

Book Review



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**Cordell, K., Agarin, T., Osipov, A. (2013):
Institutional Legacies of Communism:
Change and Continuities in Minority
Protection. London: Routledge.**

**Agarin T., Cordell, K. (2016): Minority Rights
and Minority Protection in Europe. Lanham:
Rowman and Littlefield.**

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Two Gap-filling Books on Non-immigrant Minorities

In our book review, we present two books that deal internationally with a topic that is examined by literature regarding national minorities. Let's see the authors of the gap-filling work first. Timofey Agarin and Karl Cordell, researchers of the nationalities of post-communist states, have presented several publications. Agarin is an instructor at Queen's University in Belfast. His field of research is the social and institutional change in post-communist countries, with particular regard to the aspects of minority protection, migration and NGOs. His investigations primarily seek to demonstrate the impact of national identity, power relations and ethnic conflicts on the nation-state institutional system of the post-communist region. Cordell is a professor of political science at the University of Plymouth, an editor of the prestigious *Ethnopolitics* journal, published by the Association for the Study of Nationalities. In his research, he focuses on minority politics in Central - Eastern Europe, especially on the development of Polish-German relations. The fruit of the joint work of Agarin and Cordell is the two volumes that address the issues of European minority rights and protection of minorities and the survival and transformation of the anti-minority heritage of post-Communist countries

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(Agarin & Cordell 2016; Cordell & Agarin & Osipov, 2013). Osipov collaborated with them as a member of the international research team at the European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) when he published the book in 2013, dealing with the perspectives of European politics and society of ethnic diversity and autonomy.

National minorities in Central-Eastern Europe

In the last quarter of the 18th century, among the peoples of Central-Eastern Europe emerged a national revival process of historiography, i.e. the formation of modern nations in this area. The ethnic groups of the region stood at different levels of development regarding nation building, but one common point is that the so-called cultural nation concept had the most significant impact (Dobszay & Fonagy, 2013; Molnar, 2013; Romsics 2004).

World War I brought about a significant change in the lives of ethnic groups that had lived in a different empire (Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Russia, Osman Empire and German Empire) structures until then. Following the Paris Peace Treaties, the principles of Wilson were not fulfilled, and such states, considering themselves nation states (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, later known as Yugoslavia), arose which were again many or multi-national countries. However, the state borders were rearranged to bring new minority communities to life. The general characteristic of the history of the two world wars is the progressive geographical, institutional, demographic, and social development of the state forming nation, which following the world conflict, was also observed during the second communist regime. In countries under communist influence, Moscow, besides the false implications of internationalism, in fact in the spirit of the consolidation of the Communist power, was ready to recognise the primacy of the titular nations of the region (Pusztai & Markus, 2017). The rights of national minorities could only be exercised within the framework of the State party.

After the change of regime, the countries of the region were freed from communism, but in many respects, the party-state practice of minority restraint continued. The political nationalism of the Central - Eastern European states (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, etc.), which now gained independence, has set itself the goal of strengthening the dominant nation's position. The population of these countries still cannot be called homogeneous nation-states because of their ethnic-linguistic diversity. According to this approach, " to determine the nature of the state not only the ratio of majority and minority is important, but also the behaviour of the majority, political self-determination and state-building strategy." (Romsics, 2004).

The growing political nationalism of the independent post-communist countries has, in many cases, encountered intentions of minority and nationalist interests intensifying their voices. In many instances, the educational, linguistic and cultural needs of minorities have found themselves in the hostile atmosphere of the post-communist

countries which formulate state-nationalist goals. The EU accession has not solved the conflict between the state-forming majority and the minorities. Brussels was in favour of the success of integration and gave way to the interests of the majority nation.

The legacy of communism

Assessing the minority protection of post-communist EU Member States, Agarín and Cordell emphasise that in their case the prevention and management of minority conflicts did not succeed. It is understandable how the states, as candidates for EU membership, have raised the false apparitions of their enthusiastic commitment to minority protection while in reality, they were reluctant to meet the standards of the EU accession. The authors emphasise that despite the fundamental political and economic changes following the change of regime, many problems of minority protection have not been reassuringly tackled. The authors present two striking examples of minority policies in Slovakia and Ukraine to justify their claim. The fundamental feature of the Slovakian nationality policy is the limited nature of minority representation, as a result of which minorities have become victims of the nationalist state power as in other Central-Eastern European territories. Most of Slovakia's minority policy derives from the legally restrictive traditions of the Czechoslovak state, and the process of nation-state building undermined minority protection. It contradicts optimistic expert opinions according to which a democratic society automatically enforces minority rights without any external and internal pressure. The authors denounce this with Nedelsky's view that the disadvantaged politics of the Czechoslovak period defined the assessment of the minorities in Slovakia after the change of regime.

According to the authors, the legally restrictive legacy of the communist era and the growing state nationalism also put pressure on the minority of the Hungarians living in Slovakia which became independent in 1993. After Trianon, the Hungarian elite of Upper Hungary lost its leading role, and in Czechoslovakia, between the two world wars, the minority rights were granted only on paper. The period between 1945 and 1948 was even more unfavourable when Eduard Beneš led Czechoslovakia declared the collective guilt of the Hungarian and German nationalities. Following the communist takeover of 1948, there was also a change in minority policy. The then leadership tried to promote equality coming from a socialist idea, but Stalinism lasting until the middle of the 1950s did not give way to minority law enforcement. The Hungarian Workers Culture Association in Czechoslovakia (Csemadok), founded in 1949, could not pass the boundary set by the state party. Slovakian nationalism increased as a result of the Prague spring of 1968, which was also accompanied by anti-Hungarian attitudes. It encouraged Csemadok to put the minority policy demands besides cultural ones on its flag. After 1970, Csemadok came under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, which reduced the role of the Hungarian language in education.

In the years following the change of regime and the declaration of Slovak independence, Hungarians in Upper Hungary enjoyed the hope of enforcing the proper minority

protection rights. However, it soon became clear that harmonisation with the EU accession standards did not bring any fundamental change to the achievement of these rights. The authors say that it was a positive development when in 2003 the only tertiary education institution in Slovakia, the Selye Janos University, started its operation. At the same time, the proper political presence of the Hungarians was damaged, as their representatives could only be delegated to the Pozsony Parliament from the Hungarian districts. Although the Slovak constitution adopted in 2012 provides mother tongue education, however, language rights can be allowed only by the 20% territorial concentration of the given minority and under the condition that it does not violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Slovak state. The latter clauses allow arbitrary interpretation of minority rights. The authors conclude that there is considerable continuity between Communist Czechoslovakia and the practice of minority policy in Slovakia today.

Another example of the authors is Ukraine. The area of today's Ukraine has belonged to several states over the centuries. The Mongol-Tartar throne, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzecz Pospolita*), the Habsburg Empire and Poland had the most significant effect on the historical development of Western Ukrainian lands. In Dnieper Ukraine, lying east of Galicia and Bucovina, the will of Tsar Russia, which owned the Crimean Peninsula from 1783 until then under Turkish rule, is prevailed. The rise of the Russian population has become significant through the continuous invasion of the Tsar government: in addition to the Tartars, the number of Russians in the Crimea increased, the industries of the formerly almost uninhabited Southwestern Ukrainian regions and their developing agriculture attracted more and more Russian workers. This latter phenomenon was only enhanced by the industrialisation introduced in the Stalinist times. As a result of the deportation of the Tartars after World War II, the Crimea became populated by mostly Russians.

After the change of regime, independent Ukraine defined itself as a single nation-state. According to data from the first and only Ukrainian 2001 census, 77.8 percent of the population claimed to be Ukrainians, while the proportion of Russians was 17.3 percent. The census identified a total of 134 ethnic groups. The authors point out that a significant increase in the ratio of the Ukrainian population is explained by the change of identity of residents born in mixed marriages. In the Crimea, the Russians represented 58.3 percent of the population, 24.3 Ukrainians and 12 percent of Tartars. The authors emphasize that in an ethnically diverse Ukraine the minority issue can be interpreted in international and domestic political dimensions as well. According to the study, these two factors in Donbass and Crimea were closely linked. As a result, the minority issue soon became a victim of party politics and power struggles. While the voting dominance of the Ukrainian-dominated parties was mainly related to Western Ukraine, the political direction of Russian orientation was more prevalent in Eastern and South-Eastern Ukraine as well as in the Crimea. Taking into account that the study on Ukraine was born in 2013, we can say that the authors have foreseen the conflict in Crimea.

Independent Ukrainian governments have not developed a comprehensive political strategy on minority rights. In the Soviet era, minority politics belonged to the Communist Party of Ukraine, but after the change of regime, this issue was still waiting for being settled. The winners of the Orange Revolution in 2004 created a National Authority for Nationalities and Religions (2006), but this was withdrawn by the pro-Russian President Vladimir Yanukovich in 2010. The authors sadly note that the Orange Coalition led by Yushchenko and the Yanukovich Party of Regions followed the practice lasting since 1991, which deprived minority policy as a tool for current political battles. Rival parties used ethnic mobilisation to maintain their position of power, leading to political instability and social conflicts. Despite the domestic and international commitments governing the Ukrainian minority policy, there was no efficient mechanism for minority protection. As an example, Ukrainian law does not provide a precise legal definition for terms such as "people", "nationalities", "national minorities" or "indigenous peoples". This situation is plastically manifested in the case of the Crimean Tatars returning home in an increasing number since the 1990s. The peninsula currently occupying Russian occupation had autonomy guaranteed by the Ukrainian Constitution (1996) until 2014. Their most important political body (Medzlis) and their native minority status, however, were not recognized by the reigning power, because of the opposition of the local Russians and Ukrainians. The authors of the study argue that the disorder of the minority issue also significantly contributed to the emergence of social distrust of the political elite in power.

Minority policy after the political changes

In spite of earlier homogenization policies in Central –Eastern Europe, some smaller and larger or more or less scattered communities are now living for which cultural autonomy would be a suitable institutional framework for the preservation of their identity. Meanwhile, in the region, the characteristic of the nation-state model and the state socialist period continues to define the state and public institutions as the almost exclusive property of the dominant nation, which protects the positions of the majority nation against minority needs. Nevertheless, many countries in the region have been involved in the development of individual or community autonomy solutions following the regime change (mainly Estonia, Croatia, Kosovo, Latvia, Macedonia, Hungary, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine). Today, a significant group of countries in the region refers to an individual or cultural autonomy, at least regarding legislation or policy documents. Since the collapse of the Communist regime, Central - Eastern Europe has undergone a radical transformation on the social, political and economic levels. The process was accompanied by the disintegration of the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak States. The emergence of these states, sometimes in the midst of severe conflicts, was essential to a national community, as some of them became nation-states for the first time and for the first time gained sovereignty for decades.

The authors point out that, while the peoples of the region were liberated from the trans- or multinational alliance, and at the expense of much suffering they gained

independent statehood or regained their national sovereignty (Poland and Hungary), Western Europe entered a post-national era. This statement explains many contemporary problems.

A minority without a home country

The authors, who have previously presented the situation of the Roma in an independent volume, focus on the ethnic diversity of the post-Soviet states, the member states of the European Union and its candidate countries, and discusses the particular situation of the ethnic group without a home country, the "Roma question" in several chapters. For two decades the nations of the region have struggled with the severe victims of political and economic transformation, and the Roma suffered the transition period in all countries. As we have seen, the EU has advocated the building of the state, which has become the primary goal in the integration process against minority protection. The strong assimilation policy of the communist regime of the time did not ease the acceptance of the Roma as a full citizen. In many countries, the exclusion of the Roma from the scope of minority policy is practically continuous, and this process is presented carefully and convincingly by authors of the volume discussed, for example in Ukraine, the Roma are not listed as a minority.

The Roma are in fact a concept of multiple origin and composition. In some countries, the Roma speaking the majority language dominate, for example, in Hungary four-fifths of the Roma are Hungarian native speakers. The authors illustrate the process of violent linguistic assimilation in the 1990s by presenting a model for education in Slovakia, which was initiated because they saw the reason for the retardation of the Roma in the use of the Roma language. The authors consider that the introduction of the pre-school classes actively contributed to segregation and questioned the right of the Roma to their mother tongue. At the end of the chapter, the authors have strong criticism of post-communist minority politics, saying that instead of looking for opportunities that contribute to the Roma-language education, the state more comfortably follows its communist predecessors in implementing brutal assimilation policy. It is also a case study of how the conditions imposed by the EU forced Bulgaria to revise and enforce anti-discrimination laws. With this, the EU acknowledged that Roma minorities are the victims of discrimination in the countries that are waiting for accession. In the light of EU accession negotiations, the question of Roma integration was even more pronounced. The exclusion of the densest ethnic minority population in the region from the arena of political life and the lack of appropriate representative bodies led the issue to European levels. We must add that the only Roma representative in the European Parliament was delegated by Hungary. There have been success stories in this area on a regular basis, and the Roma inclusion is included in more and more European documents. The attitude of European legislation is well demonstrated by the fact that countries also define the concept of Roma communities legally. Austria, Greece, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden recognize the Roma as a national minority, while Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal refer to the Roma as an ethnic

minority. The Czech Republic uses both terms. Slovenia has a "Roma community", which is a political rather than a legal category. In Italy, the Roma are only recognized as a minority at a regional level, while the Estonian government defines Roma as a separate community. The Roma are also citizens of Member States where the decisive role in political life is in the majority, so it was almost impossible to speak about Roma integration in European societies. The authors also point out that Roma interest protection later did not focus on the strengthening of minority rights, but instead turned its focus on combating discrimination, which is against the formulation of community identity, however, Roma integration has not achieved breakthrough success. The authors point out that the ultimate reason for this is that the European Union lacks the competences of minority protection.

The books by Timofey Agarin and Karl Cordell, which are here presented, attempt to analyse the minority policy of post-communist countries in the light of a hushed-up area. The books have an important message about the European Union and its future. They argue that Europe has left the member state policy in favour of the interests of the nation-state majority as a priority against the norms of European values, namely that the "return to Europe" did not improve the minority situation in post-communist states. In fact, there is no agreement among the oldest member states of the European Union on the rights of minorities, either. The book focuses on post-communist Europe, not the whole continent (suggested by the title in a somewhat misleading way), in which each state is formally European but in content national. Agarin and Cordell say that European integration and normative convergence are non-discrimination based ethnic diversity that failed to cope with the national model of state consolidation, democratisation and European integration in the EU.

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