Ministry had signed fifteen resettlement agreements with various Eastern and South-eastern European states (Schieder 1979: 16).

The new principle: compulsory removal of populations

We have already noted Macartney’s pessimistic outline of just three solutions to the minority problem: modifying the borders or the demography or the definition of the state. The years from 1938 to 1948 can be considered a single
period, during which all the powers involved in the war tried out all three of
the methods described by Macartney, with varying degrees of success.
Unfortunately, the one solution he had discarded as inhumane, physical
slaughter, was also repeatedly applied (Macartney 1934: 422–3).

The Nazi ‘experts’ were the most radical advocates of comprehensive and
large-scale population shifts. Resettlement was one of the primary instru-
ments for securing German ‘living space’ in Eastern Europe and was described
in great detail in the so-called ‘Generalplan Ost’ (Aly and Heim 1991; Heiber
1958; Rössler and Schleiermacher 1993). It rested on the notion of a social
hierarchy based on race, to be realised by means of mass murder, enslavement
and eugenic breeding over a territory that would eventually extend as far as
the Urals. The murder of Europe’s Jews is the most extreme and criminal part
of a comprehensive programme for the establishment of a global hegemony
based on race (Hillgruber 1972). The course of the war soon brought the Nazi
colonisation and resettlement plans to a halt. The ‘Generalplan Ost’ succeeded
only in carrying out the Germanisation process in the territory of western
Poland which had been annexed to the Reich, with the resettlement of some
370,000 German citizens and 350,000 other ethnic Germans from the Baltic
states, the Balkans and from isolated enclaves ‘at risk of assimilation’. Approx-
imately 1,200,000 Jews and Poles were deported from the same
area, the former to become victims of the ‘final solution’. Many other ethnic
Germans from Rumania, Hungary and Ukraine who were ‘brought home’
spent the war years in camps (Aly 1995). The German historian Götz Aly
(1995) has proposed a rather extreme ‘functionalist’ theory in which the
genocide of the Jews arose as a response to a colonisation and resettlement
plan which went awry. Although this argument seems overly monocausal
(Cattaruzza 2005), no historian before him had so closely linked German
negative and positive population policies to each other.

Among the allies, Great Britain was especially aware of the problem the
minorities presented to the prospects for peace in Europe. After 1939, London
decided that forced population transfer was the only way to solve perma-
nently the minorities problem. The first plans were already drawn up in 1940
by the Foreign Research and Press Service, which advised the British
government on foreign policy (Brandes 1988: 247, 267–8, 411–12, 566). In
1944, after Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden had agreed to the new
Polish border on the Oder-Neisse-Line, the Interdepartmental Committee on
the Transfers of Populations set up by the Foreign Office estimated that ten
million Germans would need to be resettled (Cattaruzza 2001: 200). The
Soviet Union used its support for the expulsion of the Germans from
Czechoslovakia and Poland to bind these two countries closer to itself and
ensure that its own border with Poland would remain the one agreed with
Hitler in August 1939 (Cattaruzza 2001: 200–1; Hillgruber 1988; Mastny

For Czechoslovakia and Poland, the main reason for expelling their
German population was that this minority was perceived as a constant threat

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to the integrity of the state. This perception developed in Czechoslovakia following the Munich Conference in 1938 (Brandes 2008) and in Poland in the wake of the lightning-quick defeat of September 1939. It was not just their political loyalty that was now called into question; their very presence was seen as a constant, deadly menace to the existence, past, present and future, of Czechoslovak and Polish statehood (Naimark 2001: 108–11; Brandes 1986). According to Naimark (2001: 136–7), the main motive for the Czech and Polish governments in-exile and the communist Lublin Committee supporting forced resettlement was the belief that their populations would be easier to handle and control if they were ethnically homogeneous.

For London, the removal of Germans from Central Europe was seen as a necessary preliminary measure for the establishment of one or more confederacies of nations, supposed to gravitate to the British sphere of influence. But these areas would only have ‘strategic military importance’ if they were cleared of Germans (Foreign Relations and Press Service 1942, cited in Brandes 2000). For officials in the British Foreign Office and among advisers on British foreign policy, ethnic homogeneity was a prerequisite for stability in the Eastern and South-eastern territories putatively destined to belong to a British sphere of influence. Understandably, after the experience of 1938, the British sought first to have territories ‘cleared of all Germans’, although further possible population exchanges were envisaged in order to ensure stable international borders (Seewann 1997).

In fact, the territories in question ended up becoming part of the Soviet bloc. Stalin used the promise to expel all the Germans as a ‘bribe’ to win over Czech and Polish consent (Lemberg 1994; Mastny 1975). Systematic terror by police units, partisans or simply by the mob both in Czechoslovakia and in the new Polish territories drove masses of Germans across the border long before the Potsdam Conference took place (Borodziej and Lemberg 2000–2004). The new territory acquired by Poland in the west was also used to settle the masses of Poles expelled from the Ukraine as well as Ukrainians transferred from the eastern border, where a bloody guerrilla war was still being fought (Snyder 2003a: 154–201).

The Soviet Union always approached the national issue in a pragmatic and instrumental way, and basically adhered to the model of a supranational Soviet empire, in which the nationalities were organised on a sub-political level. Mass resettlement (sometimes with genocidal consequences) was a tool of state, to be applied whenever an ethnic group was considered a collective security risk (Martin 2001a, 2001b).

Conclusion

Forced migration and mass resettlement, which reached its high point during World War II and in the immediate post-war period, represents the climax in
a development of European history which had its beginnings back in the 1870s and 1880s.

In the Western European states, the transition to political mass society led to a radicalisation of nationalism and new, often aggressive political cultures (Hobsbawm 1990: 101–31). In the Habsburg Empire, the border regions of Imperial Germany and the western parts of tsarist Russia, however, the political mobilisation of the society in terms of a conflict-ridden nationalisation took place at sub-state level. At the end of World War I, the organic nationalism of these movements was promoted to become the self-image of new states. The political and social disempowerment of previous ‘master nations’ took place in the context of an exclusive and organic conception of nation. Unlike what happened in Western Europe, in the successor states of the old multi-ethnic empires social emancipation and nationalisation went hand in hand with the removal of the old ‘alien’ elites. These dynamics were the pre-history of the later more radical solution to the minority problem by means of their complete removal. According to Mann (2005: 69), ethnic groups are unlike the social classes of a capitalist society; they are not dependent upon each other; they can each live for themselves (see also Snyder 2003b).

The second crucial premise for later forced resettlements was European instability after the end of World War I. This instability encouraged German (and Hungarian) revisionism and contributed in no small measure to the outbreak of World War II. Revisionist claims and minority issues were trapped in a vicious circle; the existence of ‘ethnic enclaves’ beyond the state border legitimised the claim to redraw the latter, which only radicalised the minority group further, especially during Nazi Germany’s active and initially successful revisionism.

It is therefore important that future historical research into these processes of forced migration consider its European dimension rather than simply collect and analyse individual cases. Furthermore, the period from 1919 to 1949 should be treated as a unity. Also, the effect that National Socialist Germany had on the countries of Eastern Europe, which became its political and military allies must be considered in more detail. Such an approach would not only allow the history of forced resettlement to be integrated into the history of Europe in the twentieth century; it would also reposition the history of East Central Europe in the context of a ‘Thirty Years’ War of nationalities’. There was a close relationship between the violent removal of populations and the goal of creating an ethnically pure living space, and these should be seen in historical terms as constituent parts of a specific type of nation-building in East Central and South-eastern Europe.

Notes

1 The Rumanians in the northern Bucovina and Bessarabia first fled this territory following its annexation by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940. The refugees then returned in the course of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. (Deletant 2006: 15–24)

3 On the thorny issue of the representation of the compulsory expulsion of the German population in the final stages of the war and the immediate post-war years, see the following collections of essays: Danyel and Ther (2005), Kruke (2006), Bingen, Borodziej and Troebst (2003). See also Moeller (2005), Faulenbach (2004). More general, and addressing the risks of a ‘moralised knowledge’ resulting from political correctness, see Lübbe (2001).

4 In his study, Detlef Brandes (2001) clearly shows that the resettlement plans need to be seen primarily as part of the Soviet and British plans for a new order in post-war Europe. Of course, they also met with the approval of Czechoslovak and Polish governments in-exile. A similar argument can be found in Hillgruber (1986). The historian from Cologne was unfortunate to get caught up in wheels of the German Historikerstreit, and consequently his thesis that the ‘destruction of Prussia’ was a primary British and Soviet goal was never seriously considered. For the documentation of British resettlement plans see Seewann (1997). For a very good description of the decision-making processes leading to the expulsion of the Germans, which took place for the most part irrespective of the crimes perpetrated, see Naimark (2001: 108–111).

5 The national conflict between Italians and Slovenes in Trieste developed in the same manner, i.e. in the course of the urbanisation of large numbers of peasants from the Slovenian hinterland and the emergence of an – albeit thinly-spread – Slovene middle class (Cattaruzza 1988). More generally on the problem of different nationalities among the urban middle classes and the peasant majority in many parts of the Habsburg Empire see Pearson (1983: 33–35).

6 In Eugen Lemberg’s sober opinion, this was ‘a not-to-be-underestimated lesson for a self-consciousness of national groups without their own states, for their integration without the benefit of a state’s monopoly on violence, even against the latter. The groundwork for the second phase in the development of the nationalities question - that of the nation-states – was thus laid to a certain degree in this first phase of supranational states’ (1964: 187).

7 The term ‘master nations’ was coined by the historian Lewis Namier following Hegel’s idea of ‘historical nations’. On Lewis Namier see now Graziosi (2007).

8 Laws that discriminated against Jewish citizens were passed in 1938 in Hungary, Rumania, and in Italy (Benjamin 2001; Sarfatti 2001; Stark 2001).

9 Macartney mentioned a fourth solution but refused to consider it further: ‘Perhaps a fourth [solution, MC] should be counted – physical slaughter; but although this most effective of all remedies is still in vogue in certain countries it shall not be discussed in this humane essay’ (1934: 422–423).


11 The change in sovereignty of the southern Dobrudja was accompanied by a population exchange between Rumania and Bulgaria. While 103,711 Rumanians left the region, 62,278 Bulgarians moved to it from northern Dobrudja (Deletant 2006: 25).

12 Both the French and the British governments had consented to German economic expansion into southeastern Europe at the Munich Conference. For France this meant the end of its ambitions in its former sphere of influence (Leitz 2004: pp. 98–99).

13 Discussions between Beneš and Molotov took place in Moscow in March 1945 when Beneš tried to get the Soviet Union to agree to the complete expulsion of both the German and the Hungarians. Cf. Document Nr. 54, Notes on a conversation of V.M. Molotov with E. Beneš, Moscow, 21 March 1945 (Volokhina et al. 1997: 174–183).
References


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