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Ethnic Minorities
and Long-Term Implications
of EU Enlargement

ANDRE LIEBICH

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of EU Enlargement**

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**Liebich: *Ethnic Minorities and Long-Term
Implications of EU Enlargement***

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Introduction*

A century ago about half the population of the area under consideration was identified with one ethnic minority or another; sixty years ago the proportion was still about one-quarter. Today, although quantitative approximations are extremely problematic, it might be estimated that no more than one-tenth of the population in East Central Europe belongs to an ethnic minority.¹ Nevertheless, the problems associated with minorities have not declined proportionately. Unlike immediately neighbouring regions, such as Moldova and the rest of ex-Yugoslavia, minority problems here have not exploded into armed conflict and they are not likely to do so. However, they continue to weigh considerably on the internal evolution of the area and on its future relations with the EU.

It might well be argued that the minority issue is a symptom and that the underlying problem is the dominant conception of the state in East Central Europe. Even more than elsewhere the state here is perceived as the exclusive state of the titular majority. From this perspective, minorities are viewed as peripheral and even illegitimate. Their presence constitutes a reminder that the state does not correspond to its image of itself and their development raises fears that the nature of the state will be put into question. In this sense, one could say that it is not minorities but majorities that are the problem. Moreover, one might add that it is the weakness of the state rather than the strength of the minorities which lies at the root of the problem.

The exclusivist conception of the state, with its consequences for the minority issue, is a common feature of all the countries under examination here, regardless of the very significant distinctions in the weight and situation of minorities among them. Four countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary) have minority populations not exceeding 10% of the total population. With the exception of Roma, these minorities are not salient. In four other countries (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania) minorities comprise up to 25% of the population. Here, certain minority groups constitute compact and distinct societies and they are an important factor in national politics. Finally, in two countries (Latvia and Estonia) minorities, in fact, a single Russian-speaking or Slavic minority, exceed 30% of the population.

* In accordance with the terms of reference of this project, this paper deals with Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia. An earlier draft of this paper was presented to the Reflection Group on 'Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement: The Nature of the New Border,' Florence 18-19 June 1998. I am grateful to all the participants who commented on the draft and, in particular to Gaetano Amato, Alex Smolar, Jan Zielonka.

The similarity of attitudes towards minorities as well as the dynamics of minority life in East Central Europe may explain the similarity of minority grievances throughout the area. It is therefore tempting to assume that the situation of minority groups is similar in the various countries and that the condition of the various minorities within each country is also comparable. Such assumptions would not be justified. There is a considerable gap between the minority-friendly policy pioneered by Hungary, the lukewarm or indifferent stance of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, the recently-tempered hostility of Romania and Lithuania, the continued animosity of Bulgaria and Slovakia, and the confrontational positions of Latvia and Estonia. There is an even greater discrepancy between the situation of minorities connected to Western home countries, such as Germans and Jews, and minorities with only regional patrons, such as Hungarians, Poles, Turks and Russians, or no patrons at all such as Ruthenes, Pomaks or Kashubes. Above all, there is a profound gulf between the condition, both objective and subjective, of all other East Central European minority groups and the Roma who happen to be by far the most numerous and the most problematic minority.

These numerous divergences imply that it is not practical to seek a unified strategy of coping with the minority issue just as it is unrealistic to expect the peaceful assimilation of minorities along imagined Western patterns. In the following pages we shall first examine the historical foundations of East Central Europe's specificity with regard to minorities. We shall then look at the mainsprings of current minority demands in the context of prevailing legal and policy regimes. Finally, we shall consider the regional and international implications of minority issues in the foreseeable future.²

Historical Background

'Discontinuity' and 'empire' are two terms which provide the key to the historical situation of East Central Europe's minorities and, indeed, to the history of the region as a whole. It is these terms too that define the most significant contrast between East and West European development.³

Western European political and linguistic boundary changes over the centuries have been moderate, compared to those in East Central Europe. They have, nevertheless, been the source of considerable turmoil and they continue to impinge upon daily life and politics in Western Europe.⁴ One can therefore understand the profound impact of repeated and acute boundary modifications in East Central Europe, continuing virtually up to the present day and far exceeding anything Western Europe has experienced in the last millennium.

Comparing maps from one period to another one finds entire countries that are displaced. For example, 10th century Bulgaria appears where Serbia is later to be found and 13th century Serbia is located in present-day Bosnia; Poland's boundaries today resemble those it possessed at the beginning of its state existence but they are quite different from those it displayed in the intervening thousand years.

Such discontinuities can be attributed in part to the absence of natural boundaries in the area and to the unstable demarcation among languages and dialects, notably Slavic ones. For the most part, however, these discontinuities are historically determined. Although both Western and East Central Europe were formed through the invasion or migration of peoples from the East, these movements continued to occur in East Central Europe long after they had ceased in the West. The Magyar presence is the most persistent confirmation of this reality.⁵ Whereas in the middle ages East Central Europe appeared to be embarking upon a process of state-building which resembled and even anticipated that in the West none of these medieval states survived into the modern period. A sovereign Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Bulgaria arose almost as early as the post-Carolingian French state and they preceded British, Spanish and Swedish statehood. It must be added, however, that these East Central European states disappeared and only reappeared well after the process of state formation in the West had been completed.

What was happening to East Central Europe at the time that Western Europe was developing the modern territorial state, between the 16th and the 19th century? Without a single exception the peoples of the area were falling under the sway of imperial rule of one sort or another. Once again, the natural configuration of the area favoured such an outcome. 'The Lands Between,' as they have been gracefully designated, happen to lie between large and powerful imperial units.⁶ From the West, the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nation, The Habsburg Empire, Prussia and Germany have all exercised cultural, military and political hegemony over large parts of East Central Europe at one time or another. From the East, Moscovy, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union have dominated parts of the area by virtue of their superior force. Moreover, for several centuries, a Southern neighbour, the Ottoman empire, controlled the Balkans politically and defined them socially. It is salutary to recall that one of the countries considered here, Bulgaria, was still formally under Ottoman suzerainty until 1908.

The implications of these historical processes are significant, both for majorities and minorities in East Central Europe. Majorities or the titular nations corresponding to the states of the area are painfully aware that their

states are small, weak and fragile, and that, historically speaking, their very existence is an exception rather than a rule. East Central European intellectuals, such as Milan Kundera and Istvan Bibo, have remarked on the existential distress of these small nations, where the question of survival – an absurd question for the old continuous states of Western Europe is – is posed ever anew.⁷ Whereas the English sing “there will always be an England,” the Poles comfort themselves with the lyrics “Poland is not yet lost while we are alive”.

Minorities in East Central Europe are living testimony to the meanders of the past, and perhaps also to the uncertainties of the future. Like archaeological layers, they recount a history: that of the Turks in Bulgaria, the Hungarians in Romania and in Slovakia, the Germans in Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere, the Poles in Lithuania, and the Russians in Latvia and Estonia. Moreover, the history they recount is one of past domination. It is the negation of piously cultivated narratives of continuity and of identity between a land, a state and a majority people. Minorities are a disturbing reminder that, in political terms, Slovakia was not always Slovak, the Czech Republic was not Czech, Bulgaria was not Bulgarian and so on. At the very least, they recall that even recently parts of today’s Poland were not Polish as parts of Romania were not Romanian. Inasmuch as the legitimacy of state units in East Central Europe is founded, to an even greater extent than in Western Europe, upon myths of national continuity, nay, of perennity, minorities are an unwelcome presence.

Current Situation

Why have minority issues attained such prominence in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism? Scholars fret over whether the minority issue is now one of old wine in new bottles or of new wine in old bottles.⁸ Meanwhile, explanations and interrogations concerning the ‘return of minorities’ continue to abound, usually connected to speculation about post-communist nationalism in general. The early ‘icebox’ theory, according to which the demise of communism ‘unfroze’ hoary national sentiments turned out to be more successful as an image than as an argument. It was supplanted by the ‘vacuum’ or ‘default option’ theory which stated that ethnic identity and nationalism stepped into the ideological void left by the disappearance of Marxism-Leninism and by the weakness of alternative value systems. Neither explanation has led to much in the way of a coherent Western policy, other than distaste for manifestations of nationalism and a vague concern for majority nationalism’s minority victims.⁹

More satisfying than other explanations has been the 'ethnic allocation' model which argues that ethnicity has become one, sometimes the principal criterion for the distribution of scarce resources in the post-communist countries. The model usually, but not necessarily, points to 'ethnic entrepreneurs' as key agents in the process. This approach has the merit of highlighting an important but neglected fact: minority tensions, such as those we have been experiencing in the last years, come to the fore when a preceding equilibrium, however unsatisfactory, has been broken. As the economic, political and social spheres change radically, groups, like individuals, are obliged to reposition themselves. They carve out their place in the new order, seek out and defend the most satisfactory niches, and realign themselves with respect to rivals. This is an inherently conflictual process fought for high stakes. Minorities participate in it as do other groups.¹⁰ Let us note, in passing, that no new equilibrium has yet been established in respect to the minority issue anywhere in the post-communist world.

To understand this process fully, it should be noted that the minority question was not entirely absent during the communist period, as is sometimes alleged. To be sure, state and party control of the media meant that minorities were only granted as much attention as the authorities allowed, and minority conflicts, real or potential, were ignored. The range of communist options for dealing with minorities, however, was fundamentally the same as that of their post-communist successors. The communists could ignore the existence of minorities, they could coopt and channel minority sentiment in a non-threatening direction, or they could recognize and formalize the status of minorities by granting them autonomy of one sort or another. Thus, Poland consistently refused to acknowledge any sort of German presence. Bulgaria sought to assimilate its Turks and Pomaks and, eventually, to expel those who could not be assimilated. Slovaks in Hungary, Poles in Lithuania and small minority groups in other communist states were allowed to set up carefully controlled cultural associations. As Romania emancipated itself from Soviet tutelage, it curbed the Hungarian autonomy that it had previously granted. On the other hand, Slovenia and Slovakia constituted distinct, ethnically defined units within a federal state, as did the three Baltic republics in the more restrictive conditions of the USSR.

What has changed today is that it is no longer possible for states to ignore the existence of minority groups which insist on being heard. In Poland, not only the previously unacknowledged Germans and the barely recognized Ukrainians and Belarussians but the formerly overlooked Kashubes have staked out their place on the ethnic landscape.¹¹ The Czech Republic has not granted an official status to non-Czech groups but it may be obliged to do so. Hungary

has defined a system of minority institutions which is both organisationally elaborate and politically marginal. In these countries minorities are more visible than they were previously. At least potentially they have powerful instruments at their disposition, such as a free media, an unrestricted right of association, and some sympathy abroad, though not matched by sympathy at home.

In those countries where minorities are more numerous and more prominent, they are more assertive today than they were in the past, they are better organized and they carry definite political weight. From their point of view, however, their actual achievements are disappointing. Thus, the Hungarians of Romania and Slovakia, like the Turks of Bulgaria, feel that they have little to show for their efforts of the last years, and that whatever specific gains they have made have not been accompanied by general societal acceptance. In some respects, the situation of minorities may even have encountered a setback. Because of the fate of the three federal communist states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, USSR), federalism itself or even more mild versions of territorial autonomy have become taboo since they are considered stepping-stones towards separatism and disintegration. Because of the general reassertion of nationalist sentiment, anti-minority political formations find sympathetic hearing and an electoral following.

The question of economic well-being, factual or perceived, dominates the agenda of post-communism. The experience of minorities in this respect is therefore a key component of their overall situation. Living standards fell radically for all social groups (as opposed to some individuals) with the introduction of the market economy and, for the most part, standards have been rising only slowly and hesitantly.¹² Economic insecurity remains far higher than it was in the communist period. In the light of this situation, the question is not whether minorities have gained economically but whether they have lost more or less than others. Once again, no general answer is possible. A number of minorities has been particularly hard hit by the 'transition.' This has been the case for those prominently represented in obsolescent sectors of the economy: Turkish agricultural workers in Bulgaria, Russians in heavy industry in the Baltic countries, Hungarians in the primary and secondary sectors in Slovakia. Minorities inhabiting advanced areas, such as the Germans in Polish Silesia or the Hungarians in parts of Transylvania have struggled to keep their edge with respect to the national economy with varied results.

In the final analysis, however, the economic question as it affects the minority issue is one of perception. If minorities are seen as profiting from the transition more than the majority population (or, at least, suffering less), resentment against them ensues. This is particularly relevant for the case of the

Roma. By all accounts they are the most miserable social and ethnic group in the area and their overall situation has deteriorated since the social safety net of communism disappeared. Yet, the Roma minority has become the focus of social frustration for various reasons. Roma are conspicuously different in terms of consumption patterns and life style and they are easily identifiable. Long involved in the shadow economy they are now also prominently represented in both petty and organized criminal activities. A well-defined ethnic group which is perceived to be preying upon the rest of society in order to avoid the rigours of transition is a veritable lightning rod for social resentment.¹³

Tendencies

The premise underlying discussion of EU enlargement in East Central Europe is that, sooner or later, the outcome of the economic transition will be some sort of stable and, it is hoped, prosperous economic order. In these future circumstances it is likely that another dimension of the minority issue, namely that of identity politics will come to the fore. Already today, as the East Central European countries come under the influence of current West European intellectual and cultural values the politics of recognition and of identity are emerging as a new feature of the ideological landscape.¹⁴

Nationalism, as an expression of the majority's identity, shows little sign of losing importance within the political culture of the East Central European states. Generally speaking, overtly nationalist parties have not fared best since the onset of democratization but this has been because all other parties have become nationalist to a greater or lesser degree. The glorification of national history and the assiduous restoration of national symbols have been high on the agenda of post-communist governments. Obviously, this has heightened the sense of exclusion among ethnic minorities but it has also made them receptive to ideologies and strategies of counter-affirmation.

In response to the persistent dominance of majority groups and inspired by Western preoccupation with minority rights and ethnic revival, East Central European minorities are increasingly receptive to the idea that cultures cannot be assessed on a scale of 'higher' or 'lower,' that all ethnic groups should be recognized as equally worthy of respect, and, in particular, that numbers are not determinant of status so that even small minorities deserve equal recognition. For the moment, these considerations lead towards demands for equality of treatment rather than calls for affirmative action (positive discrimination).¹⁵ At the same time, they are preparing the ground for a minority agenda based upon

ethnic pride, compensation for past victimhood and redress of present discrimination.

The culture of subjectivity and the politics of identity will not only legitimate demands based on identity but will also dramatically expand the bases for identity. In addition to traditional religious, language and ethnic bases, identity in the future may well be founded on gender, sexual preference, or lifestyle considerations. These new identity groups may, in the long run, upstage ethnic minorities although, in the first instance, they will probably reenforce them and, in the second instance, they will supersede them. For example, we shall find not only Hungarian minority associations in Slovakia but Hungarian homosexual minority associations as separate groups. There is really no limit to the proliferation of such identity formations. The multiplication of affinities along with the combination of 'ressentiment' and narcissism will provide an abundant and inflammable fuel for minority demands.

The implications of these trends are that minorities will emerge strengthened, both subjectively and objectively. Existing organized minorities will be more affirmative in their demands, incipient minorities will develop self-consciousness, new minorities will arise. Forcible assimilation of minorities already banned, at least by international convention, and voluntary assimilation will become less respectable. To be sure, the visible differences between minorities and majorities may become less noticeable in an increasingly uniform urban and modern setting. Diminution of objective differences does not mean though that minorities will abandon their distinct subjective identity nor the agenda that flows from it.

The process we are describing is a diffuse and inchoate one but it is already perceptible. Poland is witnessing not only the affirmation of its more substantial minorities, such as the Germans, the Ukrainians and the Belarussians, but also of such numerically insignificant communities as the Jews and of groups striving for recognition such as the Kashubes. Hungary's national minority policy is designed to maintain minorities in existence and these minorities are making claims on the national agenda and national budget. The revival of the Ruthene identity, in part through efforts from abroad, affects Slovakia and Poland as well as countries outside our purview, notably Ukraine and Yugoslavia.¹⁶ In the Czech Republic, Slovaks, indistinguishable in most respects from the Czechs, have organized as an ethnic minority. The relegalisation of churches, such as the Uniates, and the vigour of Islam have also bolstered ethnic identity. Post communist national censuses confirm that earlier tendencies are being reversed and that more individuals now choose to proclaim a minority identity, previously dormant or recently acquired. It

remains to be seen whether such developments will gravitate towards the realm of symbolic or of effective politics.

Legal and Policy Regimes

A telling aspect of the minority question in East Central Europe is the discrepancy between the spirit of these countries' constitutional regimes and the international legal regimes to which they are ready to subscribe. In no other area is there as profound a gulf between the desire for national self-affirmation and the wish to integrate into a larger unit.

The preambles of many post-communist constitutions confirm resoundingly the identification between the political order and the titular nation. The state is routinely presented as the emanation, the incarnation, or the property of the majority nation. Some preambles also seize the occasion to articulate a view of history from which past or present minorities are absent.¹⁷ Constitutions mention national minorities in general terms, sometimes employing circumlocutions or alluding to them residually (e.g. 'citizens whose native tongues are not Bulgarian'). They guarantee minority rights for individuals but not for collectivities, thus frustrating a key minority demand. The limitations of these provisions come to the fore when compared with those of the Hungarian constitution which specifically states that 'national and ethnic minorities share the power of the people - they are constituent factors in the state' and which recognizes minorities as collective rights-bearing entities.

Underlying these new constitutions is a jacobin conception of 'La République, une et indivisible'¹⁸ Territorial autonomy is banned, explicitly or implicitly. There might well be solid reasons for doing so: autonomous territorial units may simply replicate the exclusivist logic of the nation state on a smaller scale, they invariably create new minorities among those not belonging to the titular people of the new unit, they may foster a ghetto mentality, they can act as an incitement to separatism. All these objections to territorial autonomy are weighty enough. It remains true, however, that territorial autonomy or federalism has functioned successfully as a mechanism for managing minority problems in various parts of the world. It is regrettable, though comprehensible in the light of recent experience, that federalism should arouse such panic in the ex-communist states.

Constitutions are not necessarily the best guide to state practice because of their general nature and exhortative function. In dealing with minorities many constitutions simply refer matters to subsequent legislation, stipulating

rights or guarantees 'as provided by law.' Consequently, confrontation between the state and its minorities often focuses on particular laws concerning language (Slovakia), education (Romania), citizenship (Estonia, Latvia) or on a combination of these and other specific issues (eg, toponyms, personal names, flags and other symbols). In most cases what counts is the spirit of the laws and of their application. Inasmuch as trust between the states and their minorities is minimal, however, much energy is dissipated in bickering over the wording and interpretation of these laws.

It is often in response to such disputes that minority issues are internationalized. All the countries discussed here belong to the Council of Europe and to the OSCE and it is these organisations which have taken an increasing interest in setting norms and in intervening in minority-related conflicts. The Council of Europe adopted a European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (1992) but it has been slow in obtaining ratification. The Council's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) has very recently come into force and is heralded as a major breakthrough in minority protection. Since the end of the Cold War the OSCE has adopted a number of declarations relating to minority protection. Most significantly, it has established the Office of a High Commissioner for National Minorities (headed by the former Dutch foreign minister, Max van der Stoep) who has worked tirelessly as a mediator and rapporteur throughout the ex-communist world. Of course, there are also UN bodies dealing with minority issues, notably the sub-committee on minorities within the human rights commission. The EU has only stepped into this area warily and indirectly, by way of the 'Plan Balladur' (1995), formally sponsored by the OSCE, which called upon prospective entrants into the Union to settle among themselves frontier and related issues, such as minorities, before proceeding with the adherence process.

The internationalization of the minority issue has created a dilemma for a number of East Central European states. On the one hand, they resent the outside interference and the assault on their sovereignty, much as they did in the interwar period when the League of Nations monitored compliance with the minority treaties imposed upon the East Central Europeans by the victorious great powers. On the other hand, they are keen to argue their case inasmuch as rapprochement with Western countries is their top international priority. Indeed, Hungary has made internationalization of the minority issue a linchpin of its policy with regard to Hungarians abroad.

Quite striking is the uncontrite tone of the East Central European states' defence of their minority policies. They appear to be sincerely convinced that

they are acting in good faith and in a reasonable manner, that minority complaints are exaggerated and stoked from abroad. The contrast between such attitudes, shared by public opinion, and the growing stridency of minority spokesmen suggests that the parties to conflict may be growing apart rather than coming together. It is indeed true that East Central European minority groups are following the lead of Western NGOs and international institutions which, all too often, have little specific understanding of the area and automatically assume strident stances. Moreover, it must be grating for post-communist governments to hear 'standard of civilisation' arguments from countries where minority conflicts are more violent than any in East Central Europe (Northern Ireland, Corsica, Basque country) and where instances of deplorable treatment of minorities abound (as some critics put it, it is safer to be a Turk in Bulgarian than in Germany). At the same time, if the East Central Europeans are indeed seeking Western respect and equal recognition they cannot avoid having the highest Western standards in regard to minorities invoked as a norm.

Relations with Neighbouring Countries

There is a fundamental difference between the present time and the interwar period when minorities were last a bone of contention within the area: today none of the countries under examination will go to war over the minority issue. In this respect, Hungary's turnabout has been the most spectacular. Internal large scale violence too is not envisaged against minorities. One cannot be as categorical in regard to border issues but it is only marginal political formations which call overtly for border changes and it is assumed that these changes would be carried out peacefully.

At the same time, minority considerations enter into the relations of the East Central European countries with each other and with the outside world. The case of Hungary is most obvious. The fate of three million compatriots abroad (almost one-third of the population of Hungary itself) has been a dominant theme of Hungarian internal and foreign policy under virtually all regimes. Most recently, it has dictated Hungary's policies in regard to its own internal minorities. Hungary's generosity towards them was expected to serve as an example for the neighbouring countries and as a basis for reciprocity. In this respect, the experience has been disappointing. The West has applauded Hungarian policies but Romania, Slovakia, Yugoslavia have reacted with suspicion and they, as well as Ukraine, have shown little inclination to follow the Hungarian example. Within Hungary itself, the vigour with which the question of the diaspora is pursued varies with the governments in power. As for minority policy within Hungary, it is difficult to assess to what extent

support for it is 'soft' rather than 'hard.' If this policy remains unreciprocated among all the countries in the area, if its beneficiaries show themselves ungrateful, disloyal or demanding and, for whatever reasons, become unpopular (as is already the case for the Roma) one may well ask whether this policy will persist.

Sooner rather than later, the Hungarian government may be called to present its accounts with respect to its policies on behalf of the diaspora. It will have to acknowledge that the bilateral treaties signed with Slovakia and Romania, within the framework of the OSCE/EU's 'Plan Balladur', have become a supplementary source of dispute as quarrels over interpretation abound.¹⁹ The conclusion that might have to be drawn is that the fate of Hungarian communities in the neighbouring countries depends overwhelmingly on the internal politics of these countries. Hungarians in Romania made (temporary?) gains when the Democratic Convention government came to power in late 1996. Improvement of the situation of the Hungarians of Slovakia depends on the defeat of the Meciar government. What are the conclusions that Budapest (and the Hungarian minorities) will draw if it realizes that it is powerless to act as a protector of Hungarians abroad?

Other East Central European countries have not shown as much interest in the fate of their co-nationals abroad, which does not mean that they do not have diaspora communities nor that they will show forbearance in the future. Poland is sympathetic to the plight of Poles in the ex-Soviet Union (one to two million people), notably in Russia and Kazakhstan, but seems to prefer to leave the matter to the Church and other voluntary organisations. It is relieved that the Polish minority in Ukraine (220.000 - 400.000) has not become an issue, both because of Ukraine's policies and because of the generally good relations between the two countries. Poland is also satisfied that the Polish minority in Lithuania, after having opposed Lithuanian independence and then complained about political discrimination, now appears to be more docile. It is concerned, however, that political developments in Belorussia may force attention upon the Polish minority there (400.000 - 500.000).

Several countries are suspected of demonstrating concern for their co-nationals abroad only for opportunistic or retaliatory reasons. Slovakia complains about the fate of Slovaks in Hungary, although the latter are not only far less numerous than their Hungarian counterparts in Slovakia and they are integrated almost to the point of assimilation (which provides additional grounds for complaint). Slovenia responds to Italian criticism of its failure to make amends for the expulsions of Italians and confiscations of property of 1945 by evoking the condition of Slovenes in Italy. This Slovene minority

(90.000) is thirty times superior in number to the Italians in Slovenia, but the issue only makes a dent in Italian local politics whereas it is of national importance in Slovenia.

Countries outside the area also demonstrate concern for their co-nationals. The most weighty of such cases is that of Russia vis-à-vis Latvia and Estonia (Lithuania's policies towards its much smaller Russian minority have not drawn complaints). At present, the key issue is that of granting citizenship to the great number of Russians who settled during Soviet times. Inasmuch as statelessness is a violation of human rights and the citizenship requirements of these Baltic countries are designed to discriminate against a particular category of candidates, Moscow's case for protecting Russians (and other former Soviets) is a strong one. As the issue of citizenship moves towards resolution by way of inclusion, largely under international rather than Russian pressure, the nature of the problem changes. These new citizens will be able to run their own candidates for national office and they will weigh heavily on political outcomes. If they organize along ethnic lines, setting up Russian minority parties and electoral lists, they will end up by transforming these countries into binational and bilingual states. This is precisely what ethnic Latvians and Estonians are desperate to avoid but, instead of seeking an agreement with their Russian-speakers while the latter are still disenfranchised, they have been inclined to stall.

Other outside countries are far more discrete in defending their co-nationals. Germany has a long-standing policy of reaching out to Germans abroad, previously for the purpose of bringing them 'back' to Germany, more recently in order to foster German culture and to promote the welfare of Germans remaining abroad. Germany is treading very lightly in this domain, for historical reasons. In fact, it does not even need to make much of an effort at protection. The countries of the area (with the exception of Poland which behaves more reservedly) are only too eager to act benevolently with regard to their local Germans in light of the economic importance that Germany has for East Central Europe. Another outside state which may be returning to parts of the area is Turkey but, of the countries with which we are concerned this interest is potentially relevant only for Bulgaria (other Balkan countries are another matter).

Perspectives and Conclusions

Let us assume, by way of a thought experiment, that ten years or so from now all the East Central European countries examined here are members of the European Union. What then will be the situation of ethnic minorities in this enlarged Europe?

One may suppose that the minority factor will become far more important to EU politics than it is at present. This will occur because trends and realities from both parts of the Union will converge in a highly dynamic combination. On the one hand, the Union will contain a significant number of new members with important but marginalized minorities. On the other hand, it will be made up of old members where minorities are more integrated and less numerous but where a culture of minority promotion and of minority rights has been developing (often in terms of regionalisation). West European minorities will find themselves reenforced, perhaps reinvigorated, and will intensify their strategies aiming at European-wide recognition. At the same time, in the new members of the Union minorities will invoke West European precedents and norms to pursue their case in favour of an improved status, including greater cultural autonomy and, in some cases, territorial autonomy. In these circumstances it is difficult to imagine the indefinite continuation of what Bruno de Witte has aptly called the EU's "agnosticism" towards minorities residing within its member states.²⁰

To be sure, tensions might be reduced by the new element of mobility. In the forefront of those who will avail themselves of the opportunity to cross borders freely will be minority members who will gravitate towards the countries of their language or ethnic kin to take up jobs and, in the long run, to settle down. This factor may, just as easily, operate in a reverse direction. Diaspora communities have always been important to the development of nationalism and today's ease of communications means that they can play an even greater role in the politics of the land they have left.²¹ Moreover, mobility will eventually force a reformulation of the very term minority. At present, though there is no universally accepted definition of the term, there is agreement that a minority must be made up of citizens of the country of residence.²² Thus, Turks in Germany are not a Turkish minority in Germany and the only Polish minority in Germany is that made up of German citizens, a qualification which limits the weight of this group both numerically and conceptually. Such restrictions will no longer be tenable in a Union where everyone shares European citizenship. This does not mean, however, that members of the Union will cease to intervene on behalf of their own nationals abroad, along the

patterns of earlier interventions on behalf of minorities. In fact, the opposite will probably be the case.

A possible development in this future enlarged Union will be pressure towards an increase in the number of euroregions and other trans-border arrangements. At present, euroregions and the like are regarded with suspicion by the states of East Central Europe, as alibis for outside interference and tampering with borders. This is why Poland has been unenthusiastic about creating any such arrangements in Silesia, Slovakia has refused to consider them for Ruthenia (with Ukraine), and there is nothing of this sort between Hungary and Romania. It would be most encouraging if such resistance could be overcome. The realisation that trans-border cooperation, especially involving ethnic minorities, can be mutually beneficial could alter perceptions significantly. Certainly this is a less controversial project than that of introducing or reintroducing territorial autonomy or federalist structures which will continue to suscite anxiety.

As the East Central European countries enter the European Union, they will experience a series of changes affecting their sovereignty and their effective powers. Whatever their gains in other areas they will be weakened qua states, and therefore power relations between majorities and minorities within these states, as well as within the EU as a whole, will change. How both parties react to these changes is a matter for speculation. By way of conclusion, let us recall that minorities imply majorities and both assume the one-nation state as the norm of political organization. Franz Josef spoke of his "peoples" rather than of "minorities" within Austria-Hungary and the Swiss today do not refer to the French-speaking or Italian-speaking population as minorities. In both cases, we are faced with pre-modern political conceptions which, in some curious and as yet undetermined way, may be appropriate for a post modern political world as well. In the meantime, we have to manage the question of minorities within a state framework inimical to it.

Appendix I: Statistical Note

Minority statistics constitute a great illusion. Under the appearance of scientific certainty and mathematical precision they conceal, advertently or inadvertently, a world of differing degrees and conceptions of identity, diverging definitions, and unstable classifications. The uncertain or unreliable character of minority statistics holds true even if one discounts conscious falsification by state authorities, which has not been unknown in the past. Indeed, the obstacles to a reliable count come both from above and from below.

Census categories are established by state authorities and reflect their vision of the state. Instead of documenting reality, some interwar governments introduced the amalgamated categories of Czechoslovak and Serbo-Croatian to express a nation-building project. In the post-war period, states have sometimes been creative in inventing census categories, in order to avoid problems of attribution among established groups, to weaken these groups numerically, or to promote new groupings. This is the origin of the categories of Muslims, in the ethnic sense, and of Macedonians in ex-Yugoslavia. In Romania the authorities have distinguished between Szeklers and Magyars or German and Saxons to diminish the weight of the larger groups.

Authorities may ask a variety of questions to determine minority status. The most common criterion is language but this is often problematic. For example, the main language of most Hungarian Roma is Hungarian, and therefore the number of Roma in Hungary is grossly underestimated. Nor is language a straightforward criterion. Some countries ask about mother tongue, which may be a distant and irrelevant fact, whereas others inquire about language of daily use (Umgangssprache), which favours the majority language wherever minorities work among majorities. Historically too, East Central Europe has had its share of minorities defined by non-linguistic, usually religious, criteria and it can count individuals who identify with a group whose language they do not know.

Assuming the most open census questionnaires, minority statistics will still contain significant variations over time. As in all other polls, respondents often provide the answer which they imagine, rightly or wrongly, the questioner expects. They may do so because they are intimidated, because they wish to discourage prying into their personal lives, or because they seek to project a particular image of themselves. Self-identification will therefore depend on circumstances, political and other. For example, it was imprudent to define oneself as German in Poland for much of the post-war era. This ceased to be the case for individuals who wished to avail themselves of the possibility of

emigrating to Germany. More recently, it has become a factor of mobility even for those who wish to remain in Poland.

Such variations of identity are all the more prevalent and understandable in areas where people effectively share more than one identity, whether because of personal factors, such as mixed marriages, or political considerations, such as border alterations and regime changes. The wisest respondents to questions about minority identity may well be those unsophisticated individuals who reply: “we are from here” (Hiesiger, Tutejsi)

Appendix II: Statistics

Further to the points we have made above (appendix I), the following statistics provide a range of figures. In some cases, we are giving the minimal and maximal plausible figures. In other cases, we are leaving open the minimum or the maximum (indicated with a question mark). In those cases where a single figure is provided it should be seen as an approximation.

BULGARIA

population: 8.500.000

area: 110.000 km²

minorities

Armenians	020.000 - 040.000
Greeks	app. 007.000
Jews	app. 006.000
Macedonians	? - 200.000
Pomaks*	app. 200.000
Roma	450.000 - 800.000
Tatars	006.000 - ?
Turks	850.000 - 1.000.000

* Pomaks are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims

CZECH REPUBLIC

population: 10.300.000

area: 78.000 km²

minorities

Germans	050.000 - 150.000
Hungarians	app. 20.000
Jews	app. 05.000
Poles	app. 60.000
Roma	? - 200.000
Slovaks	300.000 - 500.000

ESTONIA

population: 1.600.000

area: 45.100 km²

minorities

Belarussians	app. 030.000
Finns	app. 018.000
Jews	?.- 005.000
Russians	app. 485.000
Ukrainians	app. 050.000

HUNGARY

population: 10.400.000

area: 93.000 km²

minorities

Armenians	?	- 003.000
Bulgarians	?	- 002.000
Croats	?	- 060.000
Germans	065.000	- 200.000
Greeks	?	- 005.000
Jews	080.000	- 100.000
Poles	?	- 010.000
Roma	400.000	- 800.000
Serbs	?	- 005.000
Slovaks	030.000	- 100.000
Slovenes	?	- 005.000

LATVIA

population: 2.700.000

area: 64.000 km²

minorities

Belarussians	app.	120.000
Jews	? -	025.000
Lithuanians	app.	035.000
Poles	app.	060.000
Russians	app.	900.000
Ukrainians	app.	090.000

LITHUANIA

population: 3.700.000

area: 65.000 km²

minorities

Belarussians	app	065.000
Jews	05.000	- 010.000
Poles	app.	260.000
Russians	app.	350.000
Ukrainians	app.	045.000

POLAND

population: 39.000.000

area: 312.000 km²

minorities:

Belarussians	200.000 - 400.000
Czechs	app. 2.000
Germans	300.000 - 800.000
Jews	003.000 - 010.000
Kashubes	? - 300.000
Lithuanians	app. 30.000
Roma	015.000 - 040.000
Ruthenes (= Lemkos)	? - 030.000
Slovaks	app. 20.000
Ukrainians	200.000-400.000

ROMANIA

population: 23.000.000

area: 237.000 km²

minorities

Armenians	02.000 - ?
Bulgarians	30.000 - 100.000
Croats	07.000 - ?
Germans	app. 100.000
Greeks	04.000 - 020.000
Hungarians	1.600.000 - 2.000.000
Jews	app. 010.000
Poles	04.000 - 10.000
Pomaks	25.000 - 50.000
Russians (& Lippovans)*	40.000 - 100.000
Roma	800.000 - 2.000.000
Serbs	35.000 - ?
Slovaks	20.000 - ?
Turks (& Tatars)	25.000 - 050.000
Ukrainians	070.000-250.000

* Lippovans are Russian Old Believers long settled in the Danube delta

SLOVAKIA

population: 5.300.000

area: 49.000 km²

minorities

Czechs	app. 60.000
Germans	app. 05.000
Hungarians	560.000 - 700.000
Poles	app. 03.000
Roma	250.000 - 500.000
Ruthenes	015.000 - 030.000
Ukrainians	015.000 - 030.000

SLOVENIA

population: 1.900.000

area: 20.000 km²

minorities

Albanians	app. 03.500
Croats	app. 55.000
Hungarians	app. 08.500
Istrians*	05.000 - ?
Italians	app. 03.000
Macedonians	app. 04.000
Muslims*	app. 27.000
Roma	04.000 - 10.000
Serbs	app. 50.000

The census allows for a regional self-identification.

NOTES

¹ On the difficulties inherent to counting minorities see Appendix I as well as my article, "Minorities in Eastern Europe: Obstacles to a Reliable Count," *RFE/RL Research Report* 1:20, 15 May 1992.

² Some of these issues are examined in my *Les Minorités nationales en Europe centrale et orientale* (Geneva: Georg ed., 1997)

³ I have tried to explain some of the historical differences between East and West Europe in "Nations, States, Minorities: Why is Eastern Europe Different?" *Dissent* (Summer 1995), pp. 313-317.

⁴ The Franco-Germanic linguistic border has been extraordinarily stable over the last thousand years, with the exception of the region around Bruxelles, which has therefore become a focal point of linguistic tension. John A. Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 25

⁵ The Magyars occupied the Hungarian basin in 895 whereas the last Eastern invaders to settle in Western Europe, the Lombards, established themselves in the sixth century. See Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 234. For obvious geographical reasons, East Central Europe was subsequently more vulnerable to invasion from the East than was Western Europe, although the Mongols made it to the Swiss border.

⁶ Alan J. Palmer, *The Lands Between: A History of East Central Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970).

⁷ Istvan Bibo, "The Distress of East European Small States," in his *Democracy, Revolution and Self-Determination*, edited by Karoly Nagy, trans. by Andras Boros-Kazai (Boulder, Co. and Highland Lakes: Social Science Monographs and Atlantic Research and Publications, 1991), pp. 13-89. Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of East Central Europe," *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984.

⁸ See *Minorities: The New Europe's Old Issue*, edited by Ian M. Cuthbertson and Jane Leibowitz (Prague: Institute for East-West Studies, 1993).

⁹ For some representative formulations of these interpretations see: Jacques Rupnik, "Eisschrank oder Fegefeuer: Das Ende des Kommunismus und das Wiedererwachen der Nationalismen," *Transit* 1 (1990), pp. 132-141 and his "Le réveil des nationalismes," in *Le Déchirement des Nations*, edited by Jacques Rupnik (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp. 9-40. The following title is eloquent: Bernard Paquereau, "Sous la glace l'histoire. Les rapports du nationalisme et du communisme en Europe de l'est," *Le Débat* nr. 84 (1995), pp. 105-120. For

ethnic nationalism as the "default option," see Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post Soviet State," *Survival* 35:1 (1993), pp. 5-26.

¹⁰ On the wider implications of the contemporary East Central European "politicization of ethnicity and ethnicization of politics" (Joseph Rothschild) or "revived versus contrived nationalism" (Ivo Banac), see Katherine Verdery's succinct statement "The idiom of national difference becomes the means of assigning blame for present disaster as well as of establishing who has the purity – both moral and ethnic – needed to govern," comments on Eric Hobsbawm in "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today," *Anthropology Today* 8:1 (1992), p 10, for more specific argumentation on the economic aspect, see her "Nationalism and National Sentiment in Post-socialist Romania," *Slavic Review* 52:2 (1993), pp. 179-203. For an original, moral variant see also Jirina Siklova, "The Solidarity of the Culpable," *Social Research* 58:1 (1991), pp. 765-773

¹¹ For an interesting look at the recent stirrings of Kashub identity see Brunon Synak, "The Kashubes During the Post-Communist Transformation in Poland," *Nationalities Papers* 25:1 (1997), pp. 715-728.

¹² The economies of all the states examined here suffered calamitous drops (contractions of up to one third and, in the case of the former Soviet republics, one half of GDP in the early 1990s) compensated by subsequent growth in the single-digits (and renewed decline in the case of Bulgaria). Today only Poland, Slovenia and, possibly, Slovakia have attained their pre 1990 GDP. See figures in *PlanEcon Review* as synthesized in "East European Facts and Figures," East European Studies, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, September 1997.

¹³ In Hungary and the Czech republic, for example, Roma unemployment rates hover around 60% to 70%. In Hungary, Roma life expectancy is about fifteen years lower than the average. About 60% of the prison population in Hungary is Roma and some 50% of burglaries in the Czech Republic are committed by Roma. These figures appear to be fairly representative. For a useful overview of the area as a whole, see Zoltan D. Barany, "Living on the Edge: The East European Roma in Postcommunist Politics and Societies," *Slavic Review* 53:4 (Summer 1994), pp. 321-344.

¹⁴ New approaches to minority issues in this perspective have been pioneered by two Canadian authors, Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁵ The option of positive discrimination was already suggested for the area in a case before the Permanent Court of International Justice in 1935 concerning Greek minority schools in Albania. The Court ruled that although equality in law precluded discrimination, equality in fact might involve the necessity of different treatment. The suggestion has not been taken up in the post communist period. On the case, see Antony E. Alcock, "A Reappraisal of Existing Theory and Practice in the Protection of Minorities," in *Minorities in History*, edited by A. C. Hepburn (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 234.

¹⁶ Regarding efforts on behalf of the Ruthenes by a dedicated North American ethnic entrepreneur see Chris Hann, "Intellectuals, Ethnic Groups and Nations: Two Late Twentieth-Century Cases," in *Varieties of Nationalism*, edited by Sukumur Periwal (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), pp. 110-116.

¹⁷ One may read the following in the preambles to the constitutions of two new countries, identified with those whom Marx and Engels described as 'peoples without history': "We, the Slovak Nation, mindful of the political and cultural heritage of our forefathers and of hundreds of years experience in the struggle for our national existence ...;" "Proceeding from ... the historical fact that the Slovenes have formed over many centuries of struggle for national liberation their own national identity and established their own statehood." It should be acknowledged that the Slovak preamble does mention "members of national minorities and ethnic groups living in the territory of the Slovak Republic."

¹⁸ For example, article 1 of Romania's constitution of 1991 states: "Romania is a national state, sovereign and independent, unitary and indivisible," whereas the preamble to the Bulgarian constitution of 1991 recalls "our irrevocable duty to safeguard the national and state unity of Bulgaria" and soon excludes autonomous territorial units (article 2{1})

¹⁹ For a legal analysis see Kinga Gal, "The Role of Bilateral Treaties in the Protection of National Minorities in Central and Eastern Europe," E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/1998 CRP.2

²⁰ Bruno de Witte, "Ethnic Minorities, The European Union and Its Enlargement," paper presented to the Reflection Group on 'Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement: The Nature of the New Border,' Florence 18-19 June 1998.

²¹ Over one hundred years ago Lord Acton stated that 'exile is the cradle of nationality' but the literature concerning the impact of diasporas on national politics is still rare. For an excellent recent case study, see Loring M. Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²² International bodies have not succeeded in establishing a universally accepted definition of minorities, in spite of the efforts of two UN rapporteurs, Francesco Capotorti in the 1970s and Jules Deschenes in the 1980s. The definitional problem is therefore not confined to East Central Europe and a discussion of it would lead us too far astray from our main concern here. Those interested may consult, for example, John Packer, "On the Definition of Minorities," in *The Protection of Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities in Europe*, edited by John Packer and Kristain Myntti, Abo/Turku: Abo Akademi University, Institute for Human Rights, 1993.



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