

WHAT'S IN A NAME? “DE FACTO STATES”, TERMINOLOGICAL CHOICES, AND NORMATIVE CONSEQUENCES*

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Abstract There are a handful of territories around the globe that have state-like qualities such as governments, police, and tax collection, but are not recognized as states by other states, or are, perhaps, recognized by only one or several states. The study of these entities has been characterized by “terminological anarchy”, with each author developing his or her own designations, sometimes covering exactly the same ground, or seeking to introduce definitions to expand or delimit the number of cases. While these “name games” are partly driven by the ambitions of academics who want to present their research as being original and innovative, they also reveal underlying attitudes towards the phenomenon of de facto statehood. In the article, the range of appellations used in describing these political entities at the margins of international society is analyzed, to see what the choices of names can tell us about underlying attitudes. It is argued that current terminological pluralism is unhelpful and should be eliminated, in order to ensure that we are referring to the same entities in discussing what these entities “are”, what moves them and how they interact with other entities.

Keywords de facto states, terminology, definitions, quasi-states, contested states, statehood

Название статьи «Что в имени твоём?»: де-факто государства, выбор терминологии и нормативные последствия

Аннотация В мире есть некоторое число территориальных образований, которые обладают такими признаками государства, как наличие системы управления, полиции, сбора налогов и т. п., но не признаны в качестве государств другими странами, а иногда признаны лишь одной или несколькими странами. Исследование таких образований характеризуется «терминологической анархией»: каждый автор выдвигает собственные обозначения и определения, порой относящиеся к одному и тому же феномену, или пытается найти дефиниции, которые позволили бы расширить или сузить ряд подпадающих под них кейсов. Хотя эта «игра в названия» отчасти является плодом амбиций ученых, каждый из которых

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стремится представить свое исследование оригинальным и инновационным, она также отражает и более глубинные подходы к проблеме государственности де-факто государств. Для того, чтобы понять, что выбор того или иного термина говорит о базовом подходе его автора к этой проблеме, в статье анализируется спектр существующих терминов и определений, используемых для обозначения этих политических единиц, которые находятся как бы на обочине международного сообщества. В статье делается вывод о том, что преобладающий сегодня в этом вопросе терминологический плюрализм малоперспективен, и от него следует отказаться. Это необходимо для того, чтобы быть уверенными, что в ходе дискуссий о том, что представляют собой эти образования, что движет ими и как они взаимодействуют с другими акторами, имеются в виду одни и те же субъекты.

Ключевые слова де-факто государства, терминология, определения, квазигосударства, спорные государства, государственность

The choice of terminology is rarely an innocuous exercise: it also has normative consequences. It also signals a researcher's stance towards research objects, even before they are defined or described. Our terms necessarily say something about our attitudes toward these political creatures – positive or negative, condescending, approving or respectful. They highlight certain qualities and aspects, while other characteristics are obscured or pushed into the background. This is true for semiotics in general, and not least with regard to the study of de facto states.

I. Jacksonian quasi-states and Pegg-type de facto states

Systematic research into the phenomenon of de facto states – understood as states that exist “de facto”, but not “de jure” – commenced only with Scott Pegg's book “International Society and the De Facto State”, published as recently as in 1998. Hence, this is a very young discipline: the phenomenon of de facto states also has a very short history, dating back no further than the mid-20th century. Of course, throughout history, some states have been more directly included in international society than others, but international recognition as the defining criterion of a “real” state emerged only after World War Two. Prior to that time, state recognition was based on degree of “effective” or “empirical” statehood.¹ In 1933, the Seventh International Conference of American states, meeting in Montevideo, agreed on a set of criteria for states which included “a permanent population”, “a defined territory”, “government”, and “capacity to enter into relations with other states”.² Entities that fulfilled these criteria were regarded as “states”: thus, states were recognized on the basis of their capacity to live up to de facto statehood.³

After 1945, these principles were cast away, and the relationship between de facto statehood and recognition was turned upside down. As explained by Mikulas Fabry, “the post-World War Two period saw the abandonment of *de facto* statehood as the standard for recognition of indigenously founded new states. Since the 1950s, the determining factor in the admission of new members into the society of states has been whether an entity has a prior *right* [emphasis added] to independence, rather than whether it *is* independent”.⁴

This revolution in thinking about statehood created two new categories of states, which I will refer to as *Jacksonian quasi-states* and *Pegg-type de facto states*. On the

one hand, most of the newly independent states in Africa and Asia did not fulfil Montevideo criteria but were nevertheless admitted into the United Nations and treated as fully-fledged states. Having just emerged from the status of colony, they often lacked the most elementary infrastructure and institutions, but were nevertheless treated in the world organization on a par with older, well-established, functioning states. The standard study here remains Robert Jackson's "Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations in the Third World" (1990). Jackson's dismissive epithet "quasi" was intended to re-establish the distinction between empirical and would-be statehood. Unsurprisingly, the new UN members have jealously guarded their precious new status, which gives them prestige, a valuable source of income (including the possibility of selling their votes in international organizations such as the International Olympic Committee), and the ability to punch far above their weight in international fora.

At the same time, with the new thinking and new terminology as regards statehood, the concept of "de facto statehood" was liberated from its former usage, ready to be applied for new purposes. In his seminal work, Pegg used it to describe the very opposite of Jackson's *quasi-states*: as states which (more or less successfully) fulfil the Montevideo criteria of statehood but are nevertheless denied entry into international society. They are, as he aptly noted, "the flip side of the quasi-state coin".⁵ I reproduce his lengthy working definition *in toto*:

"A de facto state exists where there is an organized political leadership which has risen to power through some degree of indigenous capability; receives popular support; and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a specific territorial area, over which effective control is maintained for a significant period of time. The de facto state views itself as capable of entering into relations with other states, and it seeks full constitutional independence and widespread international recognition as a sovereign state. It is, however, unable to achieve any degree of substantive recognition and therefore remains illegitimate in the eyes of international society".⁶

Eight years later, I formulated a slightly shorter definition to describe the same phenomenon, but with a different terminology:

"To be classified as a quasi-state [...], a political entity must fulfil three criteria. Its leadership must be in control of (most of) the territory it lays claim to, and it must have sought but not achieved international recognition as an independent state. Finally, to eliminate a whole spate of ephemeral political contraptions, I exclude those that have persisted in this state of non-recognition for less than two years".⁷

Thus, while my definition basically coincided with Pegg's, there are a few significant differences. First, with regard to territorial control, Pegg used the term "a specific territorial area" whereas I specified it as "(most of) the territory it lays claim to". As one of the anonymous reviewers of the draft version of this article pointed out, my narrower criterion might create problems. For instance, prior to 2022, the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) and the "Luhansk People's Republic" (LNR)⁸ controlled only a portion of the respective Donetsk and Luhansk regions which they had declared independence for and still they were regularly referred to as "de facto states". In light of this criticism, I have now come around to believe that Pegg's more open formulation is preferable.

Secondly, I did not use the concept of *de facto* state. The intention here was to highlight the peculiarity of these entities by contrasting them with "Jacksonian states" – as "unrecognized quasi-states" versus their counterparts, the recognized quasi-states. In

fact, my definition has since been reproduced in numerous articles: 16 years after its publication, my 2006 article “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States” in “Journal of Peace Research”⁹ remains the most cited publication on *de facto* states in some academic databases (e. g., Web of Science). However, my terminology was abandoned by later researchers, and, having used the term “quasi-states” in one more article,¹⁰ I discarded it myself. It appeared in a few articles published around the same time,¹¹ but then it basically disappeared. And luckily so, as it was a rather unfortunate choice: not only did it cause more confusion than clarification, but “quasi” is also a term with clear normative overtones. It had the effect of denigrating these entities, highlighting their deficiencies. For instance, in his article “Eingefrorene Konflikte. Wie weiter mit den Quasistaaten?” [“Frozen conflicts: quo vadis quasi states?”], Wim van Meurs argued that the quasi states are “black holes” which provide their elites “with almost unlimited possibilities for self-enrichment”.¹²

Part of the reason why I chose the appellation “quasi” in my 2006 article was that when I wrote it, I had visited only one *de facto* state – Transnistria – at a time when it had reached the bottom of societal collapse, with hyperinflation and rapidly deteriorating living conditions for the vast majority of the population.¹³ Since then, Transnistria – as well as some of the other post-Soviet *de facto* states – has acquired considerably stronger institutions and economy, in many respects approaching “real” states in their performance.¹⁴

Another reason why “quasi-states” seemed apt at the time, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was that they were perceived to be transient phenomena, destined to sink back into nonexistence in the not-too-distant future.¹⁵ They had appeared at the time when their parent states – the states from which they had seceded – had just been established and lacked the means to rein in rebellious regions. It was expected that as soon as these parent states managed to get their act together, the separatists would be overrun. This is what history had prepared us for: most of the *de facto* states in Africa that were established in the wake of decolonization, such as Biafra and Katanga, proved to be of very short duration. That was also the experience of the West Balkan *de facto* states Republika Srpska Krajina and Republika Srpska.¹⁶

With the tenacity of “Pegg-style states”, it seemed increasingly reasonable to adopt Pegg’s terminology. My later contributions to this literature – most of them co-authored with my colleague Helge Blakkisrud – have consistently used the term “*de facto* states”,¹⁷ in line with most other scholars writing on the subject.¹⁸ But this consensus was reached only after considerable vacillation which has not yet been overcome entirely. Some terminological variation lingers on, with alternative appellations cropping up.

II. Terminology: state of the field

Below I give a survey of (mostly) English-language literature on *de facto* states, focusing on their terminology. Seeking to slash a way through the terminological jungle and systematize the plethora of appellations which have been used, I introduce a four-box typology. One axis seeks to capture the axiological dimension – positive versus negative valorization. The other highlights the “spatial” dimension – inward versus outward: designations of the first group characterize *de facto* states in their relation to the entity’s own population, the other, in relation to (other) states. Many concepts try to capture both spatial dimensions, but the emphasis generally falls on one of them. With regard to axiology, certain terms are clearly more evaluative than others, while some are regarded as positive by some authors but denigrating by others.

Table 1. Typology of terms to describe “Pegg-type” entities

	Outward dimension	Inward dimension
Negative valorization		
Positive valorization		

Puppet state

Discussing the five secessionist entities in the former Soviet Union plus the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Bogdan Ivanel¹⁹ uses the term “puppet states”. In his terminology, these “secessionist entities have all the outside aspects of a de facto state, [but] are in fact effectively controlled by their sponsor state”.²⁰ The sponsor state has not only established the puppet state through military force: it also “controls its everyday life through the use of military, economic and political means, leading to a de facto annexation of the given territory”.²¹ Several other scholars discuss “puppet states” as a theoretical category, but mostly to dismiss it as unhelpful or in contrast with “de facto states”.²² The epithet “puppet” implies that the states in question do not have agency – whereas virtually all experts agree that most of them actually do have room for independent action.²³

Sessionist state / separatist state / separatist region

In two early contributions to the literature, Dov Lynch²⁴ used the term “separatist state”. In my view, “separatist state” is a reasonably straightforward and accurate description: the vast majority, or perhaps all, of the de facto states have seceded from another (internationally recognized) state. At the same time, this term has the effect of underscoring the non-legitimacy of these entities under international law.²⁵ However, in his 2004 book-length treatment of the subject, “Engaging Eurasia’s Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States”, Lynch used “separatist state” and “de facto state” interchangeably. “Separatist state” for him appears to be an auxiliary concept only, clarifying to the layperson what to expect to find in the book. Then, in a later contribution, Lynch switched to “de facto state” terminology, and argued why it is important to do so:

“The fundamental project in each region has been the construction of the political institutions of independent statehood. Using the term of de facto ‘state’, therefore, serves to draw our attention to the political underpinning of the projects that have sustained these regions despite their isolation”.²⁶

Too often and too hastily, he notes, these regions are referred to as criminal black holes or as the puppets of external actors.^{27,28}

The first chapter in Franziska Smolnik’s book “Secessionist Rule: Protracted Conflict and Configurations of Non-state Authority” is titled “De facto state or rebel region?”. Smolnik does not answer her own question directly, but in the remainder of the book, *de facto state* is the preferred term.²⁹ The concept of secession/separatism is reserved for the process of separatist conflict – something that makes good sense.

Unrecognized states

In his 2008 study of democracy in Pegg-type states, Kimitaka Matsuzato³⁰ employed the term “unrecognized states”; this has also been used in other contributions

to the literature.³¹ Importantly, Nina Caspersen titled her seminal study “Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Independence in the Modern International System” (2012),³² highlighting the fact that these states lack international recognition as their defining aspect.³³ This is also the term used in the volume Caspersen edited together with Gareth Stansfield.³⁴ However, the term is somewhat problematical, as quite a few entities normally regarded as Pegg-type states, also by Caspersen – such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – have been recognized by one or a few states. Typically, this is the patron state, but in the two first instances the patron – Russia – has managed to persuade or bribe other states into doing the same. While these few recognitions do not make a dent in the massive wall separating the Pegg-type states from international society, it is hardly desirable to adopt a terminology that obscures the difference between single-state and none-state recognition. Indeed, in other articles Caspersen joins the band of experts who have switched from their originally preferred terminology to the consensus term “de facto states”.³⁵ Others use “de facto states” and “unrecognized states” interchangeably as synonyms.³⁶

Contested states

Deon Geldenhuys prefers to call Pegg-type states “contested states,” a term which in my view is not problematical in itself. More than most researchers, Geldenhuys underscores the state-like qualities of Pegg-type states. He insists that they “deserve to be called ‘states’ because nearly all of them satisfy the basic, formal requirements of statehood in international law save for recognition [...] and in many ways act like typical states”.³⁷ Geldenhuys mentions and dismisses no less than 12 alternative designations for contested states, some of which are merely hypothetical suggestions apparently not used by anyone. Others refer to categories not coterminous with Pegg-type states. The more serious contender he rejects is “de facto states”, as this term in his view “suggests that these entities are denied de jure recognition, receiving de facto recognition only, which is not necessarily the case”.

Geldenhuys’s terminology was followed up by James Ker-Lindsay in his book “The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States” (2012),³⁸ a term which he also used in a later article.³⁹ More recently, he has switched to “de facto states”.⁴⁰ Two of his new articles were part of a special issue on “de facto states” of the journal “Ethnopolitics”, and it would be confusing if the various contributions to the same cluster of articles in the same issue of a journal should use separate terminologies to designate the same entities. Hence, the need for greater clarity drives researchers towards definitional consensus.

However, the concept of “contested states” was resuscitated in George Kyris’s recent article discussing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.⁴¹ Shpend Kursani also prefers the term “contested states” in his 2021 article on Pegg-type entities.⁴² Noting that there are more than a dozen concepts and over fifteen different labels in use to describe such entities, he dismisses as barren and unhelpful the discussions as to which labels are more or less useful. In his view, the fact that there are many definitions of the phenomenon is “not a fundamental problem per se”.⁴³ Kursani believes that research on contested states suffers from over-terminologization, while remaining “fundamentally under-theorized”. Therefore, he holds, it is time to move on to the more substantial question of what these entities actually *are* – an “ontological approach”. While fully agreeing that the study of Pegg-type states cannot stop with terminological clarification, I nevertheless believe that the terminological debate is a necessary prolegomenon to a study of the factual character of these entities. Moreover, as Kursani notes, “individual

attempts to conceptualize the contested state have produced collective inconsistencies in both the various meanings associated with the phenomenon and with the empirical categories they purport to capture".⁴⁴ Precisely for this reason, I believe that an initial terminological house-cleaning is needed to clear away some of the confusion and inconsistencies.

Para/pseudo/phantom states

Appellations such as "para/pseudo/phantom" states all define Pegg-type states in terms of their internal functioning, or lack thereof. Although these appellations are eye-catching, they, wittingly or not, signal a very negative attitude towards the research object. In Greek, "pseudos" means "a lie"; indeed, the scholars who used this term, Vladimir Kolosov and John O'Loughlin,⁴⁵ have later abandoned their original terminology and joined the bandwagon of "de facto state" supporters.⁴⁶

The term "*para-state*" had been used in an early contribution by Pavel Baev,⁴⁷ but when Stanislawski and colleagues⁴⁸ used the same name ten years later, they gave it a different meaning. For Baev, it meant the same as "de facto states", whereas Stanislawski and his colleagues used it as a generic term for various kinds of less-than-real states, including Jacksonian quasi-states and Pegg-type de facto states. In referring to the latter type alone, they used the term "almost-states", indicating a somewhat more respectful attitude towards them than towards "quasi-states". Even so, they maintained that, in the case of "almost-states", "control exercised by the home [= parent] state has been replaced by informal but very strong dependence on another country, making these republics de facto satellites".⁴⁹

Some 12 years after the publication of Stanislawski's article, a research team led by Michael Rossi revived the term "para-state" by basically reverting to Baev's usage of the term,⁵⁰ while insisting that they were using it in a new and innovative way. They claimed that they had identified a category of "unique and exceptional states around the world that go beyond existing understandings of 'de facto' states",⁵¹ which necessitates a separate term. All para-states are functional de facto states, they maintain, but many de facto states are not para-states. However, instead of reducing the category of de facto states to a more precise group with clearly identifiable qualities, Rossi and his collaborators expanded it somewhat beyond the standard inventory. They defined a para-state as "a political entity that has officially declared some form of independence, is able to secure control over a given territory, and possesses many trappings of statehood similar to sovereign states".⁵² This definition looks suspiciously like the standard definition of "de facto states": instead of offering greater terminological clarity they muddy the waters by including some entities in a way that stretches their own principles for inclusion. This new attempt at terminological innovation, it seems, only proves that we are better served with converging on one term – de facto states – as a clearly recognizable and increasingly recognized category.

Nonstate states

In 2001, in a pioneering article on Pegg-type states, Charles King used the neutral term "unrecognized states".⁵³ However, King clearly likes to play with words, and in another article published the same year he used instead the term "nonstate states".⁵⁴ He underlined these entities' unreal as well as sinister character: "if one were looking for places to acquire arms, offload heroin, and launder money, Eurasia's archipelago of nonstate states would be a good place to start".⁵⁵ King's terminological experimentation

did not stop here, but continued with an article published 11 years later together with Daniel Byman, in which the same entities were described as “phantom states”.⁵⁶ Using a clutch of other graphic terms such as “wraiths” and “apparitions”, King and his co-author strongly underscored the “ghost-like” nature of these entities. Whereas the epithets King used were new, the emphasis on the criminal character of these political contraptions was retained. Byman and King pointed out that these phantom states have been “stoking wars, fostering crime, keeping weak states weak”.⁵⁷

Informal states

In her book “The Making of Informal States: Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria”,⁵⁸ Daria Isachenko provides a thoughtful discussion of her choice of terminology. She dismisses the term “de facto states” which, in her view, “implies something static and fixed”.⁵⁹ She also argues that the concept “states-within-states” is inadequate, as among the cases studied under this name there are also sub-state actors that do not seek international recognition.⁶⁰ Isachenko has more sympathy with “contested states”, although she deplores that Geldenhuys’ concept, in her view, “implies an almost exclusive focus on external sovereignty”. Her own proposal – *informal states* – draws on the political science literature that refers to informal procedures and institutions as something “created, communicated, enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels”. In her view, it is precisely such informality that marks the internal statebuilding processes in these entities.⁶¹ These are serious arguments, and her choice of terminology might have had a chance to establish itself as the preferred option if it had been introduced earlier. However, as far as I can see, Isachenko has no disciples in the research community, and her proposal has only led to a further proliferation of terms.

Quasi-states

This term was discussed above and dismissed as unduly vilifying Pegg-type states. However, I would like to return to it for a moment, noting that in some cases it might be a reasonably accurate designation after all. Some of the secessionist regions that have declared their independence and managed to stave off all attempts at re-capture by the parent state have spectacularly failed to establish viable state institutions and are indeed remarkably weak. In such an environment, criminal networks based on smuggling, kidnapping and other illicit activities thrive. The Republic of Ichkeria – more commonly known as Chechnya – could be characterized as a bandit controlled-area in the period between the first and second Chechen wars.⁶² Some early studies of the self-declared republics in Eastern Ukraine seemed to indicate that, as of the mid-2010s, they were rather lawless territories where various warlords had considerable clout.⁶³ So, in order to develop a distinct category of “genuine” de facto states as states that exhibit many state-like qualities, we should perhaps introduce a separate category of “unrecognized quasi-state” to designate basically lawless territories, and exclude these from the “de facto state” category.

III. Conclusion

Scott Pegg has remarked, correctly in the author’s view, that the study of unrecognized states has been marred by “prolonged terminological and definitional battles that have done comparatively little to advance scholarly understanding”.⁶⁴ It would be a clear advantage if the research community could agree on the basic terms of

inquiry. To be sure, disagreements about approaches and conclusions are to be expected and should indeed be welcomed in all academic pursuits – but unless the various authors impart the same meaning to the same words, they risk talking past each other.

A fruitful delimitation of a research object should be neither too narrow, nor too wide. There is little to gain from a concept that serves as a catchall category. Therefore, the concept of de facto states ought to include only *entities which have seceded from a parent state, have managed to capture and retain control over a specific territory for a reasonable period of time, and have declared their independence from the parent state*. In other words, I recommend using Pegg’s definition. I also agree with O’Loughlin et al.⁶⁵ that this is “the most appropriate and most neutral” term available on the menu – or at least one of three most appropriate and neutral terms, alongside “contested states” and “informal states” (see Table 1).

A narrow and specific definition of de facto states is not an impediment to fruitful comparison with other political entities, but rather a precondition for it. For instance, in a recent addition to the literature – the 2020 collective volume “De Facto States in Eurasia”⁶⁶ – the authors contextualize this phenomenon in a broader framework of less than fully independent political entities in the same region and compare them also with territories which have not declared independence. They make comparisons both chronologically, with cases in and adjacent to the Russian Empire before 1917, as well as synchronically. In one chapter, Vincenc Kopeček discusses why two Armenian-populated territories outside Armenia – Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan and Javakheti in Georgia – have followed such different political trajectories after the collapse of the Soviet Union. One important difference is – unsurprisingly – that Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed its independence and became a de facto state: Javakheti did not.

Some authors find the term “de facto state” useful because they believe the concept has a positive ring to it. For instance, the authors of the edited volume “De Facto States: The Quest for Sovereignty”⁶⁷ chose this title because they wanted their publication to promote the cause of entities that have unilaterally seceded from an internationally recognized state. They argued that all the cases discussed in their book “have passed the test. Each of these unrecognized states has become what Alexis Heraclides calls a “separate society”, that is, the “one whose members are convinced that self-rule would result in far greater justice and equality’ than continued allegiance to the previous unified state”.⁶⁸ De facto states, they maintain, are “states in waiting, of nations tiring of waiting”.⁶⁹

On the other hand, James Ker-Lindsay believes that the epithet “de facto” disparages these entities. He argues that de facto states suffer from discrimination and “are often treated as pariahs on the international stage”.⁷⁰ He sees this negative attitude reflected in language and in how they are talked about, which in his view amounts to stigmatization: the attachment of the qualifier “de facto” to their identity “is designed to show that such territories are not de jure states. They are not regarded as legal”. This may well be so – but it is exactly the opposite position from the group of authors referred to above. In any case, virtually all possible contenders for the most appropriate designation of “Pegg-type states” carry strong normative overtones.

A precondition for enhanced terminological clarity is that researchers not only use the same terms, but also use them *in the same way*. It seems confusing when Adrian Florea uses the concept of “de facto state” but drops the criterion that the territory must have declared independence.⁷¹ In his view, it is enough to “seek some degree of separation from a recognized country”.⁷² With this liberal definition, Florea ends up with an inventory of no less than 40 de facto states since 1945, 24 of which still exist. His

meticulous study yields many interesting insights – but with such a generous delimitation of the phenomenon of de facto states, his findings cannot be readily compared to those of other researchers. Also, by collapsing those not-recognized states that have and those that have not declared independence, he is unable to analyse the impacts which such declarations might have. Florea’s idiosyncratic usage of the term “de facto” shows the importance of tackling terminological debates *before* progressing to the ontological debate advocated by Kursani.

Pegg and Kolstø⁷³ argue that framing these sovereign anomalies “in consistently negative terms (as illegal, pathological and clandestine) and with regard to what they fail to achieve (sovereign territorial statehood) ultimately restricts analysis of these polities and denigrates their achievements”. James Ker-Lindsay and Eiki Berg⁷⁴ point out that the notion of “de facto statehood” along with other concepts such as “de facto authorities” and “occupation” are “fundamentally normative”. “Such terms are often used to undermine the claim to full independence and statehood in the future”, they argue. This may be so, but we definitely need some generally agreed-upon term to refer to these entities, and the term “de facto states” seems to be the best possible candidate – it certainly carries less connotations of stigma than do most of the alternatives.

Pegg’s own terminology can be criticized for stating the obvious: yes, these states do indeed exist “de facto”, but so do also all other states. But the message lies in what is implicitly understood: in other contexts, the concept of “de facto” is normally juxtaposed to “de jure”, and “de jure” status is what such de facto states lack. It is probably futile to search for the perfect, value-free designation – but we should be aware of the power of language over thought and pause to consider the connotations which the various terms might have. Then we should be able to make an informed choice. In the long run, reduplication of names is confusing, and in the name of scholarly consensus it would be advisable to choose one term. That would facilitate better communication and ensure that we do not talk past each other. Luckily, it seems that this is what is happening: after several lengthy detours we seem to be arriving at Pegg’s original proposal – de facto states – as the consensual term. A few other terms might arguably have served the purpose equally well, but they have generally been abandoned by the wayside.

ENDNOTES

¹ Fabry M. *Recognizing States: International Society and the Establishment of New States since 1776*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. P. 41.

² *Convention on Rights and Duties of States* [International Conference of American States, 1933]. URL: <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-40.html> (accessed 16.05.2022).

³ Fabry M. *Op. cit.* P. 7.

⁴ Fabry M. *Op. cit.* P. 12.

⁵ Pegg S. *International Society and the De Facto State*. – Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998. P. 4.

⁶ Pegg S. *Op. cit.* P. 26.

⁷ Kolstø P. The sustainability and future of unrecognized quasi-states // *Journal of Peace Research*. 2006. V. 43. No. 6. P. 725.

⁸ Throughout this volume, “DNR” and “LNR” are used as abbreviated names of the two entities (from “Donetskaya narodnaya respublika” and “Luganskaya narodnaya respublika”, Rus.).

⁹ Kolstø P. Op. cit.

¹⁰ Kolstø P., Blakkisrud H. Living with non-recognition: state- and nation-building in South Caucasian quasi-states // *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2008. V. 60. No. 3. P. 483–509.

¹¹ Rywkin M. The phenomenon of quasi-states // *Diogenes*. 2006. V. 53. No. 2. P. 23–28; Van Meurs W. Eingefrorene Konflikte. Wie weiter mit den Quasistaaten? // *Osteuropa*. 2007. V. 57. No. 11. P. 111–120.

¹² Van Meurs W. Op. cit. P. 119. The same point was made by Charles King in his seminal article: King C. The benefits of ethnic war: understanding Eurasia’s unrecognized states // *World Politics*. 2001. V. 53. No. 4. P. 524–552.

¹³ In the course of two years Transnistria experienced some 200 000 percent inflation, and in 1996 the Transnistrian currency traded 490000 Transnistrian rubles to a dollar. Isachenko D. On the political economy of unrecognized state-building projects // *The International Spectator*. 2010. V. 44. No. 4. P. 62.

¹⁴ Later, I have visited a number of de facto states: Abkhazia – three times, Nagorno-Karabakh – two times, South Ossetia – once, Somaliland – once, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – once, and Transnistria – four times altogether.

¹⁵ In 2006, Michael Rywkin wrote that “by nature, quasi-states are temporary entities requiring, at some point, a definite solution” (see: Rywkin M. Op. cit. P. 28). I agree, but the point when the “definite solution” is reached seems to be receding further and further into the future.

¹⁶ The third de facto state in Southeastern Europe – Kosovo – has graduated into a new category of a “halfway house recognized state”, having achieved diplomatic relations with 50 percent of the UN member states (97 out of 193 in 2020).

¹⁷ Blakkisrud H., Kolstø P. Dynamics of de facto statehood: the South Caucasian de facto states between secession and sovereignty // *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*. 2012. V. 12. No. 2. P. 281–298; Kolstø P., Blakkisrud H. De facto states and democracy: the case of Nagorno-Karabakh // *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. 2012. V. 45. No. 1–2. P. 141–151.

¹⁸ See, for instance: Berg E., Toomla R. Forms of normalization in the quest for de facto statehood // *The International Spectator*. 2009. V. 44. No. 4. P. 27–45; Von Steinsdorff S., Fruhstorfer A. Post-Soviet de facto states in search of internal and external legitimacy: introduction // *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. 2012. V. 45. No. 1–2. P. 117–121; O’Loughlin J., Kolossov V., Toal G. Inside the post-Soviet de facto states: a comparison of attitudes in Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria // *Eurasian Geography and Economics*. 2014. V. 55. No. 5. P. 423–456; Broers L., Iskandaryan A., Minasyan S. Introduction: the unrecognized politics of de facto states in the post-Soviet Space // *Caucasus Survey*. 2015. V. 3. No. 3. P. 187–194; Markedonov S. De facto statehood in Eurasia: a political and security phenomenon // *Caucasus Survey*. 2015. V. 3. No. 3. P. 195–206; Dembinska M., Campana A. Frozen conflicts and internal dynamics of de facto states // *International Studies Review*. 2017. V. 19. No. 2. P. 254–278; Riegl M., Doboš B. Post-Soviet de facto states and Russian geopolitical strategy // *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies*. 2018. V. 12. No. 1. P. 59–89; De Facto States in Eurasia. Eds. T.Hoch and V.Kopeček. – New York: Routledge, 2020; Tokarev A., Margojev A., Prihodchenko A. The statehood of Eurasia’s de facto states: an empirical model of engagement by great powers and patrons // *Caucasus Survey*. 2021. V. 9. No. 2. P. 93–119.

¹⁹ Ivanel B. Puppet states: a growing trend in covert occupation // *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law*. V. 18. 2015. Ed. T.D.Gill. – The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016. P. 43–65.

²⁰ Ivanel uses the term “sponsor state” where most other researchers prefer “patron state”.

²¹ Ivanel B. Op. cit. P. 43.

²² Pegg S. Op. cit. P. 35; Lynch D. *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States*. – Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004. P. 4; Caspersen N. Playing the recognition game: external actors and de facto states // *The International Spectator*. 2009. V. 44. No. 4. P. 50; Matsuzato K. From belligerent to multi-ethnic democracy: domestic politics in unrecognized states after the cease-fires // *Eurasian Review*. 2008. V. 1. P. 98; Ó Beacháin D., Comai G., Tsursumia-Zurabashvili A. The secret lives of unrecognised states: internal dynamics, external relations, and counter-recognition strategies // *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. 2016. V. 27. No. 3. P. 441.

²³ See, for example: Ambrosio T., Lange W.A. The architecture of annexation? Russia's bilateral agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia // *Nationalities Papers*. 2016. V. 44. No. 5. P. 673–693; Caspersen N. *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Independence in the Modern International System*. – Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012; Kolstø P. Biting the hand that feeds them? Abkhazia–Russia client–patron relations // *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 2020. V. 36. No. 2. P. 140–158.

²⁴ Lynch D. Separatist states and post-Soviet conflicts // *International Affairs*. 2002. V. 78. No. 4. P. 831–848; Lynch D. *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States*.

²⁵ Littlefield S. Citizenship, identity, and foreign policy: the contradictions and consequences of Russia's passport distribution in the separatist regions of Georgia // *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2009. V. 61. No. 8. P. 1461–1482.

²⁶ Lynch D. De facto “states” around the Black Sea: the importance of fear // *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*. 2007. V. 7. No. 3. P. 486.

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 483–496.

²⁸ Somewhat confusingly, Lynch at the same time maintains that, up to a point, they are in fact “racketeer states” in the sense that they “produce a danger and, at a price the shield against it” (*Ibid.* P. 486). He adds, however, that “however much they are criminalized and dependent on external support, one should not confuse focus with significance”.

²⁹ Smolnik F. *Secessionist Rule: Protracted Conflict and Configurations of Non-state Authority*. – Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2016.

³⁰ Matsuzato K. Op. cit. P. 95–119.

³¹ See, for instance, Cooley A., Mitchell L.A. Engagement without recognition: a new strategy toward Abkhazia and Eurasia's unrecognized states // *The Washington Quarterly*. 2010. V. 33. No. 4. P. 59–73.

³² Caspersen N. *Unrecognized States*.

³³ Caspersen N. Democracy, nationalism and (lack of) sovereignty: the complex dynamics of democratisation in unrecognised states // *Nations and Nationalism*. 2011. V. 17. No. 2. P. 337–356.

³⁴ *Unrecognized States in the International System*. Eds. N.Caspersen and G.Stansfield. – London: Routledge, 2011.

³⁵ Caspersen N. Playing the recognition game: external actors and de facto states // *The International Spectator*. 2009. V. 44. No. 4. P. 47–60; Caspersen N. Making peace with de facto states // *Annual of Language & Politics and Politics of Identity*. 2016. V. 10. No. 1. P. 7–18.

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- ³⁷ Geldenhuys D. *Contested States in World Politics*. – Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. P. 26.
- ³⁸ Ker-Lindsay J. *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
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- ⁴¹ Kyris G. The European Union in Northern Cyprus: conceptualising the avoidance of contested states // *Geopolitics*. 2018. V. 25. No. 2. P. 346–361.
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- ⁴³ Ibid. P. 775.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 754.
- ⁴⁵ Kolossov V., O’Loughlin J. Pseudo-states as harbingers of a new geopolitics: the example of Trans-Dniester Moldovan Republic // *Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity*. Ed. D.Newman. – London: Frank Cass, 1999. P. 151–176.
- ⁴⁶ O’Loughlin J., Kolossov V., Toal G. Op. cit.; Bakke K.M., Linke A.M., O’Loughlin J., Toal G. Dynamics of state-building after war: external–internal relations in Eurasian de facto states // *Political Geography*. 2018. V. 63. P. 159–173.
- ⁴⁷ Baev P. *Russia’s Policies in Secessionist Conflicts in Europe in the 1990s*. – Oslo: Norwegian Atlantic Committee, 1998.
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- ⁴⁹ Stanislawski B.H. et al. Op. cit. P. 373.
- ⁵⁰ Rossi M. The durability of parastates: declarative statehood in the absence of constitutive sovereignty // *Nationalities Papers*. 2020. V. 48. No. 1. P. 24–41; Rossi M., Pinos J.C. Introduction to inconvenient realities: the emergence and resilience of parastates // *Nationalities Papers*. 2020. V. 48. No. 1. P. 12–23.
- ⁵¹ Rossi M., Pinos J. C. Op. cit. P. 13.
- ⁵² Ibid. P.12–13.
- ⁵³ King C. The benefits of ethnic war: understanding Eurasia’s unrecognized states // *World Politics*. 2001. V. 53. No. 4. P. 524–552.
- ⁵⁴ King C. Eurasia’s nonstate states // *East European Constitutional Review*. 2001. V. 10. No. 4. P. 102.

- ⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 99–102.
- ⁵⁶ Byman D., King C. The mystery of phantom states // *The Washington Quarterly*. 2012. V. 35. No. 3. P. 43.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 43.
- ⁵⁸ Isachenko D. *The Making of Informal States: Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdnistria*. – New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. P. 18.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. P. 17–18.
- ⁶⁰ *States Within States: Incipient Political Entities in the Post-Cold War Era*. Eds. P.Kinston and I.S.Spears. – New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- ⁶¹ Isachenko D. Op. cit.
- ⁶² See, for example: Tishkov V. *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*. – Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.
- ⁶³ See Matveeva A. *Through Times of Trouble: Conflict in Southeastern Ukraine Explained from Within*. – Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018. For an updated analysis of DNR and LNR, taking on board later developments in statebuilding efforts and political orientations, see Matveeva A. Donbas: the post-Soviet conflict that changed Europe // *European Politics and Society*. 2022. V. 23. No. 3. P. 410–441.
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- ⁷⁴ Ker-Lindsay J., Berg E. Op. cit. P. 335–342.

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