FOREWORD

When, rather surprisingly, the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – were able to claim back their independence in 1990-1, they did so by asserting their continuity with the three Republics suppressed by Stalin in 1940. A key aspect of this assertion was the claim that their core populations were identified at the time they were suppressed; only those persons, or their descendants, were automatically nationals of the revived States. This raised the question what modern international law has to say about nationality in cases where the identity or continuity of states is in question. It is this which forms the focus of the present study. Although specific in its origins, it is of general importance, and for a number of reasons.

First, of course, it affected a large number of people, and was a source of ethnic and political tension between Russia on the one hand and Latvia and Estonia on the other. (Because Lithuania has a much smaller fraction of Russian-speakers among its population it was able to resolve the issues more easily.) The gradual resolution of this problem, even if incomplete, was an important aspect of regional politics and of legal discourse during the decade.

Secondly, it brought into tension, if not outright opposition, the claims of the Baltic States to restoration of their independence with the developing demands of international law that all persons have the right to a nationality and the right not to be forced to leave their country. As to the former, the Baltic States sought restitution of their independence, not recognition of their existence as new States – in other words *restitutio in integrum* in relation to an independence unlawfully suppressed by the Soviet Union in 1940, that low-point of the fortunes of international law in the 20th century. As to the latter, the human rights in question were eventually conceded, but how they were to be applied was a question. The persons concerned were not stateless, and it was argued that the new states had the right to require familiarity with the national language as a condition of the recognition of their local nationality.

Thirdly, the debate on these issues, carried out in a variety of forums, shed light on such key questions as the relations of statehood to nationality, of state identity to state continuity and of human rights to the state. In order to deal with the specific inquiry, it proved necessary to explore general and foundational conceptions of international law, in particular statehood, identity, nationality and non-discrimination.

It is the great merit of Dr Ziemele’s work that she locates the specific questions of interest to the Baltic States and their peoples within the general framework of international law, and does so in a way which is historically informed and that takes into consideration the difficult legal and political relationship between the Baltic States and Russia. She ignores neither the aspirations of these States (themselves based in claims about international law which were quite widely recognized by others) with developing human rights demands. The result is a valuable account both of the specific and the
Foreword

general. It bids fair for the development, or redevelopment, of international law in the region.

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