Ethnic Political Mobilization: an Integrative or Disintegrative Force in the Modern Polity? Case-Studies of Political Mobilization by Non-Titular Nations in Moldova, Estonia and Lithuania

Keiji Sato

Abstract

The ethnic political mobilizations, which were originally led by the non-titular nations of the Soviet republics, traced different paths at their latter phase, after the collapse of the USSR in particular; the emerging of *de facto* independent states inside *de jure* newly-established states (Moldova and Georgia), the political reconciliation by forming autonomy (Moldova and Ukraine), the uprising of the inter-state war (Azerbaijan and Armenia), and the ethnic tension toward improvement of minority rights (Lithuania and Estonia). The four case-studies presented in this paper demonstrate that rich material and immaterial resources increased the sustainability of ethnic political mobilization. The sustainability was an important factor in achieving de facto independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This paper emphasizes that these material and immaterial resources were not valid for the mobilization until the appearance of political opportunity and political will for collective action by social political organizations. The political mobilization in Transnistria not had only rich resources, but strong political will among associates toward regional independence. The political actors discovered the resources, supplied the resources to the participants of collective action, motivated them toward political activity and increased the potentiality of immaterial resources.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of ethnic political mobilization at the end of Soviet era was a prelude to the demise of "existing socialism." The political actors who took part in the mobilizations, no matter to which ethnic stratum they belonged, underwent fusions and fragmentations, demonstrating complex correlations; integration, assimilation, liberation, competition, domination, collusion and so forth. The collapse of the Soviet regime removed only the outermost cover of the matrioshka structure of security control and the issues of ethnic confrontations were retained with relabeled titles in the fifteen states newly independent from the Soviet Union. The ethnic political mobilizations, which were originally led by the non-titular nations of union republics, traced different paths at their latter phase, after the collapse of the USSR in particular; the emerging of *de facto* independent states inside *de jure* newly-established states (Moldova and Georgia), the political reconciliation by forming autonomy (Moldova and

Ukraine), the uprising of the inter-state war (Azerbaijan and Armenia), and the ethnic tension toward improvement of minority rights (Lithuania and Estonia).

This study applies the theory of resource mobilization, which offers an alternative understanding of the phenomenon of ethnic upheaval, and analyzes the major factors of ethnic political mobilization by non-titular nations, which attempted to achieve greater autonomy (in some cases, then independence from union republics), at the end of the Soviet era. The study does not generalize causes of ethnic confrontations in the USSR or focus on cases of collective action and independent movements by titular nations, which are more prevalent aspects of study among scholars and scientists, but instead examines cases of non-titular nations to determine the cause of different outputs of these ethnic confrontations, violent outcomes or peaceful settlements in former Soviet countries. In addition, this study conceptualizes the phenomenon of unrecognized states, which arose in Moldova and Georgia.

There is an infinite variety of ethnic political mobilizations and autonomous movements in accordance with their scale, members, demands, space and sustainability, and it is difficult to generalize these cases into one category. This study does not examine cases in which political or ethnic collective groups externally proclaimed sovereignty or independence in order to protest against the political orientation of titular nations, or did not put the plan into action despite their being rich resources to do so but examines cases in which non-titular nations publicly addressed and implemented a feasible scheme toward self-governing dominion. Suitable candidates for the case studies are: Šalčininkai and Vilnius regions (Lithuanian Poles - Lithuania), North East Estonia (Russian speakers - Estonia), South Moldova (Gagauz - Moldova), Transnistria (Russian speakers - Moldova), South Ossetia (Ossets - Georgia), Abkhazia (Abkhazians - Georgia), Crimea (Russian speakers and Crimean Tatars - Ukraine). This study selects the cases of Lithuanian Poles, Russian speakers in Estonia, Gagauz and Russian speakers in Moldova. The above-mentioned four cases range from moderate to intense. The case of Lithuanian Poles is considered to be the weakest mobilizing power among all cases.

2. Structural Formula of Political Mobilization in Former Studies

In examining power of political mobilization (E) in cases in the USSR, Taras and Bremmer present the following structural formula ($E = W [HG + sG + hg] + sHg$). However, this structural formula hardly applies to the cases of ethnic political mobilization by non-titular nations for several reasons. Firstly, there are just four indicators, S (Size of state [area]), H (ethnic composition), W (standard

living) and G (economic condition), so that each one becomes too salient. For instance, according to Taras's table,[1] Azerbaijan has just one high indicator H, and Estonia W. It is difficult to recognize one indicator as the decisive factor for ethnic political mobilization.

Secondly, as confirmed by Taras himself,[2] two controversial types of republic, HG (ethnical homogeneous demography + economic flourish) and hg (multi ethnic demography + economic decline), are inclined to lead ethnic political mobilization with just one indicator, W (better standard of living than average amongst Soviet nations). As we can see in the structural formula, Taras recognizes that high standard of living is one of the most significant factors toward mobilization, because three types of republics among four, inside the parenthesis, contain W. However Sakha Republic in the Russian Federation, regardless of the high potentiality to have a higher standard of living, did not mobilize people. On the contrary, Gagauz and Lithuanian Poles, who had a lower standard of living than average, put mobilization into practice.[3] So W is not a decisive factor for mobilization in the case studies of this paper.

On the basis of the discussions above, the following structural formula can be applied to analyze the mechanism of ethnic political mobilization.

$$E = (O) \times (W) \times (R)$$

R = (Population density) + (Economic growth)
+ (Social organization) + (Regional minority) + (Patronage)
Social organization = (Member) + (Slogan) + (Event)

Mobilization (E) is composed of three major factors, Political Opportunity (O), Political Will (W) and Resources (R). (O), (W) and (R) always show a number over zero. The grounds for selecting these factors are: Political Opportunity is based on the mobilization theory by Sydney Tarrow who scrutinized the Velvet Revolution in Eastern Europe,[4] and Political Will is based on the conclusion from my field studies on primary sources and interviews with then political activists and Resources is based on the classical theory of resource mobilization by Charles Tilly.[5] Mobilization consists of multiple values of the

---

[1] Ian Bremmer and Raymond Taras, *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-soviet Nations* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 691.

[2] Ibidem, p. 692.

[3] Keiji Sato, "Mobilization of Non-titular Ethnicities during the Last Years of the Soviet Union: Gagauzia, Transnistria, and the Lithuanian Poles", *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, tom. 26 (2009), p. 142.

[4] Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[5] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978).

three factors, so the possibility of inducing mobilization is extremely low if a sole value among the three is close to zero. The structural formula defines that economic development or/and rich resources are not decisive factors for ethnic political mobilization, on the contrary to Taras's and Bremmer's argument. Political Opportunity and Will are more decisive factors for igniting ethnic political mobilization, considering that resources never becomes nil practically if there is space, people and governance.

In terms of political opportunity, one of the strongest impacts on these actors is, without doubt, the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the process of the demise of the Soviet regime, there were a great number of political events such as the elections of the republic's Supreme Soviet, the Congresses of People's Deputies of the USSR, interference by the Soviet army, the 1991 August coup, and so forth. These political events arose and melted away in different times and different places all over the USSR. Without the emergence of political opportunity, it is difficult to explain why some non-titular nation A, who obtained or expected to obtain poor resources, decided to mobilize ethnic groups and tried to form a new frame for regional autonomy. Without political, social and economic disorder, most of them probably refrained from putting the political desire into practice. As an indicator, however, political opportunity equally, to some extent, had an impact on Soviet nations through mass media and the effect was almost the same in each of the four cases covered in this research.

There is a large gap among cases in terms of political motivation to maintain ethnic political mobilization. Resources do not grant gains and losses for people, but the Political Will of its participants decides whether it is profitable or harmful for them. Therefore almost zero Political Will is practically nil for mobilization, even with rich resources and a great number of political opportunities. It is difficult to calculate Political Will numerically, but it is possible to grasp it generally by the number of meetings and their participants, the election results of republic Supreme Soviets, the support ratio from peculiar ethnic groups, the results of questionnaires and so forth. These numbers are based on different measures in each survey,[6] so it is also difficult to generalize that one case of leading social political organization had more support than those in other cases in different republics. However it is also possible to measure strong aspirations of local inhabitants and actors toward autonomy by the sustainability of political mobilization. The Transnistrian case proves that strong support from local inhabitants caused sustainable political mobilization, and the achievement and retention of de facto independent states.

---

[6]   *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 28 Dec. 1990; *Atgimimas*, 17 July 1989.

3. Comparative Analysis of Resource Mobilization

As already mentioned, Resources is not a decisive factor for mobilization, but one of the most primary factors for sustainable collective action. Mobilization itself does not require many Resources, but without Resources it may end up as a mere riot or disturbance. Resources are composed of the material as well as the immaterial. Immaterial resources are also a significant parameter in achieving the final political goal, and in consolidating a newly established state. For instance, Russian speakers under the patronage of the Russian homeland might be expected to elevate the enthusiasm of participants toward ethnic political mobilizations.

Resources consist of five indicators; (1) population density, (2) regional economic growth, (3) social political organization, (4) counter mobilization by regional minority and (5) patronage by neighboring compatriot. The indicators list the gradation of features from one to five, material to immaterial and instrumentalistic to primordialistic. Social political organization has subdivisions of organizational formula; (3-a) composed members, (3-b) attractive and persuasive doctrines, (3-c) effective utility of political events. In graph A, "++" means quite influential indicator on mobilization, "+" - relatively influential, "0"- not so important, and "-"- undermining effect.

3.1. Ethnic Demographic Condition (Population Density)

A space that is able to hold large-scale meetings and to build communication networks among participants is one of the most important and basic indicators for ethnic political mobilization. The four cases show that, in spite of their final goal of forming regional autonomy, political activities did not spread across the whole area, but centered in urban areas.[7] Therefore it is more meaningful to focus on collective action in urban areas.

In terms of the scale of city populations, there is a remarkable contrast between Transnistria and the region of Lithuanian Poles. According to the Soviet census in 1989, Transnistria is composed of seven major cities; Tiraspol - 202,900, Tighina (Bender) - 144,000, Slobozia -112,100, Rîbnița- 96, 000, Grigoriopol - 54,000, and Camenca- 36,600.[8] The region of Lithuanian Poles has three *gorod*, which is hardly defined as a city; Šalčininkai - 6,500, Nemenčinė - 5,600, and Eišiškės - 3,800 in the same year.[9] The population of Camemca, the smallest city

[7]   Sato, "Mobilization", p. 147-149.
[8]   Boris G. Bomeshko, *Sravnitel'nyii analiz nathional'noi struktury i naseleniia MASSR i PMR: Tom. 1* (Tiraspoli, 1993), p. 37.
[9]   1989 metų visuotinių gyventojų surašymo duomenys (The data of the overall census of population in 1989), I tomas (Vilnius, 1991).

in Transnistria, had more than the total number of all major cities in the region of Lithuanian Poles. The size of the population related to spatial conditions such as halls, parks and squares for demonstrations and rallies as well as hiding places from security forces inside buildings. In this sense, North East Estonia, despite having the next largest population to Transnistria, could not secure enough capacity of high-rise buildings. The Transnistrian urban area has a more multiethnic composition of citizens; Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Jews and Bulgarians, while the regions of the other cases show more homogeneity. Its multiethnic composition did not have a negative effect on political mobilization by Russian speakers for the sake of discretion of a nationalism slogan.[10]

Transnistria also has the most advantages in well-organized internal networks among cities and between rural and urban areas. Most cities and villages are located on the single trunk road along the Nistru River, which plays the role of a natural great moat against Chişinău. In particular, Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria, is just ten kilometers from Tighina, the second largest city, and the population in greater Tiraspol including those in Tiraspol, Tighina, Parcani, Skreia and Slobozia was over 400,000. On the contrary, the other three cases had problems not only in population density but in the far distances between population centers. The three main cities in North East Estonia are 25 - 30 kilometers apart and villages where Estonians are predominant were studded among these cities. This was the same in the case of North East Estonia, Šalčininkai, the first main city of Lithuanian Poles, were 35 kilometers from the second city Eišiškės, and Belarusian and Lithuanian predominant villages were dotted between them. Furthermore, their ethnic predominant region formed a doughnut-shape around Vilnius city and was not strengthened by a belt of infrastructure. In the case of Gagauz, there is Talacria, a predominantly Bulgarian city and region, between Comrat, the capital of Gagauzia, and Vulcăneşti, the third largest city in the region. Taraclia played the role of dividing the Gagauz movement into south and north due to the counter mobilization by Bulgarians against Gagauz regional autonomy.[11]

Thus, from the viewpoint of the scale and low density of urban areas as well as the underdeveloped network systems in these regions, the cases of Gagauz, Lithuanian Poles and North East Estonia faced greater obstacles in maintaining physical and human communication for promoting ethnic political mobilization than that of Transnistria.

---

[10] *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 11 May 1989; 13 May 1989; 04 July 1990.
[11] Keiji Sato, "The Rise of Ethno-Nationalism in the Gagauz Autonomous Movement during the Decline of the Soviet Era", *Slavic Studies*, vol. 53 (2006), p. 326-327.

3.2. Regional economic growth

From the perspective of material resources, controlling a highly industrialized area means strengthening of the potentiality to supply basic resources to members. Its material control fortifies the member's loyalty from the viewpoint of the immaterial side. And enclosure of an industrial area creates pressure on a titular nation and republic government that is hurrying to integrate the territory of the republic.

During the Soviet period, Trasnistria had outstanding regional economic potentiality. Having no more than 13 percent of the territory of Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, Transnistria accounted for 37 percent of Moldovan industry and 90 percent of the energy supply.[12]Steel production and the electric power industry have been the leading industries of Transnistria. Rîbnița steel industry began operations in January 1985, equipped with the latest technologies at that time, and continues to contribute to the state budget of the de facto independent state by earning foreign currency.[13] The power stations, as a key industry in Transnistria, still continue to respond to the energy demands of the right bank. The Transnistrian authorities can always threaten to suspend the energy supply if Chişinău tries to threaten or/and intervene in Transnistrian interests. In this regard, political actors of Russian speakers in North East Estonia could not perfectly control the thermal power plant despite its great location in their own territory. Furthermore the textile industry, which is the main one in North East Estonia, was vulnerable against other foreign companies in the international free economic market. Unlike the case of Transnistria, North East Estonia was unable to realize an independent economic zone as the area had too weak infrastructures. South Moldova, and Šalčininkai and Vilnius region, where agricultural industry was based, were in a much more severe condition. Agricultural industry in a rural area relies on the consumption of an urban population.

The four cases show a different level of sponsorship from industrial sectors. Industrial complexes did not always support social political organizations and regional Soviets toward establishing regional autonomy. Some of them did not show a clear attitude toward its movement, the others even opposed it. Entrepreneurs, the same as members of executive committees of social political organizations, considering their cost-benefit balance, decided to support autonomy. In the case of Transnistria, most entrepreneurs played a leading role from the beginning of autonomous movement and supported the idea of regional autonomy, economic independence and political separation from

---

[12] Nikolai V. Babilunga and Boris G. Bomeshko, *Pridnestrovskii konflikt: Istoricheskie, Demografi-cheskie, Politicheskie aspekty* (Tiraspoli, 1998), p. 19.

[13] Sato, "Mobilization", p. 153.

Chişinău.[14] This shows that self-determination of economy and politics was more attractive for entrepreneurs than subordination to central Moldova. On the contrary, most entrepreneurs in North East Estonia opposed partaking in ethnic political mobilization in their area,[15] so employers and employees could not effectively organize joint struggles under the name of Russian speakers or the worker's class. They hesitated because the entrepreneurs sought more for personal gain and their own company's profit than political power and mass interest. Gagauz entrepreneurs were variously supportive, disinterested or confused by issues of regional autonomy. Supporters paid corporation tax to the self-proclaimed Gagauz government, the disinterested kept paying corporation tax to the Moldovan state authorities and the confused paid to both.[16] In the case of the Lithuanian Poles, at the early stage of introducing the free market system in the USSR, most sectors of industry such as construction and food, sharply declined, and political activists could not expect financial support from them.[17]

3.3. Social Political Organizations

As previously mentioned, the existence of plentiful mineral resources does not seem to be a decisive factor for independence or separatism. The four cases clearly illustrate that it is necessary for regional autonomy and independence to have authority figures that can discover the availability of material and immaterial resources for ethnic political mobilization. As described in the third section of this paper, social political organizations played a key role as an engine of mobilization. This section focuses on their organizational structure (members and leader), persuasive political slogan, and effective utility of political events, with a comparative analysis of each case.

3.3.1. Organizational Structure

The leading figure of mobilization in Transnistria was the Union of Collective Workers (OSTK), whose members were mostly composed of entrepreneurs and factory workers.[18]It formed two weeks before the establishment of the language law on 31st August and 1st September 1989, which defined the Moldovan language with a Latin script (de facto Romanian language) as the sole state language and Russian as the interethnic communication language. The OSTK,

---

[14] *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 19 Aug. 1989; 24 Aug. 1989; 16 Sep. 1989.

[15] *Sovietskaya Estonia*, 11 Aug. 1989; *Narvskii Rabochii*, 24 May 1990.

[16] Interview with Olga Radova, writer and former representative of the Gagauz Women's Association, Comrat, Moldova, 04 Feb. 2004.

[17] Sato, "Mobilization", p. 155.

[18] Ibidem, p. 154-155.

stimulating fear of Russian speakers regarding degradation to second class citizens, took countermeasures against Chișinău's legal decision and extremism by titular nation. And the OSTK also conducted a joint struggle with Strike Committees in Transnistria, which was established in the same month and year as OSTK, activated statewide and had a relatively similar political orientation. After the long political strike in August and September 1989, OSTK planned to hold a session of the interregional Soviet (latter, the provisional Supreme Soviet and the Supreme Soviet of Pridnestr [Transnistria]), steadily mingling the city and regional Soviets, and other social political organizations in Transnistria. Notably, Igor Smirnov, one of the founders of OSTK, took leadership to combine the political circle, industrial sector and local inhabitants. Smirnov often showed up in the media and laid a foundation stone seeking recognition by Transnistrian citizens as an energetic leader. Latter, he was elected as the chairman of the provisional Supreme Soviet (2nd October 1990), the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Pridnestr (17th November 1990), and the president of Pridnestr (3rd December 1991), and strengthened his foothold as a sole symbolic and charismatic leader. Thus OSTK with a centric figure exercised strong leadership in the short term by effective ways and took over other political parties and social organizations and mobilized well-commanded members.

The core group of the Gagauz movement was Gagauz Halkı (Gagauz people), which was organized in 1988 when Perestroika had an impact on society.[19] Its members were intellectuals and writers who belonged to the academy of science of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. The first aim of its foundation was to promote and improve the educational surroundings of the Gagauz language. The opening of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in May 1989 was a clear turning point of politicization of Gagauz Halkı.[20] The trials of Gagauz Halkı for transferring their political voice to Moscow caused fear of the executive committee of the Popular Front of Moldova, which was a main social political organization by the titular nation. Gagauz Halkı became more radicalized for two weeks before and after the language law on August 1989, in the same timing as OSTK in Transnistria. Gagauz Halkı supported the idea of conducting strikes as a way of political protest. At the same time, political messages and statements by Gagauz Halkı were more radicalized when the Comrat Strike Committee joined the Gagauz movements. With the influx of the Comrat Strike Committee, the members were composed of industrial and agricultural engagers, and festive free riders. Stepan Topal, the leading figure of Gagauz political mobilization, was originally the representative of the Comrat Strike Committee. In the process of

---

[19]   *Proekt Programmui diskussionogo kluba Gagauz Halkui hem perestroika* (Komrat, 1989).
[20]   Sato, "Rise," p. 321-322.

its merger, he was recognized as a leading figure by members of the executive committee of Gagauz Halkı.[21] He, as well as Smirnov, made a political career in the latter phase of the mobilization; the chairman of the Supreme Soviet (31st October 1990) and the president of the Gagauz Republic (1st December 1991). However Topal, as he could not perfectly control security power such as the Gagauz vigilante (Gagauz republic army), was not acknowledged as a charismatic leader as was Smirnov. The Gagauz case shows that social political organization widely expanded its scale by mingling with the other social and political groups and lost control over ethnic political mobilization, at last.

Political mobilization led by Intermovement, whose headquarters were located in Tallinn, spread into North East Estonia at the end of 1988. Its manifesto and slogan were relatively close to Edinstvo in Moldova. The centripetal force of Intermovement as a representative of non-titular nation A was weakened by the failure of forcible occupation of the *Riigikogu* (Estonian parliament building) in May 1990.[22] Some Russian speakers were against the rise of extremism from Intermovement and seceded from supporting its political activities. Although Intermovement was still active in North East Estonia, the organization did not possess sufficient resources to mobilize the local inhabitants, because their mobilization was originally based on grass-roots action from North East Estonia. Russian speakers in North East Estonia did not fully ride the political strikes against the law of the state flag or other legal decisions by *Riigikogu*, which was proposed by Intermovement. The scheme of regional autonomy was consulted on by not only Intermovement but by the Narva city Soviet, which was one of the most influential bodies in the regional political arena. Members of the Narva city Soviet formed the interregional Soviet united with Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järvecity Soviets and discussed the formation of an independent regional economic zone. However the Narva city Soviet did not actively mobilize non-titular nation A and Russian speakers toward regional autonomy, but it was more likely to take up the rising voices of local inhabitants as a regional administrative office. Local inhabitants in North East Estonia feared their common living space being cut-off by the newly introduced economic border upon the Narva River and partially supported the establishment of a common economic zone in the area.[23] The interregional Soviet held several meetings, but could not develop into the Supreme Soviet of North East Estonia such as in the case of Transnistria.

In the case of Lithuanian Poles, the Polish Union in Lithuania, whose members were chiefly intellectuals, encouraged ethnic political mobilization in

---

[21] Interview with Stepan Bulgar, writer and former executive member of the Gagauz Halkı, Chişinău, Moldova, 19 June 2004.

[22] *Leninskoe Znamia*, 17 May 1990.

[23] *Sovietskaya Estonia*, 25 Oct. 1990; *Poisk*, 24 Oct. 1990.

order to improve and protect the ethnic cultural environment at the first phase of the movement.[24] Unlike the case of Gagauz, the motivation of its establishment, despite cultural organization, was a politicized one such as a countermeasure by non-titular nation A against titular-nation. One of the obstacles for mobilization was that Vilnija, a social organization formed by the other Slavic group (Tuteišas – non-titular nation B), opposed the political orientation of the Union of Polish in Lithuania and supported the democratic movement by Sąjūdis. Vilnija criticized that the Union of Polish in Lithuania attempted to be granted special privileges.[25] During the confrontation among social organizations in Šalčininkai and Vilnius region, the regional and city Soviets promoted realization of regional autonomy. As in the cases of Transnistria and North East Estonia, Šalčininkai and Vilnius regional Soviets took a leading role to form the united Soviets and discussed regional autonomy in the region of Lithuanian Poles. Regardless of heated disputes, realization of regional autonomy failed due to lack of support from local inhabitants. [26]

The four cases show that actors concerning autonomous movements consisted of more than two leading social political organizations. They frequently were either opposed to or cooperated toward forming regional autonomy or independence and this fusion and fragmentation among social political organizations was a cause of vicissitudes of ethnic political mobilization.

3.3.2. Validity of Doctrine and Slogans

Attractive and persuasive slogans aimed at increasing loyalty and the aspirations of members and regional inhabitants made the top-down order system of political organizations more effective, and also heighten the sustainability of their mobilization. The four cases are generally divided into two groups; one is those who insisted on maintenance of the status quo with the USSR and the existing Russian speaking environment (the cases of Transnistria and North East Estonia), and the other is those who demanded expansion of the cultural autonomy of non-titular nation A (the cases of Gagauz and Lithuanian Poles).This motivation is also paraphrased that the former group intended to restrain the titular group from radicalization by showing similar types of political collective action (mirror action or countermeasure) and the latter group to swim with the tide of reform movements by demanding the same types of political rights as titular nations (competitive measure).The different political orientations among cases reflected

[24] Lietuvos Valstybės Naujasis archyvas (LVNA), f. 42 [Lietuvos Lenkų Sąjungos (LLS) perdu-odamų dokumentų sąrašas] (The New Lithuanian State archive, the inventory of Lithuanian Polish Union transmited documents), ap. sąr, b. 92, l. 1
[25] LVNA, f. 10, ap. sąr, b. 25, ll.105-106.
[26] Sato, "Analysis", p. 127.

on the ethnic hierarchy under the Soviet regime. Russian speakers, who were in the first rank of *Narod* and had the advantage over the others *Narod, Narodnost'* and *Etnicheskiie gruppy*, tried to defend their existing status and, on the other hand, the other non-titular nation A, who were inferior to Russian speakers and titular nation, tried to use the exceptional political opportunity to improve their own political and social status.

Intellectuals of Lithuanian Poles and Gagauz had a sense of impending crisis regarding the future of their ethnic identity. Their patriotism and competitive attitude against titular nation often leaned toward radicalism. Critically, political actors in the two cases chose to stress ethnic slogans and messages directed at their own ethnic groups in order to consolidate ethnic identity; however, this policy had a negative effect on the eventual realization of regional autonomy. In the case of Gagauz this policy of patriotism helped to raise the self-consciousness of the Gagauz people to some extent, but to accelerate antagonism among Bulgarians, who have a symbiotic relation with Gagauz in southern Moldova.[27] In this regard, North East Estonia and Transnistria aimed to maintain the status quo and barely directed the radicalism of the political mobilization.

3.3.3. Effective Utility of Political Events

Political opportunity, which is provided by others, has a passive aspect, while political events, which are promoted by social political organizations, has an active aspect. This inventiveness of political events indicates the faculty of social organizations toward mobilization. All four cases, as well as any kind of political action at the end of the Soviet period, often used open mass demonstrations in parks and congress-type meetings. These congresses mostly imitated the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, which had a strong impact on Soviet nations through mass media. However the utility of political events was not the same in each case.

In the case of Transnistria, events strengthened the support of Transnistrian inhabitants toward the leading figure of the political mobilization. Nikolai Babilunga, a Transnistrian historian in Tiraspol State University, argued that the political strike against the language law could not achieve its ultimate aim to quash the law, but assisted in consolidating the solidarity of nations in Transnistria.[28] There had been sporadic shootings on the left bank since the middle of 1990. A large-scale armed clash between Moldovan police and Transnistrian vigilantes occurred on the Dubossari Bridge over the Nistru River on 2nd November 1990 and three Transnistrians died in the clash. The Transnistrian authorities, which

---

[27] Sato, "Rise", p. 326-327
[28] Babilunga & Bomeshko, *Pridnestrovskii konflikt,* p. 151.

were gradually gaining ruling power over the region, conducted a "state funeral" for the victims and tried to spread the image of Chişinău as a great menace to peace and order, and of Tiraspol as a heroic defender of peaceful nations.

Gagauz, North East Estonia and Lithuanian Poles could not utilize the political events effectively. Their actions showed a clear contrast to the mobilizations by titular nations, Estonians and Lithuanians. These titular nations actively commemorated their history of independence at the time of the Baltic States and conducted symbolic weekly protests, the so-called calendar demonstrations. The Soviet security forces hardly controlled the numerous co-memorial events, which glorified national and ethnic events before the Soviet occupation. On the contrary, the non-titular nation A was always one step behind the calendar demonstrations. Social political organizations also conducted historical memorial events, but could not effectively use them to strengthen the solidarity of members and participants. For instance, in the case of North East Estonia, Intermovement in his session emphasized the great Soviet heritage and the achievements of existing socialism such as the escape from poverty, the overthrow the Bourgeoisie from the Baltic States and the victory of the Great Fatherland War.[29] Such lists of communist achievements did not attract the young Russian speakers and non-titular nation A.

Counter Mobilization

In the case of the Gagauz and Lithuanian Poles, redefined regional minorities such as Bulgarians, Moldovans and Lithuanians played decisive roles in suppressing ethnic political mobilization by non-titular nation A. Self-proclaimed autonomous regions in the four cases were not always established by political majority rule, such as by referendum or other voting system. The independence or sovereignty proclamations by political actors of non-titular nation A were hastily started before the local inhabitants had the opportunity to consider their attitudes toward the self-governing system. Naturally, there were many groups opposing separation from republics (host-countries) in their self-proclaimed autonomous regions. The major opposition power was non-titular nation B and redefined ethnic minorities in this regard. In the case of Gagauz, Bulgarians took countermeasures against Gagauz autonomy and formed the social political organization, Vazrazhdane, for the aim of achieving larger cultural autonomy in Moldova. Bulgarians opposed Gagauz autonomy because a single ethnic group should not be privileged in a multi-ethnic space.[30] Gagauz leaders

---

29 *Sovietskaya Estonia*, 10 March 1989.
30 Sergei V. Novakov, *Tradicii bessarabskix bolgar i problem soxranenija ix identicnosti* (Kishinev: Ştiinţa, 1994), p. 60; 65.

persuaded them to form an autonomous republic for the wealth of all ethnic groups in southern Moldova in accordance with internationalism, but could not respond to the question of why the autonomous republic should be labeled "Gagauz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic."

In the case of the Lithuanian Poles, Karaimas, Tatars and Tuteišas, despite being micro minorities in the region, organized counter mobilization.[31] As in the case of the Bulgarians in southern Moldova, these minorities did not allow Lithuanian Poles to steal a march on the other ethnic groups. Although their capacity for ethnic political mobilization was much smaller than that of the Moldovan Bulgarians, the Lithuanian government recognized them as an important political object, which had the possibility of oppressing the autonomous movement by Lithuanian Poles from inside Šalčininkai and Vilnius regions. Halina Kobeckaitė, the representative of the Karaimas Cultural Association in Lithuania, was designated as the director of the Department of Ethnic Issues in Lithuania on 23rd November 1989 when it was founded with the aim of resolving minority issues. The process is remarkable because many ethnic minority groups achieved greater cultural autonomy during the elevation of ethnic confrontation. Republic authorities as well as political leaders of non-titular nation A competed to give political voice to other non-titular nations or allot financial support to ethnic cultural activities for the aim of collecting wider support from different ethnic groups. Most cultural associations of non-titular nations in Moldova, Lithuania and Estonia were established during the period of intensive ethnic conflict from 1989 to 1991.

On the contrary to the two cases, there were limits to counter mobilization from non-titular nation B in the cases of Transnistria and North East Estonia. According to the interview with Vladimir Chuikin, the former chairman of the Narva city Soviet, opposition protests by Estonians in Narva were so small scale that the city Soviet could ignore them.[32] Except for the redefined regional minority, Estonians, there were no ethnic groups who visibly organized political protests or conducted political mobilization against non-titular A. This case shows that vertical pressure on non-titular A from lower and higher strata by the same ethnic group did not become "a pincer movement" like the case of the Gagauz and Lithuanian Poles but resembled the simple conflict diagram as "titular nation versus non-titular nation." The cases of political mobilization in ethnical diverse areas were apt to reach an impasse owing to deliberations on opinions from each ethnic group.

---

[31] *Sovietskaya Litva*, 16 Aug. 1989.

[32] Interview with Vladimir Chuikin, Former Chairman of the Narva City Soviet and CEO of the Chuikin Group, Narva, Estonia, 20 March 2011.

3.4. Patronage

Compatriots in neighboring countries (Poland of Lithuanian Poles, Russian Federation for Russian speakers in Estonia) did not play a supportive role in the context of ethnic political mobilization, due to the negation of conspiracy and violation of other's borders. Therefore the triadic nexus of national minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands, which is the most famous Brubaker's theory of ethnic studies,[33] barely explains the state relationships concerning ethnic groups at the end of the Soviet period. This theory may apply to cases after the Soviet Union collapsed and external national homelands achieved independence.

In this regard, Moscow's attitude toward non-titular nation A was extremely significant. The Soviet authorities, including Mikhail Gorbachev, had watched nationalist, radical and separatist movements arising all over the Soviet Union. Consequently, there was a possibility that the Soviet authorities and the conservative groups who wished to retain the Soviet structure might utilize the political activists of non-titular nation A in order to control titular's separatism actions.[34] However we cannot take the remark concerning the conspiracy between Moscow and non-titular nation A at face value. It is more rational to understand that the Soviet authorities, in order to avoid dismantling the Soviet Union, showed more sympathetic behavior to titular nations rather than to non-titular nation A despite their strong appeal for a pro-Moscow attitude. As Soviet ruling power declined in the periphery of the USSR, the political attitude often hurt political opportunities to mobilize Russian speakers in North East Estonia. The Russian speakers interpreted the non-interference attitude by the Soviet authorities as the bureaucratism that deteriorated the Soviet Union and could not be resolved even under Perestroika and conditions of state emergency. After their disappointment with the Moscow policy, the interregional Soviet in North East Estonia, playing the ethnic card, asked for rescue from the Russian Federation in the middle of 1990. However, Yeltsin directly denied autonomous movement by Russian speakers in North East Estonia in a meeting with representatives of the interregional Soviet. Yeltsin, due to the opposition attitude against Gorbachev, clarified his position as a democratic leader and adopted a stance of cooperating with the Popular Front forces of the Baltic States. Therefore, he could not support any political bodies who might side with the Soviet authorities.

Vadim A. Medvedev from the secretariat of the Central Committee of CPSU

---

[33] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 4.

[34] Philip G. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization", *World Politics,* vol. 43 (1991), p. 222.

Ethnic Political Mobilization: an Integrative or Disintegrative Force in the Modern Polity?
Case-Studies of Political Mobilization by Non-Titular Nations in Moldova, Estonia and Lithuania
PLURAL
79

suddenly visited Šalčininkai region in November 1989 when the Lithuanian Communist Party discussed its separation from CPSU USSR. The aim of his visit was to restrain from the separatist tendency of the Central Committee of Lithuanian CP, making use of political pressure from the Lithuanian Poles toward the Lithuanian government.[35] The city and regional Soviets in Šalčininkai and Vilnius regions expected further Moscow support, but their expectations were diminished as the brakes were finally put on their ethnic political mobilization as in the case of North East Estonia. On behalf of Moscow, the Polish government did not become a patron for the Lithuanian Poles. The Lithuanian Poles originally had an identity as *Polonia*, who are the Polish diaspora and conscious of their own individual identity, which is slightly different from Polish nationals in the Republic of Poland.[36] Therefore Poland and the Lithuanian Poles have not always had a patron-client relationship through their history.

The political actors in Transnistria and Gagauz trusted Moscow's patronage of their political movements less. Moldova is located much further from Moscow influence than the Baltic states from a geopolitical aspect. On 22th December 1990, Gorbachev stated that Moscow did not support political activities in the Gagauz region and Transnistria.[37] Transnistrian and Gagauz authorities discouraged the statement, while proceeding with policies toward completion of a state structure such as founding a state bank, parliament, presidency, court, police, army, and so forth. This independent attitude became one of the major causes of establishment of a de facto independent state, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

The four case-studies demonstrate that rich material and immaterial resources (R) increased the sustainability of ethnic political mobilization. The sustainability was an important factor in achieving de facto independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This paper emphasizes that these material and immaterial resources were not valid for the mobilization until the appearance of political opportunity (P) and political will for collective action by social political organizations (W). The political mobilization in Transnistria not had only rich resources ([1], [2], [3-a], [3-b], [3-c] are double plus [++]), but strong political will among associates toward regional independence. The political actors

---

[35] Algirdas Brazauskas, *Self-determination 1988 - 1991* (Vilnius: VAGA, 2004), p. 167.

[36] Interview with Boleslav Daskevich, Administrative Director of Šalčininkai region self-government and former member of central committee of Šalčininkai District Soviet, Šalčininkai, Lithuania, 01 Feb. 2007.

[37] *Sovietskaya Moldova*, 03 Jan. 1991.

discovered the resources, supplied the resources to the participants of collective action, motivated them toward political activity and increased the potentiality of immaterial resources. It is remarkable that the political actors in Transnistria succeeded in completing the supplying and recycling system of resources in the early stage of the political mobilization.

The formation of such political climate and features, which supplied basic human resources, partially dates back to the time of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which was established on the left bank of the Nistru River as an autonomous republic of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. The left bank had produced scholars, politicians and laborers even after the merger with Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, as one of the fifteen Soviet Union republics, in 1940. Its sixteen years' experience of socialism fostered Transnistrian regionalism among the inhabitants. Albeit to a lesser degree, North East Estonia had good quality human resources, too. However the political actors did not have strong will to foster regionalism because Russian speakers were conscious of ethnic divisions rather than regional divisions. Furthermore, they preferred to dialogue with Tallinn. On the contrary, Gagauz actors chose the opposite direction from North East Estonia, and were in a hurry to discover and nurture human resources by establishing cultural centers, theaters, museums, universities, textbooks and dictionaries in the Gagauz language and increase the number of lessons taught in the Gagauz language in elementary schools. However, the Gagauz movements exhausted all resources before the completion of a newly educated generation, and supplying and recycling systems of resources. Transnistria effectively used political opportunities and resources with a strong political will. This is why Transnistria achieved de facto independent states and the other three regions failed to do after the collapse of the USSR.

Table. Regional potentiality toward political mobilization in each region

		Region of Lithuanian Poles	North East Estonia	Region of Gagauz	Trans-nistria
(1) Population Density		0	+	+	++
(1) Economic growth		0	++	+	++
(1) Social organization	(3-a) Member	++	+	++	++
	(3-b) Slogan	++	+	++	+
	(3-c) Event	0	0	+	++
(1) Regional Minority		-	0	-	+
(1) Patronage		0	+	0	0