

European Integration and the consequences for regional development and minority rights

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Introduction

This report assesses relations of minorities with majorities in regional economy and local government, as well as the nature of nationalist politics, in the context of policies and processes set in by European integration. Its purpose is to revisit the original propositions of the EUROREG project in light of the case study findings and to discuss the findings in the three sub-groups of cases: minority-inhabited regions in old EU member states that are beneficiaries of structural funds, new EU member states from Central East and Southeast Europe where pre-accession regional development and institutional reforms strategies have been implemented, and border regions that have engaged in cross-border cooperation projects.

The present analysis is based on nine case study reports that cover the following minority-inhabited regions in old, new and recently acceded EU states: the Greek region of Thrace inhabited by Turkish Muslims, the Bulgarian districts of Smolyan and Khardzali (part of the South Central region) home to Turkish and Muslim minorities, the Slovenian region of Littoral-Krast home to a small Italian community, the Italian area of Friuli-Venezia Giulia inhabited by Slovenian communities, the Romanian region of Transylvania inhabited by Hungarians, and the Slovak region of Kosice also home to a Hungarian minority. Besides secondary literature, regional socioeconomic and other official reports, political and press material, each case study report also draws from approximately 33 semi-structured interviews conducted at the regional-local level with representatives of minorities and majorities (elected officials, community leaders, development officials, individuals engaging in development programs).¹

The aim of this project as it was originally set out was to study comparatively the effects of European integration and enlargement on the political-economic interests and identities of national majorities and ethnic minorities inhabiting regions near or across border areas in EU member states. It was posited that through regional economic and minority protection policies, the EU integration alters political and economic opportunities and constraints for ethnic minorities and national majorities. In this way, it potentially redefines forms of interest representation and collective identification historically characterized by attachment to an exclusive national-ethnic community.

EU integration was anticipated to bear an impact on minority-inhabited regions first, through its cohesion policy. The latter comprises structural funds to redress economic problems of less developed regions and to engage in cross-border co-operation (CBC) initiatives, as well as equivalent pre-accession funds and programs in the candidate states of CESE that are by now all full EU members. Structural funds, CBC and pre-accession funds, the significance of which has grown in the 1990s, are premised on enhancing regional competencies. They are largely pervaded by a functional logic with the goal of promoting integration in the European common market and are by no means specifically aimed at minorities. Drawing from a body of literature over the past ten years that explored and identified significant institutional, policy and political consequences of structural funds

¹ This research was carried out as part of the FP6 research project *Changing interests and identities in European border regions: EU policies, ethnic minorities and socio-political transformation in member states and accession countries* (FP6 # 506019).

implementation at the national and regional-local levels,² EUROREG sought to inquire into these specifically in the case of minority-inhabited regions.

EUROREG departed from the assumption that regional economic-institutional reforms undertaken in connection with EU cohesion policy and pre-accession strategy at a minimum unsettle established relations between regional ethnic minorities with states and national majorities, and they may have indirect and largely unintended effects on their patterns of political mobilization and local participation. Specifically in the context of EU enlargement in the ex-communist states for CESE, regional changes have been additionally contested by ethnic minority parties that emerged as important political actors after the transition to democracy. Such parties have claimed their legitimacy by professing to promote protection of human rights and minorities, which the EU incorporated among its political conditions for membership vis-à-vis the CESE candidate states. In this respect, EU accession of those states has also been assumed to specifically encourage or implicitly countenance multi-ethnic diversity and the ability of minorities to contest political representation at the national, regional and local levels. Therefore, on a comparative basis, we draw a distinction between old EU member-States on the one hand, and new members from Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe (CESEE), given that the two sets of countries have followed different trajectories of democratisation cum Europeanization.

Through regional economic and human rights/minority protection policies, EU integration was anticipated to expand opportunities for regional political mobilisation and/or cultural assertion of ethnic minorities, to trigger anew contestation with states and national majorities, but also to establish new possibilities for co-operation between them. The case study findings show a close interconnection between processes of regionalization and ethnic minority mobilization in the context of EU integration but not of the kind and in the direction anticipated by the original EUROREG questions and hypotheses.

Therefore, before discussing the findings of the case studies, some preliminary observations are in order regarding the aforementioned assumptions and propositions. At the outset, it must be noted that the original formulation of the research questions in terms of EU policy impact on regional changes and minority politics was somewhat misleading. In the first place, there has not been any clear EU approach to regionalisation while any EU policy on minority rights as such is virtually absent (the European Commission has tended to leave decisions on such matters in the hands of State elites). Regional institutional and administrative reforms, as well as state approaches to minorities, are influenced and shaped by a multiplicity of factors and conditions that largely emanate from the domestic level. The EUROREG research design was not suited to evaluating the relative importance of EU versus national-state level factors, neither was this of any central concern to the project.

In light of the case studies findings, regional economic restructuring and institutional, local government reforms are significantly linked to EU integration, but not in a top-down manner of unmediated policy impact emanating from the European down to the state and local levels. While in response to European market integration processes, state regional reforms and institutional changes are significantly shaped in different ways by nationally-based actors and factors. At the same time, through broadly defined normative and

² See for example, Hooghe, Liesbet, "Reconciling EU-Wide Policy and National Diversity", in Liesbet Hooghe (ed.), *Cohesion Policy and European Integration*, Oxford: University Press, 1996, pp.1-24 ; in the same volume see also Garry Marks, "Exploring and Explaining Variation in EU Cohesion Policy", pp.389-422 ; and Gary Marks, "Structural Policy and Multilevel Governance in the EC," in Alan W. Cafruny and Glenda G. Rosenthal (eds.), *The State of the European Community*, Volume 2, Essex, Longman, 1993, pp.391-410.

institutional blueprints, in tending to favour certain kinds of political and economic priorities, EU integration empowers some domestic political and social actors, without in any way imposing or mandating the latter. Take for example EU cohesion policy. Comprising structural funds and a variety of cross-border co-operation initiatives and pre-accession programs, such a policy is largely pervaded by functional economic priorities and stresses administrative efficiency, regional competencies and local mobilisation with the goal of enhancing production, development and market competitiveness.

In sum, EU structural policy, as well as a European-level regime of minority rights (not limited but not even mainly based on the EU), are important sources of such normative principles and precepts about institutional reform for 'good' governance, democracy and economic development. Yet, they do not in any way mandate specific kinds of national or regional reforms. In this respect, they are both part of a changing European opportunity structure for regional and territorially-based minorities, but also as carriers of particular local discourses about nation, citizenship and 'Europe'.

In assessing nationalism and the strategies employed by minorities, EUROREG has been specifically interested in the ways in which territory and territorial demands figure in minority politics of nationalism, as well as in their symbolic constructions of identity. Historically, the processes of consolidating national states in Europe to a large extent were driven by the aspiration to gain control over a specific territory. This was largely pursued through central government attempts to incorporate or accommodate ethnically, linguistically or religiously distinct populations into it. Competing claims over a specific territory have been most pronounced in border regions which are inhabited by more than one national or ethnic community. Presently, secessionist strategies and objectives are neither considered acceptable nor for most part pursued in Europe (exceptions notwithstanding). Nonetheless, the aspiration to ensure political representation of the community by seeking to establish some form of control over a specific territory and/or local government institutions remain pivotal aspects of most nationalist strategies promoted by subnational minorities, as our case studies of CESE states show.

1. Regional political economy in the context of European integration

Border areas, together with the frontiers that delimit them, comprise institutions and processes that have played a significant role in the formation of contemporary national states.³ Rarely remaining impermeable to external influences, they are sites where political loyalties and national-ethnic identities have been strongly pronounced but also most sharply contested. Diverse ethnic and religious communities have often resisted assimilation into the dominant nation. In Europe many minority communities have retained and even cultivated their political allegiances and cultural affinities to a national homeland outside or across the state border. In view of this, as expounded in Malcolm Anderson's important study, border regions have historically been a target of specific state policies and government attempts aimed at securing state frontier and territorial integrity, as well as consolidating central national authority over diverse ethnic-religious communities.⁴ In the context of the 'new Europe', however (both within the EU but also in candidate states), central government capacity to interfere in this regard in border regions, although still salient for national interests and identities, arguably tends to diminish.⁵

³ Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers – Territory and State Formation in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

⁴ Anderson, *Frontiers*, pp. 1-2.

⁵ Anderson, *Frontiers*, p. 4.

Often lying near or across state borders, minority-inhabited areas often comprise enclave, interface or external peripheries, zones historically characterised by conflict and highly sensitive for state sovereignty. While national consciousness has rarely been uniform in these areas, aspiration of the central state to instil homogeneity has been strongest, rendering these areas sites of competing ethno-national claims. The status of minority before and mainly after World War II has not been defined solely by international treaty commitments, inter-state relations and political priorities. Whether under state socialism or under a liberal market economy, national governments in Europe have employed state structures and regional policies to pursue assimilation of territorially concentrated minorities, to marginalise, or conversely, to devise various mechanisms for accommodating them.⁶ In minority regions, the territorial distribution of power between central and local levels, and the formation of administrative structures and government institutions, have been of cardinal importance. They have been instrumental for the demarcation of state boundaries and often highly contested with regard to the ability of the centre to establish control over national territory. In this sense, historical processes of nation-state building form legacies that thoroughly permeate contemporary territorial and administrative structures. At the same time, they bear a strong imprint on the workings and culture of local economy and government of border regions. This project departed from the assumption that both through market integration processes and specific policies EU integration potentially transforms such nationally formed local government structures of border regions with important implications for the politics of ethnic minorities and their relations with national majorities.

In light of the case study findings, and as already suggested in the introduction to this report, structural and pre-accession funds as well as CBC initiatives do not in themselves bear a decisive impact on national political-administrative structures, economic development strategies and subnational government of minority regions. Their role appears to be more important in some cases more than in others, and primarily in the less developed regions of old EU members, which have had a longer experience with implementation of such funds. In contrast, besides being of smaller pecuniary importance, pre-accession funds have had a short lifespan in the new EU members of CESE and therefore, their role at best appears so far to have been secondary. Structural funds though, are one component of **broader processes of regionalization** evident across the EUROREG country-cases, which must instead be understood as the main independent variable in this project. A trend of growing significance of regional economic development strategies and subnational political and administrative institutions, seems to define such processes, which have been underway across the old and new CESE member states of the EU under study. Even though they are not unidirectionally caused by any EU policy, such processes are inseparably linked to the context of EU integration.

Since the 1990s, post-communist restructuring, European integration and enlargement have reinforced a series of economic and institutional changes at the subnational level that are transforming the nature of border and minority-inhabited areas, as well as the interests and identities of communities inhabiting them. Driven largely by functional and economic imperatives, such changes are far from uniform or unidirectional. Regionally-specific policies and administrative-territorial reforms were already in vogue in the 1960s in Western Europe.⁷ These, however, were largely a component of central economic management and a mechanism for consolidating the nation-state.⁸ In the context of European integration such policies and reforms are seen to have gone hand in hand with greater regional assertion and

⁶ Stein Rokkan and Derek W. Urwin, 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' in Stein Rokkan and Derek W. Urwin (eds.), *Politics of Territorial Identity* (London: Sage 1982).

⁷ Anderson, *Frontiers*, pp. 113-114.

⁸ Keating, *The New Regionalism*, pp. 46-47.

economic mobilisation. In some cases, they have arguably reinforced a revival of ethnic-cultural identities in areas inhabited by historical minority nations and communities.⁹

In the context of economic restructuring, market integration and EU enlargement from the 1990s onwards, states in Central-East and Southeast Europe have also instituted a series of regional reforms and related policies. Post-communist restructuring and the creation of a European single market have made more acute the deep socioeconomic disparities of the less developed areas. With the exception of the Basque Country, the remaining eight minority-inhabited regions are characterized by low levels of socioeconomic development. Redistributive policies and measures on the part of national governments to redress these disparities have been limited due to macroeconomic constraints made imperative by convergence with the common market. In part, however, redressing such disparities has been incorporated as a goal in the EU's cohesion policy and pre-accession strategy. Already in the late 1980s following the Mediterranean enlargement, the EU undertook redistribution of development funds to deal with the large regional disparities of the less developed states of south Europe.¹⁰ Upholding the post-war model of social democracy and the principle of social cohesion, structural funds were a compensation for those regions and populations likely to be placed at a disadvantage in the competitive European common market.¹¹

Through assistance to disadvantaged regions to help them develop economically and converge with the European economy, cohesion policy was intended to contribute to the stabilisation and political normalisation in the newly democratised states of south Europe. Besides being a social counterpart to the European liberal project of economic deregulation and market integration, the underlying philosophy had analogies with the historical underpinnings of the EU as a whole: economic development and integration can challenge both physical borders and national boundaries that have historically been loci of national and ethnic antagonisms. From the second half of the 1990s onwards, pre-accession funds have increasingly been directed to the Associate Candidate Countries (ACC) and to the new EU member states of Central-East and Southeast Europe (CESE). Being largely pervaded by functional economic priorities, structural funds seek to enhance administrative efficiency and regional competencies with the goal of promoting production, development and market competitiveness. While by no means specifically aimed at territorially-concentrated minorities, they may had indirect and largely unintended effects, potentially influencing the workings of subnational structures, as well as patterns of political participation and interest representation in border regions.

A second set of regional changes evidenced across the EU and the ACC is the establishment or reform of regional-subnational institutions, reconfiguring in varying ways state territorial and administrative structures. In the ex-communist countries such reforms were in part a reaction to the legacy of entrenched centralisation under the former regime and a response to the call for democratising state structures by restoring powers and functions to regional-local levels of government.¹² In some cases like in Northern Ireland, devolution since the 1990s has been propelled by pressures to redress inter-communal tensions and encourage inter-communal cooperation. Furthermore, in some cases more than in others, impetus for subnational reform has also come from the EU regional policy. The latter has introduced pressures for the establishment or reform of regional-level institutions capable of effectively

⁹ Keating, *The New Regionalism*, pp.83-85; 75.

¹⁰ Loukas Tsoukalis, *The New European Economy – The Politics and Economics of Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 206.

¹¹ Liesbet Hooghe, 'Reconciling EU-Wide Policy and National Diversity', in Liesbet Hooghe (ed.), *Cohesion Policy and European Integration* (Oxford: University Press, 1996), p.5.

¹² Andrew Coulson, 'From Democratic Centralism to Local Democracy', in Andrew Coulson (ed.), *Local Government in Eastern Europe* (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1995), p. 16; Judy Batt, 'Introduction', Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk (eds.), *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 8.

managing structural funds in member states, as well as in the course of enlargement to the East.¹³ As beneficiaries of pre-accession funds such as PHARE, the candidate states of CESE have engaged in regional reforms to enhance planning and programming competencies of their subnational structures, largely in preparation for implementation of EU structural funds.¹⁴

To be sure, and as evidenced in the case study findings of EUROREG, the restructuring of the regional and local political economy in the EU does not suggest the emergence of territorial units along any specific model of regionalisation, let alone political decentralisation of sub-state structures, neither does the EU promote any such model. In the first place, the political connotations of the infamous principles of partnership and subsidiarity have receded in the scholarly literature. Premised on the involvement of subnational actors along with national authorities and the Commission, such principles were understood to imply a transfer of power from central to local-regional government¹⁵. In fact, in the context of enlargement to CESE, the EU approach has tended to underscore the need for speedy and efficient absorption of funds, placing now the emphasis on expanding regional administrative capacity rather than decentralisation.¹⁶ In this way, it is argued, it effectively promotes centralisation and the concentration of management responsibility in the hands of central government, at the expense of local-regional authorities.¹⁷

Whether through broader processes of market integration or through specific policies aimed at development, the EU significantly influences but does not in any way mandate specific institutional or policy changes in member states. This is even less warranted due to the fact that subnational reforms or development policy implementation are fundamentally mediated by domestic forces pertaining to patterns of party competition, elite support and other factors, and are also constrained by pre-existing structures and institutions. Whether and the extent to which European policies and processes influence or trigger domestic change depends on factors at the domestic level that may facilitate or conversely obstruct change: pre-existing domestic institutions, a country's organizational and policy-making culture, differential empowerment of national actors and learning (Risse et al. 2001: 2). Domestic actors utilize EU policies, rules and norms in order to underpin, justify and legitimate their pursuit of reforms (Vermeersch 2003: 4). They may do so as an opportunity to further their goals and interests, or they may come to redefine their interests and even identities in response to Europeanization (Risse et al. 2001: 11-12).

Regardless of the specificity of domestic context, studies broadly suggest that pressures for structural change and reforms within the EU context are characterized by a tendency to enhance local and regional institutions as arenas for interest articulation, as well as to promote a more participatory approach to local economic development (Fargion et al. 2006: 770). In this sense, regional changes pave the way for reorganization of local interests and potentially redefine opportunities for political participation and representation of local communities. At the same time, the technical skills often required to participate in

¹³ John Bachtler, Ruth Downes and Grzegorz Gorzelak, 'Introduction: Challenges of Transition for Regional Development', in John Bachtler et al. (eds.) *Transition, Cohesion and Regional Policy in Central and Eastern Europe* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), p. 6.

¹⁴ Michael Keating, 'Territorial Restructuring and European Integration', in Michael Keating and James Hughes (eds.) *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe* (Brussels: PIE- Peter Lang, 2003), p. 16.

¹⁵ Raffaella Y. Nanetti, 'EU Cohesion and Territorial Restructuring in the Member States', in Liesbet Hooghe (ed.), *Cohesion Policy and European Integration* (Oxford: University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ James Huges, Gwendolyn Sasse and Claire Gordon, *Europeanization and Regionalization in the EU's Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 139.

¹⁷ Keating, 'Territorial Restructuring', p. 21; James Hughes, Gwendolyn Sasse and Claire Gordon, 'EU Enlargement, Europeanisation and the Dynamics of Regionalisation in the CEECs', in Michael Keating and James Hughes (eds.) *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe* (Brussels: PIE- Peter Lang, 2003), p. 77.

development planning and decision-making may inhibit less organized and socially marginalized groups to engage in it (Fargion et al. 2006: 772). The purpose of this report is to explore the implications of such changes specifically at the local level and in border areas inhabited by ethnic minorities.

2. Discussion of findings

The case studies discussed in this section show that regional structural change and institutional and policy reforms promoted by national governments at the subnational level entail a distinct and unmistakable European dimension. Priorities and principles guiding EU pre-accession strategy and/or structural policy have become an important frame in which national political actors have anchored regional reform initiatives, and in reference to which debates about regionalisation and decentralisation have taken place.¹⁸ Irrespective of the intent and approach of EU or state authorities, domestic and local actors widely perceive the EU to be closely associated with partnership and subsidiarity.¹⁹ Some attribute to the latter a reform imperative in the direction of self-government and devolution of power, while others depict such principles through the lens of administrative decentralisation.²⁰ National regional reforms have faced greatest controversy in minority-inhabited areas. In some cases domestic actors put forth a functional and efficiency-driven form of regional reform, while others advocate ethnic regionalisation that takes into account historical divisions and ethnic-cultural fault lines existing within a state.²¹ In any case, it becomes apparent that the ongoing and pending nature of regional reforms potentially set the stage for local and minority actors to mobilise in order to contest and influence outcomes.

European integration processes also ‘enter into’ and penetrate the regional and local levels through its implicit or explicit promotion of values and general norms regarding ‘good’ governance and public administration. In this sense the implementation of EU structural policy may offer one (but not the only one) empirical context in which such diffusion can be observed and assessed. As recent studies argue, the implementation of structural funds promotes administrative capacity, and emphasizes economic development and planning. In short, it prioritizes the ‘efficient’ component of representation rather than the ‘identifying’ privileging the articulation of socioeconomic interests to the detriment of the reproduction of identities in local and regional politics.²² Recognition of cultural diversity though has increasingly been streamlined in regional development and structural funds implementation in response to concerns voiced by ethnic and regional minorities.²³

In contrast to political studies of regional political economy in EU frame, studies in sociology and anthropology have offered ethnographic and bottom-up, contextualized accounts of local politics and identity change in border regions within the EU, acknowledging the salience of such regions for nationalist contestation. Such studies have explored how local

¹⁸ Kataryna Wolczuk, ‘Identities, Regions and Europe’, in Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk (eds.), *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 204.

¹⁹ Hughes *et al.*, ‘EU Enlargement’, p. 81.

²⁰ Brigid Fowler, ‘Hungary: Patterns of Political Conflict over Territorial-Administrative Reform’, in Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk (eds.), *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 25-30; Martin Brusis, ‘Regionalisation in the Czech and Slovak Republics: Comparing the Influence of the European Union’, in Michael Keating and James Hughes (eds.) *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe* (Brussels: PIE- Peter Lang, 2003), p. 107.

²¹ Jan Bucek, ‘Balancing Functional and Ethnic Regionalisation: Lessons from Slovakia’, in M. Keating and J. Hughes (eds.) *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe* (Brussels: PIE- Peter Lang, 2003).

²² Valeria Fargion, Leonardo Morlino and Stefania Profeti, “Europeanisation and Territorial Representation in Italy”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (September 2006), pp. 757-783.

²³ Juan M. Delgado Morreira, “Cohesion and Citizenship in EU Cultural Policy”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 2000, pp. 449-470.

and ethnic communities in European border areas resist or conversely support various state and supranational initiatives to transform economic and institutional structures at the subnational level.²⁴ This project has sought to combine an analysis of structural and institutional change at the regional-local level with an qualitative assessment of bottom-up perceptions of ethnic-national identity and the ways in which it is redefined in relation to conceptions of 'Europe' and the EU. Subnational institutions acquire their character and quality not only due to central design, but also by virtue of the ways in which they are supported, accepted or resisted by local communities. In the frame of regional institutional and economic change, local and minority actors mobilise diverse understandings of 'Europe' and perceptions of the EU with regard to national and ethnic identity.²⁵

By understanding domestic regional changes and the politics of identity that they spark, we gain insight into national states' processes of internal restructuring, as well as patterns of minority mobilisation within the frame of European integration. 'Europe' can be seen as an agent of stability or change, of economic modernization and liberalism, or cultural preservation and multi-ethnic diversity. Locally generated notions and meanings of 'Europe' can facilitate or conversely obstruct legitimacy of local government, institutions or projects linked to the EU.

A. Regional restructuring and structural funds in minority regions of old EU states

Since the 1990s, national and/or regional governments in Thrace, Burgenland and Northern Ireland adopted regional policies and strategies that combined economic development objectives and institutional reforms with measures to redress ethnic issues. Indicative of such strategies is the fact that all three regions received a disproportionately large share of structural funds in comparison to other regions in their respective state, and in relation to the relative size of their population (i.e. for N. Ireland, see Case study report, p. 9). These new regional strategies a) emphasized regional economic development priorities, and b) sought to incorporate minorities and recognized cultural diversity both instrumentally to further their economic goals but also to redress ethnic and inter-communal tensions. National and regional authorities in Thrace, Burgenland and Northern Ireland adopted policies and measures to induce socioeconomic mobilization and accelerate development, together with attempts to liberalize and/or expand the rights of minorities inhabiting them. In Thrace and Burgenland, the recognition of cultural diversity is incorporated in regional economic strategies in an instrumental fashion as an asset and a resource that could yield development and promote cohesion in the poorer and disadvantage regions.

Findings show that in Burgenland, Thrace and Northern Ireland, the aforementioned changes have promoted some socioeconomic integration of minorities, the degree of which varies from case to case. Institutional reforms have contributed to expanding political participation of minorities in regional and prefecture government structures. At the same time, their political integration as such exists side by side with, and is constrained by, pre-existing structures of ethnic community structures and organization, which are loci from which a reassertion of cultural mobilization and nationalist politics spring. Minority integration in local socioeconomic structures for most part is taking place primarily by utilizing community-based structures and channels. Notably, regional changes appear to have contributed to a

²⁴ Thomas M. Wilson, and Hastings Donnan, "Territory, identity and the places in-between: Culture and power in European borderlands", in *Culture and Power at the Edges of the State*, Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds.), Verlag, Munster: LIT, 2005, pp. 1-30 ; Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk (eds.), *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, London: Frank Cass, 2002.

²⁵ Batt, 'Introduction', p. 10.

certain degree of de-nationalization or at least normalization of national and inter-communal relations. At the same time, with the possible exception of Croats in Burgenland, in no other case do we see the emergence of a cross-communal regional politics around development goals, as anticipated by the research hypotheses put forth in EUROREG.

Being part of the federated Austrian state, Burgenland has pursued an autonomous development strategy in the context of the country's integration in the EU in the 1990s, the opening of borders and the new economic opportunities that opened. As Burgenland already has a strong regional government, the changes in the regional political economy did not involve any institutional reforms towards decentralization, but primarily the reordering of existing administrative and political capacities, as well as economic resources in order to improve its development prospects. The size of EU structural funds has been relatively small in comparison to federal subsidies, and they contributed only as an additional incentive for Burgenland government to pursue economic relations across the border in Western Hungary. Overall, regionalization in Burgenland is defined by a shift towards a more territorial form of economic and cultural development, which enhanced opportunities for political participation and cultural mobilization of Hungarian, Roma and Croatian minorities, all three of which have asserted a distinct ethnic-cultural identity since the 1980s. At the same time, Hungarian, Croatian and Roma representatives have responded in variable ways employed different strategies of mobilization vis-à-vis the regional government's new territorial and economic development policy. The explanation for such differences must be sought in the diversity of their historic paths, organizational structures and legal situations, despite their common situation in the region. Unlike the Croats, the Hungarians and the Roma have not been incorporated into regional government institutions and economic strategies, neither have they mobilized to pursue EU-funded programs.

In the region of Thrace in the northeast part of Greece, a new regional development policy accompanied by institutional reforms to enhance local government but also expand regional administrative capacities to implement structural funds, have enhanced local political participation integration of the Turkish Muslim minority. The new regional development strategy in Thrace was also accompanied by reforms towards decentralization through the creation of prefecture self-government and the establishment of regional administration in the 1990s. Such reforms are not directly traceable to structural funds and the implementation of EU cohesion policy. Instead, these factors interacted with and were mediated by domestic political dynamics manifested in the growth of local support and cross-party consensus around subnational reforms that gradually developed after Greece's transition to democracy in 1974. EU structural funds did not motivate or in any way lead the government to adopt this new approach, yet they made it possible to put to practice a comprehensive policy of regional development and to firmly anchor the minority issue within it. Unlike in Austria, the political discourse around the new regional development strategy and decentralization reforms emphasized modernization and efficiency, as well as 'legal equality, equal citizenship' for the Turkish Muslim minority.

Notwithstanding their limitations, regional reforms have introduced a new logic in local politics guided by development priorities and democracy, and promoted greater local participation and political integration of Turkish Muslims. Nonetheless, joint majority-minority political initiatives on a regional-local basis remain rare. Regional economic and institutional changes have promoted some inter-communal cooperation but this is constrained by ongoing political separation along nationalist lines. Turkish and Greek nationalism remains salient among minority and majority actors, even though significantly moderated in the EU context. In such a context, new notions of self-determination on political-cultural rather than territorial grounds are clearly prioritized by many members of the Turkish Muslim minority.

Since the late 1980s – early 1990s, regional changes in Northern Ireland have been pursued with the goal of enhancing economic development but also with the purpose of alleviating strong inter-communal tensions between the Catholic nationalist minority (local majority) and the Protestant unionist majority (local minority). Following the Anglo-Irish Agreement of the mid-1980s, the issue regarding the aggrieved Catholic population was no longer equal rights; legislation in this direction had already been put in place since the 1960s under pressure from the European Court of Human Rights. Instead, the issue by the 1990s was the political, social and economic integration of Catholics that could put an end to the strong tensions with Protestant unionists. An accelerated policy of regional development, significantly, even if not decisively, assisted with EU structural funds, has been combined with institutional reforms to bring devolution to Northern Ireland. In the latter direction, the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 that put in place a devolved NI Assembly and Executive, with the former premised on a strong element of inter-communal consensus. It furthermore institutionalized the joint involvement of Britain and Ireland in resolving the NI communal tensions.

While the EU did not bring about the Anglo-Irish process, which was an inter-governmental initiative, the case study report questions whether the regional political and economic initiatives that it has involved could have been possible outside the frame of the EU. The EU has explicitly encouraged and supported this process of inter-communal rapprochement extending the transfer of development resources to the region beyond structural funds with the PEACE Program from the late 1990s until the present. Overall, while the role of Structural Funds in the development of Northern Ireland and minority-majority relations is limited, their symbolic importance is clearly greater. Structural Funds are used as a reference to highlight the incompetence of the British government or its lack of interest in assisting Northern Ireland. Pursued in the broader European context, and introducing institutions and practices of cooperation to boost Northern Ireland as part of an all-Ireland economic structure, regional development nonetheless appears to have benefited the population across community divides.

Demands and interests with regard to regional development in NI seem to converge between Catholic and Protestant communities, but this does not acquire any joint political expression. EU-funded development projects and economic activities such as PEACE have actually prompted greater mobilization among Catholics in comparison to Protestants. While intended to forge cooperation between the two communities, PEACE programs have invigorated socioeconomic mobilization primarily among Catholics, who, as a historically disadvantaged minority, it has developed strong community institutions and structures. While the reforms paved the way for cross-community power-sharing in the devolved government institutions, the Northern Irish Assembly remains deadlocked and suspended. Protestants largely perceive the reforms towards devolution as an act of abandonment by the UK government. While sectarian violence has subsided in NI, an ongoing radicalizing tendency and polarization is reflected in the increased electoral gains of radical over moderate political parties among both communities. Whether it is the suspension of devolution that promotes frustration and ignites radicalization, or vice versa, both sustain, even if in lower levels of intensity than in the past, the vicious cycle of nationalist polarization between the two communities.

With the exception of Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland, minority politics among the other regions under study do not project any demands for local government, let alone, territorial autonomy. Obviously, size here precludes this. In this respect, it is only the Basque Country that stands out; as a sizeable minority nation, it has asserted itself simultaneously as a region and as nation, and has mobilized both economically and politically

to contest broader political-institutional powers and autonomy vis-à-vis the Spanish centre in the context of European integration. As in other parts of Spain, historically the inability of central state structures to displace local institutions and practices, left the latter as dominant influences in shaping collective identity and interests at the regional level, and formed the basis for the formation of regional self-government.²⁶ In the BC the constitutional respect for ancient Basque law (the historical *fueros*), and the special arrangements of fiscal autonomy preserved in the BC and Navarre, together with a history of conflict with the central state, have been formative influences for contemporary Basque politics and identity, shaping the ways in which the region's leaders respond to EU integration.

B. Regional reforms and minority politics between post-communist transformation and EU enlargement

Similarly to the Mediterranean enlargement in the 1970s and 1980s, eastern enlargement in the 1990s has succeeded the democratic transitions in CESE states where EU integration has been seen as a way to assist political and economic development and the consolidation of their nascent institutions. By the mid-1990s, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia had applied for full membership in the EU, which launched the accession process towards the end of the decade. Because of the potentially destabilising role ethnic and national divisions played in the dissolution of communist regimes and the multi-ethnic federal states of the Soviet bloc, the EU introduced protection of minorities among the political criteria for membership. While respect for democracy, the rule of law and human rights had been recognised as fundamental values since the EU's origins, insistence on the protection of minorities was a new condition explicitly specified only in the context of enlargement to CESE in the 1990s²⁷ in departure from earlier waves of enlargement in the 1970s and 1980s. Such emphasis on human rights and minorities rights contributed to establishing a distinct political context for regional minority-majority relations in the former communist countries.

In the post-communist transition to democracy, and in response to pressures from minority mobilization, domestic elites in CESE countries adopted electoral rules and arrangements that institutionalised ethnic-based representation of minorities in spite of national opposition. The incorporation of ethnic parties in the national representation systems of post-communist states transformed them into key regional actors. It furthermore contributed to the ethnicisation of local government units and municipalities in regions where minorities are demographically concentrated. Ethnic minority parties have regularly used European arenas and drawn leverage from the minority protection regime to redress their grievances and exercise pressure domestically. The role of the EU accession process in promoting the political integration of minorities and in galvanizing their assertiveness, is noted in all three countries under study and primarily in Romania and Slovakia, while this is less noted in Bulgaria. The most glaring example of direct EU interference with domestic minority issues were the EU criticisms of the restrictive approach of the Meciar government in the 1990s towards the rights of Hungarian minority, which was accompanied by the prospect of suspending the accession process. Even though clearly the exception rather than the rule, such direct intervention was important in declaring the EU's countenance to minority protection and to sending a message to ethnic and national leaders in other countries too. Both in encouraging accommodation of ethnic demands and integration, and in catalyzing local and

²⁶ On this, see Siobhan Harty, "The Institutional Foundations of Substate National Movements", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 2, January 2001, pp. 190-210.

²⁷ De Witte, Bruno (2000): "Politics versus Law in the EU's Approach to Ethnic Minorities." Florence: European University Institute, Working Paper, Robert Schuman Center, No.2000/4.

regional economic and institutional changes, EU accession process enhanced political opportunities of Turkish and Hungarian minorities in the regions under study.

Regional reforms in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia had already begun after 1990 (and even before under the previous regime in attempts to restructure the centrally planned economy) in the context of their democratization. Yet, such reforms were clearly accelerated by the process of accession to the EU since the late 1990s with the goal of expanding administrative capacities and enhancing the ability of local and regional institutions to implement pre-accession funds. The creation of regional and other subnational entities to engage in development planning has not corresponded to any historical or predominantly minority inhabited areas but these have largely been delineated on abstract and statistical grounds. In fact, national governments in the three countries under study have actually sought to design new or reformed territorial entities and local institutions in ways that would dilute the demographic concentration of minorities. Nonetheless, in the context of ongoing and pending regional reforms of existing subnational institutions and territorial structures, minority actors and ethnic parties have contested and sought to influence outcomes.

Overall, pre-accession funds in the regions under study in Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria are not only of limited pecuniary importance but they are also perceived as such by local actors. The latter may partly be attributed to their recent vintage and to the fact that not enough time has passed for such funds to become established. Despite their marginal quality as such though, the case study reports also seem suggest that they have given some, even if limited, impulse to regional development strategies. Their relative importance in this respect may largely reflect the scarcity of central state resources, given that national governments at least in Romania and Bulgaria have been facing tight macroeconomic and financial constraints. Notwithstanding their marginal role, pre-accession funds and the administrative and regional reforms undertaken in relation to EU accession have made the EU somewhat more present, proximate and relevant to those segments of the local population which are in one way or another involved in these. EU (and non-EU) funded projects and development resources have also become more prominently present in regional institutions and local government as local or municipal councils make decisions about relevant projects, local administrative personnel is trained, and in some cases like in Bulgaria local departments of European integration have even been established.

While regional economic strategies appear to have a significant element of cross-communal and cross-party cooperation, at the same time, they are also shaped by strong inter-ethnic divisions. For example, the process of pursuing and implementing EU funded projects seems to exacerbate, or at least render more visible, inter-ethnic divisions. In all three countries, national majorities (who may be numerical minorities in some parts of the regions under study like in Khurdzali in Bulgaria, or in some municipalities of Transylvania) tend to be more actively mobilized, better endowed economically, and to have greater access to EU funds and regional economic resources in general. The reasons for such disparities most likely vary from country to country, but they can broadly be attributed to the privileged political and social-economic status that the dominant national group tends to have in the local and national structures of the state. An exception here are areas such as those found in Slovakia's Kosice region, which are territorially contiguous to Hungary and where Slovakia's Hungarians can access cross-border cooperation projects through their close connections and cooperation with Hungarians across the border.

In seeking to politically capitalize on the economic opportunities that EU funds may offer to their electorates, ethnic parties like the MRF, DAHR and SMK seek to mobilize the local minority population and to secure via political influence its access to resources. While this may somewhat correct skewed distribution of resources, it also tends to deepen divisions between ethnic minority and the dominant national group because it fosters political

favoritism and introduces an ethnic criterion in the development process in local government where minority parties are numerically and politically predominant. This tends to be strongly resented by the dominant national group. At the same time, some segments of the minority and their leaders tend to think that the greater political and territorial control they have, the better will be the chances for the ethnic community to access EU and other resources, as well as to improve community and local economic conditions. Such a view for example is shared by both radical and moderate Hungarians in Transylvania, who advocate the creation of Szeklerland as a distinct minority dominant region both as a political entity and for purposes of development planning and implementation.

While regional reforms have some times tended to move towards decentralization, like in Slovakia, the overall trend is one of ongoing centralization, which, however, has been contested by ethnic parties in variable degrees in all three countries under consideration here. Strong ethnic parties like the SMK, DAHR and the MRF, largely monopolize the minority vote both at the local and national level, and have been vocal advocates of some degree of regional decentralization or local government autonomy on the basis of ethnic community. If we are to characterize the intensity and degree of their demands for territorial and local government control, on the basis of the case study reports, the strongest claims in this direction appear to be advanced by Romanian Hungarians. Besides cultural and political autonomy, they also seek to bring about a constitutional redefinition of Romania from a nation-state to a multi-ethnic state. Somewhat less vocal but equally persistent demands for regional decentralization are projected by the SMK representing Hungarians in Slovakia. Such demands are also from time to time advocated by the MRF on behalf of Bulgaria's Turks, however, these have not been so consistent or prominent, nor have they been made in relation to a specific minority area or municipality in Bulgaria. In the other two countries on the other hand, such demands have been advanced in reference to specific minority inhabited areas, such as the Szeklerland in Romania and the *Komárno župa* in Slovakia.

These differences in the intensity of territorial politics of ethnic minorities in the three cases must be sought in the relations of ethnic parties with national political parties, in pre-existing structures and institutions, and in the relations of the minority with the so-called kin-state. For example, the Romanian case study report characterizes local social and government structures of the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority (or local majority) as 'parallel structures', suggesting a profound degree of pre-existing communal separation. Hungarian minority politics tends to be more radical and assertive also with respect to demands for cultural autonomy, language rights at the local level, and the establishment of minority specific educational institutions, which are not so extensive in the case of Bulgaria's Turks.

Notwithstanding differences in the extent of demands, in all countries minority leaders tend to advocate regional decentralization or local government autonomy by appealing to European integration, indicating an identification of such a goal with norms and principles promoted by (or perceived to be promoted by) the EU. Even more so, Hungarian community leaders in Romania view 'Europe' as a means to advance the quest of self government for their group, as the assertion of their separate national identity and of the need to shape government along linguistic lines remains their chief concern.

3. Cross-border cooperation and regional change

The declining salience of borders in the frame of European integration provides new opportunities and political/symbolic/identity contexts as a local 'minority' inhabiting a border area can reach out to its 'national homeland' or to national co-ethnics across the border. In the BC in Spain, EU INTERREG funds for cross-border cooperation prompted some leaders to

consider the pursuit of development projects with Basque communities living in France. Such projects have a pragmatic and economic rationale but it is possible that some Basque leaders may also envision them as a kind of nationalizing strategy to forge contacts with their co-ethnics and visualize a national community and region that crosses state borders within the EU.

In Slovenia, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, state independence and market transition, and subsequently integration in the EU (actual or aspiring) has transformed the political and economic opportunities for the Italian communities of Slovenia and Croatia. CBC programs in the Slovenian-Croatian areas bordering with Italy have played a role in expanding economic opportunities for minorities and fostering cooperation across the border. At the same time, Slovene Italians, who had previously depended on state supports, have not been able to adjust to the changing conditions of market economy. In the new European context, heightened levels of ethnic-cultural mobilisation and political assertion of their rights can be observed among Italian minorities in the newly independent states of former Yugoslavia, together with a discernible, albeit faint sense of belonging to Europe.

In the Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, EU integration processes have improved minority opportunities at the regional level, influenced majority/minority relations and promoted political-cultural mobilization of the Slovenophone minority itself. The impact of the EU must be understood in conjunction with the broader geopolitical changes in Europe after the end of the Cold War, as well as with domestic factors. Following Slovenia's independence and subsequently its integration in the EU, Italy instituted enhanced forms of legal protection of Slovenophones. A catalytic factor transforming their political and economic position has been the progressive loosening of the border with former Yugoslavia over the past twenty years, which normalised trans-border relations.

C. National-ethnic identity and conceptions of 'Europe'

Across the country cases in old and new EU member states, the predominance of ethnic and national identification is thoroughly affirmed. In those countries with either strong regional traditions or in historical areas, like in Transylvania for example, local and regional identity appears to emerge as important, while European identification is only peripheral and weak. EU integration promotes the assertion of ethnic identity among minorities, who tend to view it as an alternative external frame to protect their rights. The EU countenance of minority rights has fostered such a perception, which was already prevalent due to the fact that it is a multi-national entity. In some cases, the declining salience of borders in the context of EU integration enhances the sense of ethnic identification because it makes easier travel, work and generally contacts between a minority with the so-called 'kin state'. For instance this is the case among Hungarians in Slovakia and in Romania ; the integration of these countries in the EU have reinforced minority ties with its 'motherland' across the border. At the same time, the coexistence of different national and ethnic groups appears to foster a sense of relativism in one's ethnic-national identity as no group is considered to be dominant.

European identity may refer to at least two different albeit inter-related things: the development of a sense of belonging to Europe, or the emergence of a collective sense of what it means European.²⁸ Overall the findings of the case studies under consideration here have shown a weak sense of belonging to Europe but increasing awareness of the latter, as well as growing, albeit variable and contradictory perceptions of what Europe and being European mean. While European identity seems to have made little advance at the local and

²⁸ Medrano, Juan Diez and Paula Gutierrez, "Nested identities: national and European identity in Spain", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 5, September 2001, pp.753-778.

regional level in the cases under study, those individuals who are involved in regional development and are in contact with European institutions and rules project a clear and positive sense of belonging to Europe.

The relationship between ethnic/national identity and European identification can be summarised that while many would claim that people are aware of Europe, the level of identification with Europe remains weak, mostly because it is seen and felt irrelevant to their daily life. An exception here is a smaller number of respondents who are in a position to know about development assistance from the EU (and about the EU in general, such as development officials, political leaders, etc.) who are more likely to express a stronger awareness about 'Europe' as another layer of politics and identity, and for some even to claim a loose sense of European identity, which does not displace but is superimposed upon national-ethnic affinities.

In general, the great number of respondents projected a host of different conceptions of 'Europe' and what being European means, which for most part were positive. Dominant views defined 'Europe' as modern, advanced and developed society, either in material or cultural terms, and to represent democracy and stability, and being European was understood to mean being educated, developed, and generally civilized. The most distinctive view of 'Europe' projected by minority members is that of an external guarantor of human rights, security and protection of minorities, as a constraint to the nationalist inclinations of states and governments, as an escape from the nation-state and as a major factor that has contributed to attempts to redress ethnic tensions. In some cases, like in Thrace, minorities and majorities tend to project divergent views of 'Europe' and the EU: while the former emphasize cultural diversity, human rights and security, the latter tend to highlight democracy in the general sense of equality and equal opportunities, economic development as well as efficiency in governance as the main features.

Minority politics, regional mobilization and nationalism in the EU

The underlying purpose of EUROREG was to better understand the relationship between regional-local political economy, minorities, and European integration, and to contribute to the debate about the changing nature of nationalism and ethnic identity in the EU context. Scholars argue that intrusion of European integration processes in the delicate and tense dynamic between states, regions and minorities through pressures to give up powers, either upwards and/or devolving them downwards, can unleash anew national antagonisms (Scheinman 1977; Smith 1995; Newman 1996). From this perspective, political and economic restructuring brought about by EU integration is constrained and shaped by traditional national politics and entrenched ethnic cultures. Empowering and mobilising sub-national actors and minorities provokes opposition from national governments and re-nationalises majority-minority politics, reviving again the spectre of disintegration (Suleiman 1995).

Other studies, however, suggest that EU processes are not constrained by, but fundamentally transform the traditional and exclusive nationalist politics that have shaped relations between states, majorities and minorities. They argue that it empowers sub-national authorities and minorities but encourages them to engage in civic politics focusing on social issues, development and territorial local government rather than cultural purity and ethnic solidarity (Lynch 1996; McCall 1998). Underlying this debate is a broader theoretical question regarding the factors shaping minority politicisation: is it an expression of cultural identity and community solidarity, or does it transform and/or integrate in response to changing structural and economic conditions (see Connor 1994)? Do European processes of market integration transform pre-existing local traditions and ethnic-cultural identities and claims or is socioeconomic restructuring and mobilisation constrained by the latter?

Our case study findings support a growing understanding among scholars that nationalism is not fading but is qualitatively reconfigured in the new Europe.²⁹ Institutional and structural changes occurring in the context of European integration and enlargement transform opportunity structures for political-cultural objectives and nationalist pursuits of minorities and majorities. They alter nationalist strategies and pave the way for a qualitative re-conceptualization of national and community identity, autonomy and citizenship. By understanding domestic regional changes, ethnic nationalism and the politics of identity that they spark, we gain insight into national states' processes of internal restructuring, as well as patterns of minority mobilisation within the frame of European integration. Understanding and explaining the diverse political manifestations and strategies of ethnic nationalism also have important implications for the ways in which minority demands can be accommodated and managed at the national and regional level. They no less have implications for the viability and orientation of the European project, its scope as well as for the forms of cultural protection and social intervention necessary for its success.

Given that the case studies on which EUROREG has focused vary considerably along a variety of grounds, it is not easy to draw broad comparative conclusions about the impact of European integration on regional mobilization, development and minority politics. Regionalization does not mean decentralization or autonomous regional mobilization. The latter is mainly observed in states with strong pre-existing regional entities and in federal states like Austria, while other states like in Greece thoroughly lack any regional tradition or institutional structure to enable autonomous and bottom mobilization. Across the board, the salience of regional economic and local government institutions and politics has been growing (in some cases more than in others), at the same time that minority cultural and political mobilization has also been galvanized within the frame of EU integration. These two kind of processes are closely interlinked in minority-inhabited areas.

To begin with, whether ethnic minorities integrate in the regional economic and subnational government structures or conversely, seek to establish control over the latter on ethnic community grounds is a matter of size. The latter is obviously out of the question for small minorities like the Italians of Slovenia, the Croats and Hungarians of Austria's Burgenland, and even for the Turkish Muslims of Thrace (who, however, are a majority in one prefecture) and the Slovephones of Italy. For these minorities, regionalization processes enhance their integration in local government and/or regional structures, and in cases of cross-border cooperation, they promote their integration in economic and social activities that may extent beyond the borders of the state, in which they live. The specific nature and extent of their participation is significantly shaped by pre-existing cultural and community institutions, state policies and relations with kin-state across the border. In all these cases, we also observe growing cultural assertion and identity mobilization of minorities. In Northern Ireland on the other hand, the aspiration for territorial and community control of local-regional government among the nationalist segments of the Catholic community remains important. While regional development has fostered considerable integration of Catholics, inter-communal divisions remain profound and block the functioning of the devolved government that is designed on the premise of bi-communal participation. One could suggest that the legacy of inter-communal violence must bear an influence, in having put in place sharp boundaries that preclude trust and significant cooperation between the two communities.

In the ex-communist states of Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, the processes of regionalization within EU accession and integration frame are being contested by strong ethnic minority parties. These parties manifest the successful accommodation and political

²⁹ Zsuzsa Csargo and James M. Goldgeier, "Nationalist Strategies and European Integration", *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2004, p.22.

integration of minorities in the post-communist period, but they also in turn promote a thorough institutionalisation of ethnic-based representation, which is also pursued in the context of regional and territorial restructuring in CESE states. While the ethnic politics of sizeable minorities in these countries do not in any way threaten state integrity, at the same time, they contest and in some cases seek to modify state structures from within.