

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND MINORITY POLICIES IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE.

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The observed area is a transitional area, “Intermediate” (Zwischen) Europe, “The Lands Between”, between the German and Russian-speaking areas, half periphery of the West-European Centre. According to *Jenő Szűcs*, sometimes it leans back to the East and becomes a double-faced region from the Baltic to the Adrian area. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century its two basic problems are the modernization, trying to catch up with Western Europe, and the creation of its own independent nations. The latter seems to be realized in three phases (1804-1878; 1912-1923; 1990-2008?) with the grave historical heritage that the ethnical and national boundaries do not coincide, so in each state live a greater or lesser number of indigenous national minorities, who have been separated from their neighbouring mother country against their will. The two above-mentioned, still unsolved questions may also be linked: the Hungarian ethnic minorities supported the EU and NATO accession of each neighbouring state in a higher proportion than the majority population, while in Ukraine the Russian-speaking minority, which makes up nearly one third of the population, are the supporters of a reversal to Moscow, rather than the believers of the Euro-Atlantic integration.

The changing of borders and accession of territories, mainly with German and Italian help during World War II, on the one hand, corrected the unjust and illogical borders laid down in Paris, in 1919, satisfied the demand for revision and nation-state, as in the case of Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Albania, and on the other hand, in consequence of the agreement of the dictatorships, they lost their independent statehood or some part of their country bringing a misery and destruction never seen before. (Poland, Czech Republic, Finland, Serbia, the Baltic states) Since the Western powers delivered the area to the Soviet Union in order to win the war, the communist takeover between 1944 and 1948, and the Treaty of Paris in 1947 not only meant the restoration of the conditions of 1937 but, in many cases the extermination, displacement and relocation of the minorities accused with war crimes in magnitude of millions. We cannot talk about minority policies either in the East or in the West: the collective and group rights of the minorities and the opportunity of self-organization were abolished resulting from the principle of collective responsibility in war crimes. This system fitted in the Soviet type states’ policy governed from Moscow, which meant the liquidation of local political/religious and generally civil organizations and the settling the one-party system.

The dominant party became the party of the majority population, in many cases the party of the “more equal”: the Russians, the Serbs and the Czechs. A doubled repression lay heavily on the minorities: their schools were closed or nationalized, their institutions were eliminated, and their Roman and Greek Catholic, Protestant and Muslim Churches were persecuted. The nationalization, collectivization deprived them from their basic individual existence, the majority population got the leadership positions in factories and cooperatives, beside the loyalty to the party, the change of language and identity assured the opportunity of further studies and social breakthrough. Generally the minority-inhabited border regions were not developed which forced the inhabitants to emigrate or to commute. From the 1960s, the majority population was settled in large quantities to the homogenous minority-lived areas in the spirit of socialist industrialization – a lot of block of flats were built for them from Tallinn to Bratislava and Brasov.

According to the ideology of automatism, ethnic differences will automatically disappear in the course of building socialism, and the Soviet, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak socialist nation will be formed speaking the language of the dominant/most populous nation. (Nowadays it can be unbelievable, but in the 70s I met a Slovene man who believed that the mother tongue of the Serbs would be the Yugoslavian language.) The issue of the minorities was treated as the given country’s home affairs. Any attempt of the homeland to act in the interest of its national compatriots living beyond the borders in another socialist country, was considered

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as an interference in their internal affairs, and was prohibited severely, because they considered it as the violation of the Soviet imperial units. (In the relations of Romania - Moldavia, Hungary - Romania, Hungary - Soviet Union, Poland - Soviet Union.) After the loosening of the monolithic Soviet bloc in 1956, after 1968 but mainly after 1985, the national communist principle and practice had become prevalent in almost all countries of our region with the leadership of Ceausescu, Zsivkov, Milosevic, Husák, Jaruzelski, and the spirit of denial of national traditions and the internationalism faithful to the Soviet persisted only in Hungary and Eastern Germany. After 1989-1990, in the process of disintegration of the federal states (Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia), the national and minority issues, which were swept under the rug till that moment, picked up strength; with the words of *George Schöplin* they fell out from the icebox where they had been iced. Beside the Soviet peripheral areas, armed conflicts with hundreds of thousands victims unfolded only in former Yugoslavian areas, but ethnic conflicts were aggravated there by suppressed historical grievances, economic-civilizational-religious differences and oppositions.

The last 20 years are contradictory from the point of view of the minorities. On the one hand ethnic minorities could found their parties and organizations using their political liberties, and they reached parliamentary representation in most countries. Their churches could revive, and they can manage and operate a total vertical educational system, from kindergarten to university. Kin countries, depending on their financial state, can provide almost unlimited support to their cross-border parts of nation. Several states granting of dual citizenship - Romania, Serbia, and Croatia - strengthen the national coherence (and not least alleviate their demographic problems). On the other hand minorities are the losers of the economic transition and the (re)privatization: it's a general phenomenon that their lands, neglected during decades and located in underdeveloped areas, are bought up by financially strong majority entrepreneurs, as well as the bankrupt socialist/ socially owned (large) farms, agricultural cooperatives. And in order to increase the rational organization of labour, productivity and profitability it's the minorities who are dismissed primarily, among whom unemployment is high everywhere. This derives partly from the fact that minorities have lower level educational qualifications: they possess half of the number of university degrees than among the majorities (3-4-7-8 % of the total population).

War and peace both could result in mass-migration and the irreversible change of ethnic proportions: in Romania the former eight-hundred thousand Germans have almost completely disappeared (Saxons in Transylvania, Banat Swabians, German settlers in Bessarabia); most of them emigrated to/ back to Germany after 1990; Romanians and Gypsies moved to their towns and villages which represent the border fortress of the (Western)-European civilization. But the number of Hungarians also fell with half a million, to one and a half million people: they settled down in the mother country or dispersed in the world from Sweden to Canada. A hundred thousands of Croats and fifty thousands of Hungarians fled from Voivodina, replaced by a quarter of a million Serbs and Gypsies/Romas from the South who have lower culture of work. The number of Hungarians in Croatia decreased to 15 thousands, it's the tenth of the previous 1910 number - their disappearance are previsible despite of the care of (two) states.

Assimilation means an even greater threat to the minorities than migration, whose main -otherwise naturally - reason is the demand of social advancement, and its dual manifestations are the mixed marriages and - in part results from the previous - the registration of children to majority-language kindergarten and school. The proportion of mixed marriages from an ethno-linguistic point of view is 25-30 % among Hungarians in Slovakia; in Voivodina it was 40 % in the 70s and 80s; 80 % in the Romanian county of Beszterce-Naszód; 63 % in Temes; and almost 100 % in the Hungarian and Italian inhabited regions of Slovenia. Mixed marriages in large numbers have become typical among the scattered groups and other people with higher educational attainment capabilities, from Finland to Romania. 85-90 % of children issued from this kind of marriage are enrolled in majority-language school; so their consciousness of belonging to the majority nation develops, in which way they are lost for the minority. Weakening their national identity and the willingness of self-denial shows that only 40 % of the Hungarians in Slovakia insist on their Hungarian beings, they are more secularized giving up both of their nationalities and church, 35 % of them are in a transitional phase, 25 % of them have Slovakian national feelings. This is the main reason why the Hungarian Coalition Party dropped out from the Parliament, and why the Hungarian-Slovak - which describes itself as a regional party - Party of Híd-Most won. The proof for that it's a general trend is that from 144 thousands of the Polish in Ukraine only 18 thousands are convinced that the Polish is their mother tongue; among the Belarus this proportion is 275:55. The relationship of national identity and language - somewhat similar to the Irish - shows that almost 7 million of Ukraine people speak Russian. (And added to this the mixture of Russian-Ukrainian hybrid 'surjik' (суржик) speakers are a larger camp.)

Generally, free use of minority languages is provided in the constitutions but it is limited by laws and ordinances in almost every cases. The Austro-Hungarian regulation lives on in Slovakia, in Romania which claims that in each settlement where the proportion of the minorities exceeds the 20 % their language is

officially the second language they can use in the administration. The recent recommendation of the European Council would limit this to 10 %, and the Minister for Minority Affairs in the Slovak Government agrees as well.

Minorities living in blocks or sectors or belts bordering their homeland have better chances to survive than those who live in diasporas and in fragments. Ethnic/ religious diaspora is a region or a settlement where the former majority indigenous population became a scattered minority. The limit is usually 10 % but the lack of institutions is a more important determinant, so where there is no native language local self-government, school, spiritual and physical care, cultural activities. From Hungarian point of view the Transylvanian Plane, Southern Transylvania, Slavonia and Drávaköz are areas of diaspora, and it becomes rapidly Ormánság too; Northwest Bačka and Srem in regard of Hungarians and Croats. But diaspora proper is not a scattered indigenous population because the inhabitants themselves voluntarily take on the minority fate with migration; so we can talk about Czech, Austrian and Western-European, and overseas Hungarian diasporas, but the Upper-Őrség Hungarians in Burgenland/Austria live sparsely.

In Croatia and Slovenia the indigenous ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Italians) have constitutionally guaranteed representation in the local Parliament; in other countries (Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, Serbia, Bulgaria) they send representatives to the legislature whose number is equivalent to their proportion in the society. There are Russian representatives in Latvia, Hungarians in Slovakia and Romania who could get into the European Parliament in Strasbourg. In Finland the Swedish, in Romania the Hungarian and in Macedonia the Albanian party of minority is the member of the government coalition; earlier, during the period of the EU-NATO accession the MKP in Slovakia and the VMSZ in Serbia got a ministerial portfolio thus proving the nature of democratic “euroconform” of the governments. In Hungary, since 1993, there are national and local minority governments who provide cultural autonomy but Hungary is rightly attacked because of the lack of their parliament representation which, according to expert opinion, could be realized only by creating a bicameral legislature. Bosnia-Herzegovina – with international governance – does not work as the federal alliance of the three entities: Bosnian-Muslim, Serbian and Croatian. The Czech Republic, Austria and Greece are almost homogenous nation-states that is why they do not provide ethnical national representation to their minorities.

*What kinds of institutions are necessary to provide survival for ethnic and language minorities?*

Self-governing systems ensuring cultural autonomy similar to that in Hungary operate also in Slovenia and in Croatia. Within the frame of territorial autonomy in Voivodina, the competence of the National Councils of the minorities (Hungarians, Catholic Serbians, Slovaks, Romanians, Gypsy-Romas, etc.) was broadened with the managing of significant state affairs, like education in the mother tongue, general education, giving information, and use of language. Western as well as eastern examples prove that territorial autonomy is the only efficient institutional framework to preserve the language and identity of minorities. Essentially it is home rule achieved by devolution, acting on far reaching mandate; in other words it is self-rule or self-governance. There is no uniform solution, valid for each and every state and minority, because competencies can be different: thus, for instance, in South Tyrol 95% of taxes remains for the minorities, while the police and the military forces are managed centrally by the Italian government, and are Italian-speaking; whereas in Catalonia (and in Basque Country) the leadership of the police falls within the authority of the local autonomic bodies and is of regional language, while the majority of the taxes goes into the central Spanish state budget. Autonomies, ethno regional self-governances can be regarded as results of compromises: both the majority nation and the minority renounce the full implementation of self-determination, that is the creation of a forcefully “homogenized” nation state on the one hand, and on the other hand the union with the mother country (kin state) or to establish an independent state of its own. Thus the territorial-administrative-language and cultural autonomy is not the first step of secession, but the last leg of the fulfilment of the individual and collective minority rights.

But one thing we have to bear in mind: our region lacks the conditions that would enable the successful operation of autonomies tried and tested in other parts of Europe. It is not just about the characteristics and demilitarized status of Åland Islands, but about the common historical and religious background, the confidence between the majority and minority communities, the uniform political behaviour and representation of the minority, the internationally recognised protected status (Schutzmacht) of the mother country (Austria), and a special characteristic of the minority, the similarity to Catalans, Scots, and Swedes, who were able to form their own countries. Taking a look at the Eastern regions, we can also find exemplary autonomies, like the Gagauz – although its establishment required the support of two great nations, Russia and Turkey, and, besides the Transnistria matter, it is only a secondary hot issue in the agenda of the central Moldavian government.

There was a general hope and expectation for the settling of the question with the EU accession and the introduction of the Schengen borders. However, it did not bring the expected results, as the great states leading the EU, particularly France, do not want to, or cannot make a distinction between indigenous national minorities and immigrant minorities. The main reason for the lack of a single supranational minority regulation is the fact that the rights of Russians in Estonia and Latvia, of Hungarians in Slovakia and Romania, of Turks in Bulgaria and Greece could be extended to the mainly Muslim immigrants in Western Europe. To avoid this, the national minorities in East and Central Europe are forced to assimilation. As a Foreign Office study in 1925 formed the main goal: ‘... Hungary can be indirectly lead to accept the unchangability of the Trianon borders, and as time goes, Hungarians living in the lost areas will absorb more and more into the community of the host country.’ In February, 2009 in the debate of the European Parliament regarding minorities Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission and Commissioner of Justice, Freedom and Security stated: ‘Protecting national minority groups does not fall within the competence of the Union, as nor does the ethical approach within the competence of the fundamental rights institute. It’s counterproductive.’

After the 2007 enlargement of the Union, the only exception became the largest minority group in Europe, the Romas with a population of about 8-9 million. According to the author of a professional study ‘...from being only an ethnical group, they became a European nation without own territories. ... The Romas are rather worthy of European attention and anxiety, than any other nationalities.’ The double standard is also reflected in the declaration of Barrot in connection with the managing of the national minority and the Roma-question in Brussels: ‘... The situation of the Romas is afflicting; their integration is a prior task of the Union and the Commission.’ (At the same time) ‘... we do not have the legal ground for the organization of minority protection. This issue falls within the competence of the Member States.’ As a consequence, the EU does not have a single minority protection policy. Although, there are several institutes dealing with minority protection, like OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the Council of Europe, or FUEN (Federal Union of European Nationalities), but the documents drafted in these institutes are only recommendations, and the disregarding or infringement of them do not entail any criminal consequences, and in addition, if the infringer is a Member State, there is no possibility for examining the case or for lodging complaints.

Here is a short summary of the data and problems in CEE countries one-by-one:

The majority of the Russian speaking (Russian, Ukrainian, White Russian) population (30-45% of the whole population) of *Estonia and Latvia* belongs to the layers of the town-dweller, skilled workers, white-collar workers, or military officers settled in the days of the Soviet rule in 1944-1990; many of them are still ‘stateless’, as they cannot or do not want to meet the requirements of Citizenship Law relieved due to the pressure of Brussels. Owing to their language knowledge and relations they can be ‘liaisons’ between their countries, the EU, and Russia; they are in better conditions of life than people living in Russia, so they do not want to move back. A special problem of the two countries is that the majority (Riga) or nearly the half (Tallinn) of citizens of their capital cities speaks Russian.

The case is similar in *Lithuania*. 10 % of the population is Russian, while 7% is Polish. The ratio of the latter nationality is the result of the strained relation between the two nations, as the capital city, Vilnius, or in Polish Wilno, belonged to Poland till 1939; even today 20% of its population is Polish, and the surroundings is also inhabited by Poles. While in the two northern countries the Russians count as security risk, in Lithuania it is the Poles.

In the whole population of *Poland*, which means nearly 40 million people, the number of Ukrainian-White Russians is around 1 hundred thousand, while that of Germans is around 1 million. Majority of them lives in Silesia, in a region with mixed population and constantly changing identity. A German-Polish treaty in 1991 was primarily intended to settle the matter of the German minority living in Poland and of the German citizens with Polish origins.

*The Czech Republic* is regarded to be an almost homogeneous state, as the 400 thousands settled Slovaks chose giving up their national identity and assimilation voluntarily. Today the Polish and German minorities and weakened regional Moravian identity are only things of the past. The real problem is the Roma/Gypsy population settled from Slovakia mainly in the years of dissolution, among whose the rates of unemployment and delinquency are high, the majority of them lives on public aids and on child benefits in the slums of the outskirts or in neglected blocks of flats. Their life conditions radically differ from that of the whole society, which results everyday conflicts. Similarly to the Muslim immigrants in Western Europe, they cannot or do not want to be integrated despite the constantly increasing subsidies and bridging programmes offered by the state and the Union as well. The solution of the problem resides in their education and learning, acquiring professional qualifications, establishing workplaces, and the establishment of an

exemplary Roma middle class.

In case of *Slovakia* 20% of the whole population is not Slovakian. Half of them is Hungarian, while the other half, 8-10%, is Roma (since 1997 the use of the word Gypsy, 'cigány' in Hungarian, is prohibited in the country). The life conditions and state of health (dysentery, hepatitis) of the latter group are sources of constant conflicts. In certain cases people living in the neighbourhood of Romas try to protect their property and health by building of walls (like in Michalovce), calling forth protests of human rights activists and Union officers. In spite of the fact that 85% of Slovaks living in the southern regions of Slovakia (that is of Hungarian majority) considers the relations good and free of conflicts, the Slovak National Party regards the Hungarians as a major security risk.

National minorities living in *Hungary* (Germans, Romans, Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, and Slovaks) are bilingual, and consider Hungary their home, as their ancestors came to Hungary before their original nations was transformed into countries. Their living conditions and religion are the same as that of Hungarians (often Germans have even better conditions than Hungarians), which strengthens their assimilation. The number and significance of other ethnic groups (Poles, Greeks, Bulgarians) recorded in the minority law of 1993 are inessential.

Here again the real difficulty is the Roma population, whose number exceeds 600 thousands, but in the case of Hungary this situation results primarily social problems. This is confirmed by the fact that opposite to the Romas in the neighbouring countries, the 75-80% of the Romas living in Hungary speaks Hungarian.

In *Romania*, with the disappearance of the German and Jewish minorities, the only significant minority remained the Hungarian community. The Hungarian self-consciousness, in possession of the centuries-old cultural and religious traditions, is the strongest in these people. 600 thousand Hungarians from the total one and a half million in Romania live in one bloc in the middle of the country, thus the ethno region of Szeklerland has the chance to retrieve a certain territorial-economic autonomy.

After the disintegration of *Yugoslavia*, the majority of the Serbs lost their dominant status, they became a minority ethnic group, while others escaped to Serbia. This process led to the fact known from history that Serbs are living in three countries: in the Republic of Srpska (it is one of the two main entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina), in Montenegro (or Crna Gora), and in the Republic of Serbia. In addition, significant Serb minority groups live also in Croatia and Kosovo (the latter is still not recognised as an independent country by Serbia and other nations struggling with national conflicts). The rest of Serbia is not a homogenous state at all: its population of about 8 million consists of many different ethnic groups, like Timok-Voivodina Romanians (Vlachs), Croats, Slovaks, Hungarians (around 300 thousands), Muslims in Sandžak (also around 300 thousands), Albanians (around 100 thousand), and Romas (around 400 thousands).

In *Croatia*, due to the wartime events, the number of Serbs in the country, more than 400 thousands before the Balkan wars, decreased to third-fourth of the original number. The exact number is difficult to be specified owing to the great number of dual citizens – many pensioners living in Serbia travel back to Croatia only for receiving their pensions. From the nationalities of the former Yugoslavia the relations with Bosnian-Muslims and Albanians are rather positive. For the Muslim community even a mosque was built in Zagreb in World War II.

In *Bulgaria*, while the number of the total population has decreased below 8 millions, the number of Muslims (ethnic Turks, Pomaks speaking Bulgarian, Gypsies) reached one million, from which 800 thousands belong to the Gypsy community (in fact, there are also Orthodox Christians among them).

One third of the population of *Macedonia*, developed from Bulgarians into a nation with own language and national consciousness, is Albanian, an ethnic group gaining more and more political power. The number and ratio of Gypsies are so significant (200 thousands and 10%) that they even received parliamentary representation. The most difficulties in international relations are caused by a conflict aroused by Greece (name, flag, arms) – that was the reason why Macedonia could not enter into the NATO.

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