NEW KNOWLEDGE about

Romania

This briefing note highlights NEW KNOWLEDGE about Romania.
We present here new knowledge and key messages for policy makers and civil society.

ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN ROMANIA

Romanian national identity and its Balkan defining traits are influenced by the social and political legacy of the Ottoman and Byzantine institutions. The religious legacy of the Byzantine Empire that made Christian Orthodoxy deeply embedded into the idea of "being Romanian" was revived after 1989. Moreover, it has effectively challenged the development of a plural society in post-communist Romania in the last 23 years, especially when considering the state's separation from church.

Although the adoption of equality and anti-discrimination standards are often considered as imported from Western Europe rather than driven by domestic values and forces, the promise of European Union membership (and the return to Europe) influenced the public discourse to such an extent that no anti-European political discourse could find its place in the national public debate.

In the ACCEPT PLURALISM project, we investigated how ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is accommodated in two very important areas: education and political life:

o We examined pluralism in education and the **education of Roma children;**
o The accommodation of **religious diversity in schools**
o The **political participation and representation of Romania's ethnic minorities**; and
o The specific status of the **Hungarian minority**.

Evaluation of discourses and practices in our three case studies:

	Institutional and legal framework	Practical situation	Public discourses
Education of Roma children	Acceptance and recognition	Indifference	Divided
Religious diversity in schools	Acceptance and recognition	Predominantly tolerance but disproportionately favouring the majority religion	Divided
Political participation and representation of ethnic minorities	Acceptance and recognition	Tolerance	Tolerance
The status of the Hungarian minority	Predominantly tolerance	(Limited) intolerance	Predominantly tolerance with incidents of intolerance

ROMA EDUCATION

According to the 2002 Romanian Census, Roma constitute 2.5% of the country's total population, although their real number is considered to be much higher: around 1.5 million or 6.7% of the total population. Of these, approximately 50% are under 24 years old. Roma suffer from high unemployment rates and poverty along with poor education levels. In effect, Roma children have a school drop-out rate that is over ten times higher than the one recorded for the general population (11.6% compared to 0.8%), and research has shown that the drop-out rates are even higher in segregated Roma schools.

In 2010, a Romanian Court of Appeal penalized a primary school teacher with a 10,000 Euro fine for not allowing a Roma child to attend her class. Although **the official institutions did not make explicit reference to ethnic discrimination, nonetheless, the public perception was that the teacher received her punishment for being unjust to a Roma child**. It proved to be a case that inspired many in Romania, making people more sensitive to the Roma pupils' needs and to the problems these pupils are confronted with. Moreover, the condemnation of the teacher who had refused a Roma pupil in the class was seen as an exemplary punishment meant to discourage discrimination in schools. Thus even though this case was not treated as a case of ethnic discrimination, the court decision is particularly important as it marks a clear message that **expressions of intolerance are to be discouraged and will be sanctioned**.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PUBLICSCHOOLS

86.7% of Romania's population is Christian Orthodox, while another 11% belong to other Christian denominations. After the fall of communism, religion became a mandatory course in primary and secondary schools, while any opposition to the public display of Orthodox symbols was immediately associated with the former communist system, atheism and repression of the right to freely express one's confession.

Since 2001, religion has become an optional subject and teachers are in principle required to inform parents and students that the course on Religion is optional. Moreover, students wishing to opt out of the Religious course must be provided with the alternative of participating in a religion class of their own confession (regardless of the number of students requesting the class). A study conducted in 2006, however, showed that only 7.8% of Romanian students knew that they could opt out of this class. Moreover, it is commonplace to find orthodox religious paintings displayed in schools even though the state and church are Constitutionally separate.

In 2006, Emil Moise, a philosophy professor, filed a complaint with the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) claiming that displaying Christian paintings in schools was a breach of the non-orthodox students' right to free choice of confession and it impeded the free development of the spirit of the rest of the students. Moise was literally harassed by the media, politicians and the Orthodox Church. The final decision of the High Court of Cassation and Justice rulling against the interdiction of icons in classrooms has openly illustrated the implicit state support for Orthodox values to the detriment of other confessions. In the end, Moise's lawsuit against the Romanian Government was dismissed by the European Court of Human Rights due to the 2011 Lautsi precedent.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION & REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Romania is home to approximately 1.3 million Hungarians and over 600.000 Roma. A Department for Interethnic Relations has been established since 2005 aiming to strengthen ethnic diversity and minority protection. As regards the wider legal framework, it is pertinent to note that although freedom of speech is protected by article 30 of the Constitution it does not include discriminatory discourse and statements promoting national, racial, class or religious-based hatred, or encouragement to discriminate. Government Ordinance (G.O.) 137/2000 for the prevention and combating of all types of discrimination prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on a number of grounds, including race, nationality, ethnicity and religion, and also established the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) which is an autonomous state authority, under parliamentary control. Discriminatory discourse on the basis of race, ethnicity and religion is also legally prohibited, as is the praising of persons found guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes and Holocaust denial. So in principle, a legal and institutional conducive to tolerance is in place.

This is also in principle the case for political participation of the country's ethnic minorities. Political parties are not legally required to include candidates belonging to an ethnic or religious minority, however, Decree no. 92/1990 guarantees minority groups the right to one mandate in the Chamber of Deputies, even if they do not obtain the necessary votes to secure a seat in Parliament. As of 2004 a symbolic threshold (10% of the average number of valid votes required for the election of one deputy at the national level) has been applied, and in the current legislature eighteen minority organizations have passed this threshold.

The biggest and most popular political party representing the interest of an ethnic minority in Romania is the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (DUHR) which currently has 19 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (out of 412), and 9 seats in the Senate (out 176).

THE STATUS OF THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY

Over the last 20 years, Romania has been the scene of much conflict and controversy with regards to statues as national symbols. The historical hostility between Romanians and Hungarians which finds its roots in the 1848 revolution is still present today fuelled by antagonistic historical narratives presented in respective schoolbooks. There is a general intolerance on the part of public opinion, politicians and the state towards actions that are perceived as disloyal toward the Romanian state, its national symbols, and holidays. The Hungarian minority's claims for collective rights, including cultural autonomy and autonomy for Szekler Land, expressed in the language of the historical contest between the two nations, and not in the rational language of the benefits of the self-administration of one's own ethnic group, revive the memories of the majority and their fears of Hungarians domination.

On the 15th of March 2010 (Hungarian Revolution Day) Csibi Barna protested on the street, by hanging a doll representing Avram Iancu, a Romanian national hero, for crimes against the Hungarians during the 1848 Revolution. Barna was an ethnic Hungarian, Romanian civil servant and a keen promoter of a Hungarian ethnic autonomous region Szekler Land. His protest tested the levels of tolerance in Romanian society and posed a challenge to the country's political elites. Politicians had the option to either interpret this case as an isolated example under the general competence of the courts, or, as it in fact happened, as an event of epic importance, to be included on the public agenda– and of course to be exploited for electoral purposes. The prime minister expressed his indignation and asked for immediate and firm measures against Barna while members of the opposition filed a petition requesting that his superiors promptly dismiss him.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The **level of ethnic and religious tolerance has increased** in the country over the past twenty years **but continues to remain relatively low**.

Nationalism (both Romanian and Hungarian), ethnic competition for access to administrative resources among elites, and a revived attachment to religiosity, and in particular Orthodoxy, among some intellectuals are the main driving forces of expressions of intolerance.

A strong anti-discrimination legislative and institutional framework is in place and appears to function rather effectively. The **judicial system applies the law without discrimination** and problems stem rather from the **extreme politicization** of each and every situation.

Research suggests that the positive developments in the field of non-discrimination at the state level are only partially mirrored by mainstream society, where considerable intolerance persists. Tolerance is higher when the majority is not fundamentally challenged, either by secularists or by Hungarian secessionists. Any engineering of a feeling of threat leads to **defensive discourses** and brings an end to acceptance.

Policy efforts should be directed towards providing general education on tolerance, diversity and anti-discrimination.

FURTHER READINGS

To read more on the research findings presented here, see:

Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Romania
By Sinziana-Elena Poiana, Ioana Lupea, Irina-Madalina Doroftei and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (SAR)

Download your copy from:
http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/24380

Other relevant publications include:

2012/02.2. Handbook on Tolerance and Diversity in Europe
Anna Triandafyllidou (EUI)

Download your copy from:
http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx

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.
Authors	Sinziana-Elena Poiana, Ioana Lupea, Irina-Madalina Doroftei and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Romanian Academic Society
Web site	**www.accept-pluralism.eu**
Duration	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
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Consortium	17 partners (15 countries)
Coordinator	European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Scientific Coordinator	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission