

REVIEW: NATIONALIST POLITICS IN EUROPE

Malcolm Anderson

James G. Kellas, **Nationalist Politics in Europe: The Constitutional and Electoral Dimensions**, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 272 pp, hb, £50, ISBN 0-333-62046-1.

Nationalism is a subject of enormous fascination which has produced a vast literature. This fascination, like the phenomenon itself, is unlikely to ebb in the foreseeable future. The dissolving of nationalism in broader loyalties has often been predicted, and indeed hoped for. The historian Norman Rich, writing over 25 years ago, dubbed the period 1850 to 1890 as the age of nationalism, thus implying that we live in a post nationalist age. More recently Eric Hobsbaum published a book in 1990 arguing that nationalism is decaying or dying. Few, if anyone, now take this view, partly because there has been a revival of extreme nationalism in certain regions, particularly accompanying the collapse of communist regimes, and partly because a new conventional wisdom sees nationalism as a quasi-inevitable counter point to globalization, as people seek to root themselves in a local identity. Professor Kellas agrees with this last contention and he argues that, on a more limited stage, 'more Europe' tends to encourage 'more nationalism'.

An up to date book on this subject is very welcome, to give students and all those with a general interest in the topic a compendium of information and an overview of nationalist politics. Most of the literature on nationalism, Professor Kellas writes, has been of a philosophical, historical and sociological character. He justifies yet another book on nationalism by saying that the political science approach has been seriously under-represented in the literature. This approach means 'looking at states and their relationships with nations, nationalist political parties and political organisations, and the votes

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for nationalist parties and propositions.’ Some may argue that this is taking an institutional definition of political science and others unduly may consider that the amorphous and protean phenomenon of nationalism requires an inter- or multi-disciplinary approach. But there is nonetheless considerable virtue in the approach adopted in this book because it allows the bringing together of a considerable amount of information across the continent of Europe and it stimulates further thinking and reflection on a very complex subject.

In some ways this is an admirable book, written in a direct and intelligible way. It is ambitious, covering, if a little too briefly, the whole of the continent of Europe, many different kinds of political parties/movements, and aspects of the constitutions of all the countries covered. The work is clearly organised by taking each country of Europe separately (although some are grouped into chapters on the Balkans, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, *Mitteleuropa* and the British Isles), describing the historical context, the constitutional system and the results of elections. Usefully, a common organisation of each chapter – historical context, constitutional structure, electoral nationalism and a brief conclusion – helps readers to make comparisons for themselves. Most sections are all too concise, which, one hopes, will encourage readers to look elsewhere. For example, the twenty four line conclusion in the *Mitteleuropa* chapter (discussing Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia) carries concision too far. Also, constitutional analysis is sparse (the sections on the constitutions comprise mainly direct quotations from the texts) and mainly directed to the degree of centralisation of political authority, although briefly alluding to language, national symbols and citizenship. Important debates are alluded to without going into the detail that a little more space would have allowed, such as the degree to which Italy is a unitary national state or a multinational state without indicating that this has been a matter of vigorous debate within Italy.

One crucial omission is that we are not given a framework within which to assess the importance of nationalism in Europe. Its importance is evident but how important is a question requiring rather more probing than we are offered here. Professor Kellas argues, controversially and without supporting evidence, that nationalism ‘is the dominant political and social force in Europe, and has replaced ideology as the divide between “East” and “West”’ (p. 225). Many arguments can be made around this proposition. First, nationalism is itself an ideology, or perhaps a family of ideologies depending how the slippery term ideology is defined, and a particularly durable one compared with most of its competitors. Professor Kellas accepts that it is

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widely held that nationalism is an ideology, although it is unclear whether he agrees or disagrees with this contention. Second, there is room for believing that some force at least the equal of nationalism is at work since, as Kellas says himself, the nations of Europe have ceased to be hostile to each other; the borders between many, and soon most, states are no longer systematically controlled, and a common currency has been established for twelve (now twenty-three) countries. Nationalist sentiment may have occasionally been a disruptive factor in European integration but it has never halted it. Third, the meaning attaching to 'East' and 'West' in this sentence is unclear. In the context it seems to refer to the difference between some parts of the former USSR plus parts of the Balkans and the rest of Europe. If it means a division between that part of Europe which made up the Soviet bloc and the other countries which lie to the West, then it is hard to sustain this position. However, the real difficulty in assessing the importance of nationalism in European political life is that the expressions of nationalism are so heterogeneous, as this book amply illustrates.

There are a series of minor flaws in the book. Even given the time taken for book production in the UK, it is disturbing to find so many facts which are out of date, some of which could have been corrected at proof stage if not earlier. For example, in a book published in 2004, the EU is recorded as having 15 member states and both Cyprus and Turkey are described as applicant states. The specific countries in the recent EU enlargement and the date of entry (early to mid 2004) became virtually certain in October 2002, time enough to be taken into account. Also, it was unlikely, even at the time of writing, that the Greek veto on Turkish candidacy of the EU (p. 165) would persist. Election results are, in some cases, not up to date – the last municipal (2001) and regional elections (forgivably) in France are not included on p. 65. Moreover, French municipal elections take place at six-year intervals (not four or five) and not in the years given on p. 65. Professor Kellas argues, with justification, that much information can be obtained from websites and this is how the reader should keep up to date. But some sub-national elections are difficult to track down and some of the raw statistics need health warnings and interpretation (such as those, for example, of French municipal elections where erroneous information could have been derived from a website without cross checking).

At other points, the facts, trivial in themselves, are wrongly reported. For example on pp. 10-11 Ireland is described as having won national independence in 1918 although on p. 25 it is asserted correctly that until 1922

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the British Isles comprised one state; on p. 28 the leader of the SDLP in Northern Ireland is still John Hume, although he stepped down in September 2001; on p. 30 the Scottish state merged with England in 1707 by the Union of Kingdoms and Parliaments – strictly speaking accurate, but the insertion of 1603 would have indicated that the union of Crowns took place a century earlier. In some of the other country sections, the inaccuracies are more numerous, again some trivial – misspelling of Adenauer (p. 108), reunification of Germany took place in October not August 1990 (p. 112), Social Democrats are called Socialist Democrats (p. 112), the Christian Democrats were not replaced by the CSU in Bavaria: they were never implanted there. Contemporary Lithuania does not correspond to the former Duchy of Courland almost all of which lies within the borders of Latvia, including its ancient capital Jelgava.

More seriously, there are errors of interpretation which are likely to mislead students. It is mentioned twice that German citizenship is based on descent (*ius sanguinis*) rather than place of birth (*ius solis*), thus ignoring the major 1998 reform to German citizenship law. Kellas is perhaps relying on excellent but out of date literature on German citizenship. And there is the surprising concluding sentence to the section on Germany ‘... German nationalism lives on, in the apparently effortless superiority of the German nation in Europe.’ It would be interesting to have some evidence of this at a time when Germans feel that the weaknesses of their economy, demography, educational system and technology, and their continuing modest political influence on the international stage, seem more evident than their superiority, effortless or not. Other assertions provoke questions in the mind of the reader. Did the shifting definition of *Mitteleuropa* even correspond exclusively to the frontiers of the Hapsburg Empire?

It short, there is much to praise in this useful short book but there are flaws to be rectified in a second edition.

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