The Role of Minorities in International and Transborder Relations in Central and Eastern Europe

A Skills Exchange Workshop held 30 April – 3 May 1998, Warsaw, Poland

Background

The role and impact of minorities on official and informal transborder relations are not well understood. The 1990s have been a time of rapid change in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and minority groups have figured prominently in this change. They have played a particularly important role in shaping the dynamics of relations between countries in the region and have been the focus of attention in the wider international community. The behaviour of each state towards minorities within its borders has been subject to scrutiny and connected to that country's compliance with bi- and multilateral treaties, as well as its status in regional associations and intergovernmental institutions. International relations are also important to minorities, both to maintain and benefit from contacts with their ethnic kin in neighbouring countries and because international organizations can help to ensure protection of their rights. While members of minority groups may facilitate informal exchange between citizens of different countries, these transfrontier contacts have often met with suspicion and are sometimes the source of friction between groups and between countries. Nevertheless, transborder interactions can bring tremendous benefits to all involved, through increased stability, trade and cultural exchange.

To learn more about these issues, Minority Rights Group International and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights organized a Skills Exchange Workshop in Warsaw, Poland, in spring 1998. The workshop brought together public officials,

parliamentarians, representatives of minority organizations and NGO activists from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The goal of the workshop was to support the process of analysing the problems and sharing strategies to address them. Participants identified their major concerns, based on their own situation. Through interactive discussion, the group then analysed these issues and sought to develop an understanding of the problems with ideas for solutions to address them.

The topics covered both the actions of states and the actions of minority groups. Participants analysed the broader international context, including the efficacy of minority rights standards and the impact of European integration on minority communities. They examined the impact of bilateral relations on minority communities, including the role of 'kin states', the 'politics of reciprocity', bilateral treaties, citizenship and media communications. They also discussed the function and methods of transborder interactions between members of the same ethnic group and the possibilities for inter-ethnic cooperation. This Workshop Report describes these discussions.

International context

It appears that both opportunities and risks exist for minority communities in the shifting political landscape of Europe. Minorities need to establish their role amid such competing

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tendencies as: increasing integration on a European level, possible tendencies to concentrate central government power in the areas of competency that remain with the state, and standards that call for local and regional devolution through implementation of subsidiarity as the guiding principle of governance. Participants concentrated their analysis on the role of international minority rights standards and the impact of European Union (EU) enlargement.

Minority rights standards: Implementation and monitoring

European law has developed a range of minority rights standards during the 1990s, the most recent of which is the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities which came into force in February 1998. Nevertheless, participants pointed to the fact that many citizens (from both majority and minority communities) are not aware of these standards, or their implications, and therefore are not able to advocate their fulfilment. Some participants believed that, without pressure from civil society, governments are able to ignore some of their obligations in implementing the standards they have ratified. One parliamentarian expressed the view that his government's acceptance of international instruments was motivated more by the desire to be seen as a good candidate for membership of intergovernmental organizations than by any intention of taking its commitments seriously.

Many participants voiced their frustration with the monitoring mechanisms for international standards. It is possible for governments to claim to have fulfilled their obligations, even though it is clear to observers that violations continue to occur. This situation is difficult for the groups directly affected and can lead to tensions between states as arguments escalate about the country's activities and intentions. One problem is the criteria for judging when a state has fully implemented the standards to which it is committed. One participant argued that, although problems exist everywhere, there are significant qualitative differences between states in the levels of non-compliance. For example, a number of participants from Bulgaria believed that their country lags significantly behind the other countries represented at the workshop in promoting minority rights. This is evident, for example, in its non-recognition of groups such as Macedonians and Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) and by its limited provisions for minority language use.

Many participants believed that a strategy for addressing these discrepancies is to create a set of indicators that could be used to ensure at least minimum compliance with the standards, while still encouraging states to promote the fulfilment of rights. Several participants pointed to the additional benefit that such criteria would help minorities argue their case. If objective criteria existed, minorities' aspirations to fulfil these criteria could not be seen as unreasonable. Conversely, several participants noted the potential danger of states using baseline criteria as a justification to lower already existing, more generous provisions for minorities, which have become *de facto* standards or 'acquired rights' in the country. While there may be a need for clear criteria to judge implementation, it is important that they are not too prescriptive in their remedies. In general, states should promote the highest standards and learn from good practices elsewhere, while allowing varied implementation strategies to suit the different needs and aspirations of specific groups.

Several participants pointed out that the success of international standards may depend on the effectiveness of international monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance. These mechanisms should not consist of complaints procedures
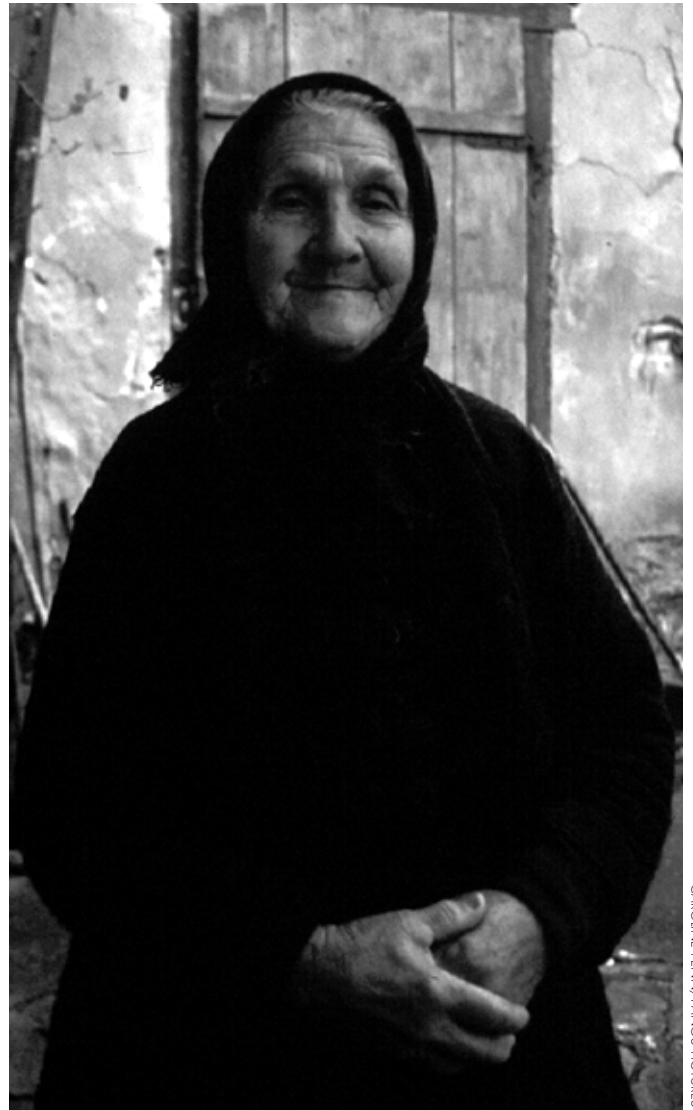
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Ethnic German woman in village of Viscri, Romania.

only (which are often very slow and resource-intensive), but should also ensure positive, institutionalized implementation. Many participants favoured independent procedures for verification of the information provided in official country reports so that the international community can assess implementation accurately. Yet even if independent verification was introduced, several participants expressed doubts about the effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms if there is no means to take action against governments for non-compliance. Participants voiced concern that the implementation of standards rests largely on the degree of political will present within a given country and within the international community to ensure that they are fulfilled.

Discussion also focused on the specific needs of the Roma communities throughout Europe and the special role of international standards in protecting and promoting their rights. Because Roma do not form the majority in any state and because of their history of persecution, several international bodies now monitor the situation of Roma and support programmatic provisions to help ensure that their human rights are met. One participant claimed that these issues should be treated as domestic concerns. He believed that Roma derive 'privileges' from this treatment. Most, however, argued that, given the gravity of discrimination experienced by Roma, international protection is essential. Another commented on the irony that Roma are often unrepresented in the institutional mechanisms intended to protect their rights. This raised the

general point that minorities should be able to participate directly in the decision-making bodies that develop policies that affect their community.

Governments also have a role to play. According to one official, it is governments that must ultimately take responsibility for creating mechanisms to meet the needs of all minority groups within the state. He stressed the importance of a legislative framework for minority rights protection because this provides the 'game rules' for cooperation and managing inter-group relations. This can create an infrastructure for ensuring implementation of international standards and supporting the rule of law. Another participant suggested the need for a conference of parliamentarians from throughout Europe who are representatives of minority groups to discuss practices in their countries and examine legislative and policy strategies for implementing minority rights.

European Union enlargement: Opportunities, risks and challenges

One of the major issues influencing transborder cooperation in the short to medium term is accession into Euro-Atlantic institutions and, in particular, to the EU. On the positive side, the EU accession process can assist in the implementation of minority rights in CEE. The EU has made it clear in Agenda 2000 that enhancing respect for minority rights, and particularly for those of Roma communities, is an important political criterion for entry.[1] This should help create an incentive for aspiring members. It also provides a political context in which minority groups can negotiate implementation strategies. Yet participants identified a number of risks associated with integration that could have a negative impact on some minority communities and voiced concern that these problems are being overlooked.

Several participants expressed frustration with the EU integration process because only current EU members can decide policies in Brussels. Newly joining members will therefore lose substantial control without having participated in the development of these policies. This group was particularly concerned about those policies pertaining to transborder relations. For example, the new European frontiers may result in 'Fortress Europe' in which freedom of movement across EU boundaries becomes harder. This is already occurring as visa regimes are harmonized under the Schengen and Dublin Agreements and other restrictive standards. This has important implications for minority communities, they may be separated across new frontiers when some countries enter the EU and others stay outside. They risk practical restrictions on their opportunities for cooperation, communication and exchange across borders. In some countries, this process has already begun even before accession.

Participants from Poland discussed the impact of the January 1998 law on the status of foreigners, which requires visitors to present papers and make a cash deposit before crossing the border. In the first six months, traffic from Eastern neighbours dropped by 40 per cent and informal transborder trade was down by an estimated 80 per cent. The economic impact has been so drastic that demonstrations have been held against the law. Ironically, in a country with a long history of demonstrators bearing slogans demanding 'Russians go home!', protesters are now stating 'We want the Russians!' (indicating, more broadly, all the peoples of the East). Participants from Slovakia discussed a similar situation on the border with the Czech Republic where, although official trade is up, informal trade has decreased. In both cases, members of minority communities – who were heavily involved in small-scale transborder trade – were adversely affected.

There are also fears that border restrictions will have more than an economic impact. As one participant put it, 'The iron curtain is down, but the money curtain has risen'. He discussed the problem of ethnic Macedonians who emigrated from Greece to Bulgaria during the Greek civil war. Many cannot afford the $50 fee for a five-day Greek visa and therefore cannot return to visit their homeland and relatives. Participants from other countries expressed fears that similar policies would be introduced in the countries that join the EU. They believe that *de facto* restrictions will hamper personal, civic and commercial interactions between members of the same minority community living across borders. Another participant was concerned about the potential for blaming minorities if a visa regime is imposed on a non-EU country. When visas were introduced for Romanian citizens travelling to the UK, Roma were blamed in the press and subjected to skinhead attacks. He warned that policy-makers should be aware of these vulnerabilities. Another participant pointed out that, while EU accession requires countries to harmonize their visa policies, states can conclude bilateral treaties with non-member states to allow freedom of movement between their citizens. One example is the bilateral arrangement between Croatia and Italy, which allows non-EU citizens to move across the EU border – although they must apply for a visa if they intend to travel to another EU country. Participants believed that urgent attention is needed to address both these problems so as to protect the right of minorities to establish and maintain free and peaceful contacts across frontiers.

There was some discussion about the dynamics of whether a general historic trend is emerging towards a new pan-European identity that is caused by the integration process. One participant argued that, in the same way that ethnic nationalism was a factor in the construction of national states, a new 'Euronationalism' is developing which is helping to build the 'New Europe'. He suggested that in the same way that minorities' organizations can work together to promote integration within their country, many minorities are in a unique position to work with their ethnic kin in other states, as well as with other minorities, to foster the cooperation that generates integration. Another participant questioned this analysis, believing it to be premature. He argued that there must be practical implementation of human rights standards before sufficient confidence is generated to promote integration. Many minorities are dealing with basic survival issues; for them, European integration seems too abstract or irrelevant to spend energy promoting it at this time.

Bilateral dynamics

Inter-state relations frequently have a direct impact on the lives of minorities; similarly, minorities influence how states interact. One participant pointed out that the process of EU enlargement should be understood within the context of the other changes in the political map of Europe that have occurred in the twentieth century. The events of 1918, 1939–45 and 1989 led to the redrawing of state boundaries and the creation of new states and new minorities. After each period of change, it took a while for people to accept the new borders and for governments to feel comfortable with non-official contacts across frontiers. One of the forces that facilitated the maintenance of transborder contacts has been the desire of minorities to continue or to develop relations with others with whom they share a common group identity. State authorities have sometimes been suspicious of these interactions. However, as one government official pointed out, even though there are historical cases of minorities participating in secessionist movements that posed a risk to the state, in general, minorities have fostered economic, cultural

and social cooperation across borders and thus supported the normalization of relations between states. Minorities, therefore, play a significant role in creating and determining the character of bilateral relations between countries.

Politics of reciprocity

Participants identified a long history in the region of states using minority communities in their relations with other states. Participants explored the dynamics that develop when there are members of a group who are minorities in one or more states ('host states') but form the majority in another state (the ethnic 'kin state'). In a region where it has been customary to conceive of the state as the home of one ethnic 'nation', relations between host states and kin states are often marked by negotiations over the treatment of minorities. These are usually in the context of the kin state seeking to protect members of the same ethnic group in other, often neighbouring, countries – countries that might, in turn, be the kin state of minorities in their country. In these situations, there is a converse relationship in the positions of minority/majority groups in each country. These conditions can create the dynamics of reciprocity in each state's treatment of their respective minorities.

In general, participants were very wary of states using minority concerns as a negotiation strategy in their bilateral relations. According to one, this often leads to dynamics based on the attitude 'we'll give you as much as you give us'. One participant argued that this 'politics of reciprocity' is dangerous because it represents the reign of politics rather than the rule of law. Without legal protection, minorities and others are vulnerable to arbitrary action that replicates or deepens existing inequalities. Another participant, who is a member of a minority community, agreed. He argued that, as a citizen of his country, he should not be a hostage to inter-state politics, but should be entitled to rights and good treatment on the basis of equality. He was concerned that if reciprocity is considered legitimate, then a situation could emerge whereby some minority groups have better provisions than others because they have a wealthy or powerful kin state. Equally, he would not want to be held responsible for his kin state's treatment of its minorities. Many participants referred to the problem of double standards operating between a state's treatment of minorities at home and its demands regarding the treatment of its co-nationals abroad. Hence, the need for international standards that apply in every country.

Another participant pointed to the limits of a purely legal strategy for addressing these problems, particularly if there is a history of grievance and enmity between the states or peoples involved. He talked about Poland, where the majority society sometimes views minority communities as 'remnants' of a losing struggle. The relationship between Poles and Ukrainians is often tense, in part because of a history of atrocities committed by both sides during and immediately after the Second World War, which has never been fully acknowledged. This has resulted in different interpretations of history whereby each group feels victimized by the other and neither is able to accept that their own party was also an aggressor. He argued that because this subject remains taboo, it has not been possible to have the open discussion that could help break down barriers between the groups and begin developing a common ground for understanding the historical record. A sense of disquiet remains, accompanied by fears that can be easily manipulated. He claimed that this dynamic exacerbates a negative politics of reciprocity between the countries. For example, the Ukrainian government has refused to refurbish a Polish cemetery because of Poland's treatment of its Ukrainian minority; the resulting Polish resentment has led to tensions that are taken out on the

Ukrainians in Poland. These politics are also used to justify minimal minority rights provisions. For example, Ukrainians in Poland would like more than the current 10 minutes of broadcasting time per week. These demands are ignored, based on the justification that, in Ukraine, there is no broadcasting in Polish. He argued that in order to address these problems, twin strategies must be undertaken to foster reconciliation and to protect and promote minority and other human rights. Recently, however, these governments have shifted their attitudes towards minorities. Far from risking its relations with Poland by a principled stance on minority issues, the Ukrainian government would now like to strengthen cooperation with Poland and views the needs of the Ukrainian minority as a potential barrier in this relationship.

The 'tit-for-tat' dynamics described in this case were recognized by participants from other countries. For example, in Romania the frequent response to the Hungarian community's desire for a Hungarian university is to question why there should be one in Romania when there is no Romanian university in Hungary. One participant claimed that this is disingenuous because the Romanian population in Hungary is between 11,000 and 25,000, whereas there are 2 million Hungarians in Romania. He argued that these are qualitatively different situations and a very large minority group is justified in aspiring to different types of provisions to meet its group needs. In other cases, governments have been known to try to engage in domestic policies to encourage 'positive reciprocity' – although their underlying commitment to minority rights for their own sake can be open to question. For example, a member of a minority group in Hungary argued that its minority legislation was developed partly to encourage the governments of other countries with Hungarian minorities to adopt similar policies. These legislative measures provide a valuable framework for minority rights in Hungary. The ongoing problems with implementation have, however, generated cynicism that the principal motivation for these measures was foreign policy considerations rather than domestic commitments. In general, participants took a negative view of the underlying logic of such politics of reciprocity, believing that rights-based approaches are the only sound and secure way to proceed. At the same time, they recognized that some underlying problems can be addressed only when and if reconciliation occurs.

Bilateral treaties

In some ways, bilateral treaties between countries regarding the treatment of minorities can be seen as a way of formalizing the politics of reciprocity. Nevertheless, some would argue that they have helped to stabilize inter-state relations and secured the position of minority communities by taking them out of the realm of arbitrary political action. After the democratic changes at the beginning of the 1990s, the newly constituted governments of the region began the process of concluding treaties on neighbourly relations. They wanted to reinforce existing state borders and to establish commitments regarding the protection of minorities consistent with international standards, as well as to provide a framework for inter-state cooperation in a variety of sectors. Germany initiated the process, partly motivated by the needs of German reunification. Hungary then adopted a similar policy to deal with the problems of Hungarian minorities abroad. Now, virtually every country in East-Central Europe has concluded bilateral treaties with its neighbours – an outcome welcomed by the EU, which encouraged the process through the Pact for Stability in Europe initiative. Bilateral treaties were often seen as a means for supporting the respective country's integration into the various European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Germany and German minorities

Germany has concluded a variety of bilateral treaties with countries that have ethnically German minority groups. The terms of these treaties frequently include arrangements for Germany to provide support to the German minorities, particularly in meeting their educational and cultural needs. For example, in Hungary a joint commission developed a detailed programme that includes cultural centres, teaching aides, libraries and media agencies. While these resources can be used by anyone in Hungary, they are particularly relevant for supporting the cultural needs of the German community. Programmes specifically for young people – such as summer camps, essay competitions and exchange programmes – contribute to their language and cultural development. In Romania, Germany sponsors joint economic development projects that should benefit everyone and not just members of the German minority. These programmatic elements have been common in most of the bilateral relations between Germany and the host states of German minorities.

Participants discussed how bilateral treaties have affected minorities. The general sense was that bilateral treaties are useful for settling border issues effectively. Confidence-building is enhanced because once boundary changes have been ruled out, the fear of secession is removed. Yet participants identified several difficult issues presented by these treaties. First, minorities have generally not participated directly in negotiating either the treaties or the implementation agreements. This resulted in significant criticism over how well these treaties address minorities' needs. There are concerns that some of the treaties, if interpreted restrictively, could result in the reduction of existing provisions for minority rights. Second, bilateral treaties with a wealthy or powerful kin state commonly include special provisions for co-nationals living as minorities in the state that may not benefit other members of society. These discrepancies can lead to resentment by both members of the majority and by other minorities. Third, the situation of minority groups without a kin state, such as Roma, can be overlooked and their rights ignored if too much emphasis is placed on the kin state as the guarantor of minority rights. Minorities with a kin state have the possibility of continually developing their culture through state institutions and a generally supportive environment. Therefore, several participants argued that groups without a kin state should have extra support to ensure that members have similar opportunities.

Hungarian–Romanian bilateral treaty

According to one participant, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR, the main political movement and party of this minority group) was opposed to the substance of the Hungarian–Romanian bilateral treaty concluded in 1996. Yet because the treaty confirmed the existing border, the perceived threat of secession was removed and many Romanians felt reassured. This provided an opportunity for confidence-building within Romania among the Hungarian minority and the Romanian majority. The increased solidarity contributed to the DAHR joining the ruling coalition government after the November 1996 elections. The new Romanian government then began a series of cooperative initiatives with the Hungarian government on a range of

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Ukranian community, Poland.

common issues, such as ecological, economic and security concerns. Within the first year there were 20 ministerial agreements between the two countries and there are now arrangements for joint military units, along the lines of the French/German model. In 1997, Romania's application for entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was rejected in the first round. The media then turned sharply against ethnic Hungarians, who were accused of using the climate of international concern to gain domestic 'concessions' on minority rights.

Role of 'kin states' and dilemmas of dual citizenship

Participants considered a number of issues relating to the role of the kin state in the lives of minorities abroad. The general assessment was that while the kin state can provide valuable resources and support for the ongoing development of the minority group, there is a risk that preferential treatment by the kin state can generate tensions. For example, a number of kin states allow 'their' minorities abroad to be eligible for citizenship or forms of residency that enable them to emigrate to, or work in, the kin country. Participants cited examples from Romania where ethnic Croats were able to work in Croatia and send money home to support their families. Several participants discussed what is frequently seen as the 'privileged' position of ethnic Germans throughout the region. A participant from Poland pointed out that ethnic Germans have the right to obtain confirmation of German citizenship by proving German ancestry. Consequently, many young Germans – usually male – have moved to Germany, creating a dilemma for their families who remain behind. This participant speculated that when Poland becomes a member of the EU, the resulting freedom of movement should mean that ethnic Germans will no longer be resented by others in Poland for their 'privilege' of a dual citizenship option.

Other forms of kin state support may also be problematic. One ethnic German participant pointed to the German government-funded hospital in her town. Its nursing home has mostly German residents who have a higher standard of living than most in the community; and while the hospital was built for the whole community, it is perceived as belonging to the Germans only. She argued that when the kin state effectively empowers one group on an ethnic basis, the resulting tensions may outweigh the benefits received. She recommended that it is better to put resources into empowering local initiatives on a non-ethnic basis so as to support overall development and ensure an equal standard of living for all.

On the other hand, there are also problems that can result when the kin state is poorer than the host state. It is common for the kin state to provide some of the cultural resources that minority communities living in other states use to maintain and develop their cultural identity, such as television and radio transmissions, textbooks, etc., in the minority group's language. Poor kin states may find that they do not have the financial means to provide these resources. For example, many minorities in Poland rely on broadcast transmissions from their kin state. The Belarussians do not benefit from this option because Belarus is not able to broadcast a signal to Poland. A number of participants expressed their concern that this problem could be exacerbated by EU accession. Because only a few will join, it is likely that an 'affluence gap' will open between states on either side of these frontiers. Participants argued that international attention and cooperation is needed to address poverty and the specific impact it will have on minority groups. In particular, there is a need to ensure that there are

adequate resources available for the survival and continual development of the cultural diversity that is Europe's heritage. When a minority group has no access to these resources – either because of financial constraints in the kin state or because the group does not have such a state – then it is important for the host state and other donors to provide assistance.

Minorities' self-organization

Governments are not the only actors when it comes to initiating transborder relations. Participants claimed that minority organizations have been instrumental in developing inter-state strategies and programmes to address their concerns. A number of examples concerned what the group began to describe as 'multi-state minorities', or those groups who form minorities in a number of different countries. Members of these types of groups have come together to offer mutual assistance. Croats from Austria, Hungary and Slovakia organize annual meetings which are held successively in the different communities involved. The Hungarian minorities that reside in seven countries of the region maintain strong networks, particularly along professional lines. Cooperative ties can be particularly important for minorities without a kin state. One participant gave the example of Pomaks in Bulgaria. This community is not officially recognized as a minority; Pomaks therefore face significant challenges in developing their cultural identity. Recently this has encouraged them to engage in grassroots-level development without government support. Pomaks in Greece can face similar obstacles and the two communities are now exploring transborder cooperation in the cultural sphere, organizing joint festivals and forming joint cultural organizations. In addition to cultural cooperation, many participants pointed to the important role of minorities working

Roma woman in camp outside of Sibiu, Romania.

together to promote awareness of their situation in international bodies. Coalitions between minorities from different states can be an effective strategy to ensure that decision-makers listen to minority concerns.

Multilateral cooperation between Slovak minorities

Békéscsaba is a town in southern Hungary that was once the largest Slovak town in the world. Today Slovaks form only 10 per cent of the population. Several years ago, they opened a Slovak cultural centre with funding support from the Dutch and Slovak governments. The centre hosts cultural events and holds international meetings of all the Slovak cultural associations in the region. Through these meetings, Slovak minorities have been able to identify ways to provide mutual support to each other. The institutionalized meetings provided by the centre have contributed significantly to the ongoing cultural development of these dispersed communities.

Another significant motivation for transborder cooperation has been the functional ties of trade and economic development. This has been particularly true for minorities who straddle the border between countries. One participant pointed to the example of the Banat region in southern Romania, where minorities have led the way in fostering transborder projects for regional development. Cases like these have fostered growing recognition of minorities in the development of 'Euroregions', which are increasingly seen as a key for integration. Another participant cautioned, however, that local people are sometimes resistant to the Euro-region concept. He pointed to the Polish–German border where, within living memory, there was bitter fighting. This historical legacy has meant that local people can be nervous about the intentions of people across the border and resentful of indications that minorities might be increasing their status or power. Nevertheless, most participants saw these transborder economic actions as positive and potentially beneficial for all the people of the area.

Formalizing relations: The Armenian community in Europe

As a result of their diaspora, there are Armenian communities throughout Europe. The pillars of their transborder cooperation have been the church, intellectuals, politicians and business leaders. Several years ago, Armenian businesspeople from Hungary and Romania – drawing inspiration from the bilateral treaty between their countries – decided to codify principles and mechanisms of their cooperation. Their intention was to enhance the legitimacy and discipline the nature of cooperation by concluding their own 'bilateral treaty'. Now other Armenian communities throughout Europe intend to enter what will effectively be a 'multilateral treaty' (this will not extend, however, to the North American diaspora or to Armenia itself). Their plan is to create a common chamber of commerce and a development bank. They believe that by creating parallel structures, they will gain advantages in relation to state institutions. Economic motivations have thus formed a strong incentive for functional cooperation between members of the same group living in different countries.

Participants were not able to identify as many examples of organized, transborder cooperation among members of different minority groups. The organizational energy of minorities is generally used to address – sometimes in coalition with other minorities – challenges presented by the government/majority society in their country or to cooperate with other members of their own group abroad. Nevertheless, there are some good examples of inter-ethnic, transborder cooperation. The Carpathian Foundation has sponsored several such projects. One brings together Ukrainians from Poland and Poles from Ukraine, both of whom experience problems with their respective majority community, to discuss ways of fostering peaceful coexistence and even active cooperation in the borderland area. One participant argued that in these types of inter-ethnic development projects, finance is not the only resource needed. Sometimes, technical assistance and training can be as important.

Zemplén public television station, Hungary

Zemplén is a town in Hungary on the Slovak and Ukrainian borders. In 1996, with support from the Carpathian Foundation, the regional public television station began broadcasting television programmes in different languages in order to reach all the minorities living within the 80 km broadcasting area. It was a controversial idea and the new 'national' programmes were seen as potentially very sensitive. They recruited a highly respected teacher experienced in multicultural issues to develop the first programmes which targeted the Slovak minority. Originally scheduled for only 20 minutes a month, they expanded quickly into weekly broadcasts. Because of the overwhelmingly positive response, the station soon began producing programmes in Ukrainian, German and Ruthenian for those minorities living in the region. It is now regarded as a station for the three-country area and is helping to overcome geographical and linguistic barriers to promote inter-ethnic understanding.

Conclusion

Participants agreed on the importance of inter-ethnic cooperation. A participant who had taken part in student exchanges argued for the importance of involving members of different groups in these programmes, both East-East and East-West. She believes that young people can be more open and that these opportunities allow stereotypes to break down and help to develop a reflexive self-identity. Another participant agreed, stressing that minorities must be active in fighting against ethno-nationalism in its many forms. There seemed to be general agreement that minorities can serve as a bridge between countries and peoples; they are therefore an asset in transborder cooperation and breaking down isolation between groups.

List of participants

Bulgaria

Ivan Alexandrov	Union of Vlachs in Bulgaria
Zeinep Asan	Inter-Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation
Zornitza Haralampieva	Ministry of Social Services
Kiril Ivanov	Ilinden United Macedonian Organization
Loutvi Mestan	Member of Parliament

Hungary

István Íjgyártó	Office for Hungarians Abroad
Anna Kerner	President of the Hungarian-German Cultural Committee
Matthias Sipiczki	Association of Slovaks in Hungary
Lajos Skrapits	Self-government of Croats in Hungary

Poland

Piotr Bajda	Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (*Co-organizer*)
Piotr Tyma	Ukrainian Union in Poland
Slawomir Lodzinski	Parliament Office for Analysis and Expertise
Eugeniusz Mironowicz	*Niwa*, a weekly journal of the Belarussian minority
Waldemar Piontek	Union of German Social and Cultural Organizations in Poland

Romania

Hannelore Baier	German Democratic Forum
István Haller	Liga Pro-Europa
Adelina Lozeanu	Department for Protection of National Minorities
Varujan Pambuccean	Leader of the Parliamentary Group of Ethnic Minorities
Tibor Szatmári	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania

Slovakia

István Batta	Coexistentia
Gertrud Greser	Karpatendeutscher Verein
Erik Lipták	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Department for National Minorities
Matus Miskuf	CSuS Czech Association in Slovakia
Alexander Musinka	Presov University

Catherine Barnes	Minority Rights Group International (*Co-organizer and Facilitator*)
Ilya Belkin	OSCE – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
Anna-Mária Bíró	Minority Rights Group International (*Co-organizer and Facilitator*)
Endre Borsos	Fund for the Development of the Carpathian Euroregion
Alessandro Missir	Delegation of the European Commission in Poland
Hugh Poulton	Researcher and Author

The views expressed in this Workshop Report represent a summary of the views of the individual participants and do not necessarily reflect those of MRG International or the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.

1   Agenda 2000 was issued in July 1997 by the European Commission. It sets out the terms and conditions under which candidate countries will be able to join the EU.

Minority Rights Group International

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization working to secure rights for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities.

We publish readable, concise and accurate Reports on the issues facing oppressed groups around the world. We also produce books, education and training materials, and MRG's 800-page *World Directory of Minorities*.

We work with the United Nations, among other international bodies, to increase awareness of minority rights, often in conjunction with our partner organizations. We also coordinate training on minority rights internationally and work with different communities to counter racism and prejudice.

MRG is funded by contributions from individuals and institutional donors, and from the sales of its Reports and other publications. However, we need further financial support if we are to continue to develop our important work of monitoring and informing on minority rights.

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Cover photo: (left) POMAK (Bulgarian Muslim) family sorting tobacco leaves in the kitchen of their home. MELANIE FRIEND/PANOS PICTURES
(Right): Roma woman in camp outside of Sibiu, Romania. MARK HAKANSSON/PANOS PICTURES