ACCEPT PLURALISM

COMPARATIVE POLICY BRIEF

Native Minority Claims: The Search for Acceptance

Policy orientation from ACCEPT Pluralism, an EU-funded research project investigating the state of tolerance in European societies.

This policy brief compares measures to accommodate native ethnic minorities by Sweden, Poland, Romania and Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Minorities are often perceived by nation-states as a challenge to their national and cultural security. That explains why far-reaching efforts to protect minorities are generally initiated at international level. Those efforts can be effective, however, only to the degree that nation-states are committed to implementing them.

There are competing views in Europe of how diversity should be managed.

In the European Union (and elsewhere) there are two competing views about how cultural diversity should be managed: The one view, 'unity in diversity', regards all ethnic groups and cultures as equals, entitled to their own representative institutions and deserving of state recognition; the other view, 'unity-*over*-diversity', holds that individuals should not be granted group-specific rights, as that would conflict with a (liberal) state's ideal of impartiality and neutrality. The latter view places individual civil rights above the principles of group-centred multiculturalism.

The implications of these competing views are manifested in the cultural diversity management practices of four European countries: Poland, Romania, Sweden and Turkey. Illustrative examples can be drawn from Poland's response to Silesian minority claims, Romania's response to Hungarian minority claims, Sweden's response to Sámi minority claims and Turkey's response to Circassian diasporic claims.

The right to 'difference' needs to be recognized and discussed.

Closer examination of these cases provides valuable insights into Europe's challenge in accommodating native minorities and their claims for political recognition. The case studies suggest that benefits could be gained by policymakers openly discussing the fact that their nation is composed of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Social cohesion might also be advanced if policymakers recognized the right to 'difference' and changed educational curricula to highlight ways that minority cultures enrich a nation.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Four countries, four minorities

The Sámi People in Sweden

The Sámi people constitute one of the world's least numerous native peoples, with around 70,000 individuals living in Sápmi, covering parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. About 20,000 Sami live in Sweden. Their minority status is recognized in Sweden through the existence of the Sámi Parliament that has both political and administrative functions. They are also granted special language and educational rights through Sweden´s ratification of the European framework conventions concerning the rights of national minorities. Members of the Sámi people are granted the right to communicate in their own language with courts and other important state authorities in the northern parts of Sweden where the bulk of the Sámi population lives. Sámis have been fighting for the following claims: to maintain the Sámi culture and language; to foster unity among the different sub-groups of the Sami population; and to defend the interests of the Sami hunting, fishing and reindeer industry in Sweden.

The Sámi are one of the world's smallest minority populations.

Hungarians in Romania

The population of Romania is composed of mostly ethnic Romanians (88.6 percent) and 12 officially recognised minority groups, among which the largest are Hungarians (6.5 percent) and the Roma (1.7 percent). Hungarians constitute the largest officially recognized national minority in Romania. They have been granted specific rights with regard to their political representation at both local and national levels. After World War II, Hungarians living in Communist Romania hoped that they could achieve a high degree of political autonomy. In 1952, during the Soviet Union, Romania created the Hungarian Autonomous Region. However, this autonomous region was dismantled in 1968 as a result of an administrative/territorial reorganization.

Hungarians constitute the largest ethnic minority in Romania.

After Bucharest abandoned Moscow's policy favourable to minorities, Hungarians became 'cohabitant nationalities' or 'Hungarian-speaking Romanians'. Although Hungarian leaders continued to feature in the Romanian Communist party leadership until the fall of Communism, this did not spare Romanian citizens of Hungarian nationality from persecution. The Ceausescu governments tried to force Hungarians to assimilate through a number of measures. Hungarian schools were closed and people graduating from University were mandatorily assigned to other regions. The overall ethnic composition of the population inhabiting Transylvania in Romania was changed because of internal migration due to the industrialisation process.

Silesians in Poland

According to the 2011 National Census, there are more than 800,000 Silesians in Poland (in a total population of 38.4 million). Silesia is a borderland region, and the Silesians attempted to create an independent polity immediately after World War II. They declared their autonomy during the interwar period. Ethnographically speaking, Silesia was a trilingual and prevailingly Catholic region. German was used in secular public spaces such as schools, offices, and business, while Polish was the language of religion. In everyday life and in their private spaces, Silesians usually used their own dialect, which constitutes a Slavic language permeated with many German words and often structured according to the German grammar.

Living near the Polish-German border, Silesians often experienced harsh policies of Polonisation and Germanisation, especially after World War I. Silesians today are not recognized as an official minority by the Polish state. They have often been perceived as traitors and collaborators by the Polish nationalists. Silesians have become more outspoken during Poland's European integration process. The Polish national majority and state institutions have considered Silesians as a centrifugal force threatening the unity and security of the country.

Circassians in Turkey

Around 2.5 million people of Circassian origin live in Turkey today (whose total population is just under 80 million). They are a diverse minority, composed of numerous sub-groups such as the Adygei, the Kabartay, the Abkhazians, the Ubikh and the Chechens. They hail from different republics of the North Caucasus. Remarkably, the linkages between these sub-groups and their homelands have increased since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Being subject to a long period of structural, political and social-economic exclusion, Circassians become outspoken after the EU's Helsinki Summit in December 1999 when Turkey was granted 'candidate' status for joining the Union. However, their vocal political participation was interrupted after 2005. That's when Turkey's Europeanization process become focused on nationalist tensions between the Turkish majority and Kurdish minority. Since the start of EU accession negotiations in 2005, Turkish nationalism has become a hegemonic discourse effectively silencing minorities, and the country has entered a phase of pronounced Euro-scepticism.

Staking minority claims: The value of official recognition

As officially recognized minorities, the Sámis in Sweden and Hungarians in Romania have local and national parliamentary facilities to present their claims such as the quest for cultural autonomy and linguistic rights.

The situation is very different for Silesians in Poland and Circassians in Turkey. Lacking their own political institutions, they organise in civic, cultural and folkloric associations to present their claims to the state.

Soft power: Silesians and Circassians pursuing different goals with similar methods

The internet and transnational networks are helping minorities to leverage public space

The European integration process, transnational networks and internet are strategically important for Silesians and Circassians. Both are raising their claims in public space to create strong communities of sentiments. By means of modern technologies of communication like the internet, the Silesians want to create an awareness among their compatriots living in Germany and elsewhere. The Circassians, meanwhile, want to have the support of the remote diasporic communities of Circassian origin on matters related to the democratic consolidation of Turkey. Unlike the Circassians, the Silesians are striving for full educational and linguistic autonomy; and they are inclined to generate political movements aimed at achieving it. Circassians, on the other hand, are simply asking for equal treatment in everyday life, and for correction of various stereotypes generated by the Turkish majority society about them.

Recognition and mobilization: Three dynamics

The case studies reveal three dynamics with respect to mobilizing and gaining recognition for minority claims:

1. **Where a minority is not tolerated, it mobilizes in search of tolerance and/or acceptance.**

   The Circassians fit into this category as they are in search of recognition and respect by the state.

2. **Where a minority is socially and culturally accepted, it mobilizes in a quest for political recognition and the right to self-determination or incorporation into the institutions.**

   The Silesians fit into this category as they are in search of political recognition.

3. **Where a minority is already institutionally recognized and respected, it mobilizes with the goal of ending socio-economic discrimination or halting the deterioration of their situation.**

   The Sámis and the Hungarians fit into this category as they are officially recognized but still subject to discrimination and intolerance. It is important to note that a minority's political integration does not necessarily mean that it does not face discrimination in society.

Key Findings

Despite official recognition, the Sámis are still portrayed as culturally 'unfit'.

The Swedish case study reveals that Sámis have so far gained a full-fledged right to political representation in both national and local levels. However, they are still far from experiencing an egalitarian treatment by the state, the media and society as a whole. They are still being stereotypically represented as backwards, irresponsible and too attached to their traditions. Public discourse presents Sámis as in need of 'parental authority' They are portrayed as a community dependant on 'benevolent tolerance' by the Swedish state in order to participate in Swedish politics. In general, they are seen to be culturally 'unfit' for Swedish political life.

Silesians in Poland, Hungarians in Romania, and Circassians in Turkey face similar problems when they raise claims regarding their represention in mainstream political and media discourse. They are commonly portrayed as being corseted by tradition and unfit for national politics.

Poland, Romania and Turkey see minorities as a threat to the nation.

In addition, Poland, Romania and Turkey resist the claims of their respective minorities for cultural autonomy because they feel this is 'dangerous' for the nation. They define the Polish, Romanian and Turkish nation as culturally and ethnically homogenous. Hence, they refuse to recognise the need for cultural (and to some degree political) autonomy that their minorities are striving for. Rather than perceiving the claims raised by ethno-cultural minorities as a quest for justice and equality, Poland, Romania and Turkey perceive them as a challenge to national unity. This mind-set derives in part from historical encounters by the majority with former neighbouring colonial powers.

Hungarian claims in Romania and Silesian claims in Poland are partly perceived by the state as acts of secessionism and irredentism. They are considered to be the continuation of the historical conflicts between Germany and Poland on the one hand, and Hungary and Romania on the other hand. Thus, minority claims are characterised as issues of 'national security' and are rejected.

European integration has helped give minorities a voice in Poland and Turkey.

The research indicates that Silesian and Circassian claims have become more outspoken in line with efforts to integrate Poland and Turkey into Europe. The EU is certainly perceived as an anchor by these communities, helping them to raise their cultural and political claims through democratic forms of participation in politics. This has also been the case for other segments of Polish and Turkish society, at least in the beginning of the European integration process. Eager to invest in their Europeanization, both countries made some effort to come to terms with their illiberal past.

The Internet and social networking are helping minorities leverage their claims.

Technological innovations such as the internet make it easier now for the dissemination of claims in and across the national boundaries. Silesians and Circassians efficiently use these tools in order to make their voices heard in transnational space. The efforts are aimed at impacting the decision-making processes of the respective states. Enabled by technology, transnational networks seem to be a driving force for minorities that have not yet gained official recognition by their respective states. Organized through the internet and various ethno-cultural associations, these networks help Silesians and the Circassians cope with the hegemony of the nation-states in which they are residing.

Two ways of managing diversity

There are two competing approaches to diversity management in European countries:

Multiculturalism vs. assimilation

a) **Unity in diversity**

A multiculturalist approach reflecting a republican perspective. It recognizes ethno-cultural, linguistic, national and religious differences of minorities.

b) **Unity over diversity**

An assimilationist approach reflecting a 'difference-blind' perspective.

It seems the EU is going to continue witnessing a competition between these two models, each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages for minority communities. It is not easy to predict which model will prevail

This much, however, is certain:

Europe's democratic consolidation depends on the capacity of states to interpret minority claims as a quest for justice and fairness, and NOT as a challenge to national security.

The European process often works in the interest of those minority groups that are repressed by their respective nation-states. The EU is often embraced by such minorities as a political anchor. Hence, it may be expected that such minorities will be repressed in times of social and political turmoil when the EU is in crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Nation-states should interpret minority claims as a quest for justice and fairness, not as a threat to national security.

→ Policymakers at national level should construct a language to **de-securitize minority claims** in a way that frames those claims as a quest for justice and fairness.

→ Policymakers at national level should **openly discuss the fact that their nation is composed of various ethnic, cultural and religious groups**.

→ The right to difference should be recognized by policymakers at national level for the purpose of strengthening social cohesion.

All should be aware that granting minorities cultural and political rights does not guarantee their equal treatment by the state and society. Education at all levels is the key to secure social cohesion.

→ Curricula of relevant courses should be changed to inform the majority society about the assets of the minority cultures enriching the nation.

→ Curricula of the relevant courses at primary and secondary levels should be redesigned so that the minorities can also be included in the definition of the nation.

While states may have an interest in 'kin' living abroad, they should be mindful that they have no legal right of interference.

→ Policymakers should refrain from using language regarding 'kin' living in neighbouring countries as this may disturb the neighbouring nation

Policymakers at transnational level should be aware that their policy interventions have a great impact on minorities.

→ Transnational entities such as the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CE), and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are decisive for the protection of rights of minority communities in the member states.

→ The Council of Europe and the OSCE should go on empowering the civil society in a way that permits the minority groups to raise their voices in international platforms.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Methodology

ACCEPT Pluralism is a research project funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. It investigates the responses to diversity and the role of tolerance in 15 European states. In each country, research was conducted into the meaning and scope of 'acceptance' in education and political life. By looking at the struggles of native minorities for political autonomy and/or recognition, the research can highlight the barriers to equal political participation and representation.

Data Collection: This policy brief is based on the comparative report and the four case study reports prepared by the research teams of each case. Each case study undertakes a textual discourse analysis of various policy documents, public statements, newspaper articles, NGO reports, academic works, blogs and websites regarding the Sami, Hungarian, Silesian and Circassian minority claims in their respective countries. The comparison is made in accordance with the data provided by four different teams who conducted their own individual studies using different research techniques ranging from discourse analysis of the official documents, speeches of politicians, media coverage of the relevant issues to interviewing the members of minority groups, politicians, scholars, journalists, and bureaucrats.

In-depth Interviews: Several in-depth interviews were held with the community leaders, state actors, local politicians who are involved in the public debates and initiatives with regard to the minority rights. Most of the interviews were conducted in the cities where those minorities are, while some of them were held in the capital cities of Sweden, Poland, Romania and Turkey. Interviews were mostly conducted between December 2011 and April 2012.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): The data collected through the interviews were evaluated on the basis of the interlocutors' reflections on some common denominators such as tolerance, Europeanization, political participation, democracy, citizenship diversity and transnational space. These interviews were analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. CDA is a method of discourse analysis focusing on the investigation of the relations between discourse and social/cultural developments in everyday life. It views discursive practices as an important form of social practice contributing to the constitution of the social and cultural world including social identities and relations.

Further Readings

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PROJECT IDENTITY

Acronym   **ACCEPT PLURALISM**

Title   **Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe**

Short Description   ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.

Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.

In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.

The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.

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Website   www.accept-pluralism.eu

Duration   March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)

Funding Scheme   Small and medium-scale collaborative project

EU contribution   2,600,230 Euro

Consortium   17 partners (15 countries)

Coordinator   European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies)

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