

Policy report on the Austrian region of Burgenland

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Burgenland – a multilingual border region in Austria

The province of Burgenland, located on the Austrian side of the border between Austria and Hungary and Slovakia, is a multilingual region. Three minority groups living the area are recognised as such by Austrian legislation and profit from the protection of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and of the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Croats, Hungarians and Roma. While minority rights for Croats were already guaranteed by the Austrian State treaty from 1955, the Hungarian minority was granted official status in 1976 and Roma were only recognised as a minority by the Austrian state in 1993. According to the census of 2001 out of a total population of 277,500, approximately 16,300 persons in Burgenland mentioned Burgenland-Croatian as their main language of communication; 6,650 claimed to speak Hungarian and 303 Roman, the Burgenland Romani variety. Approximately 3,500 marked Croatian¹ as their main language in the 2001 census and 8,400 marked other languages. This makes Burgenland a relatively multilingual region. The respective minority organisations estimate the number of speakers of Croatian, Hungarian and Romani as significantly higher than the census indicates. With the exception of Romani, where due to ethnic discrimination and social stigmatisation and it is only a recent development, that people dare indicate their linguistic affiliation to Romanes, the statistics show a decline not only in the number of speakers of minority languages but also significant generational differences indicating that the younger generations gradually switch to German. The situation of the three minorities differs substantially: Burgenland-Croatian is also spoken in some neighbouring areas in Hungary and Slovakia, but figures as a minority language in all three countries, Burgenland also has no direct border with Croatia. Burgenland-Croatian was codified as a separate variety of the Croatian language. The Hungarian speaking areas are adjacent to the kin state Hungary. The increasing international recognition of the Roma gradually helps to improve the condition of this socially most disadvantaged group. Since the 1980s dynamic in minority politics as civil society initiatives and social movements claim minority rights outside of the majority political parties. Nevertheless, the Catholic

¹Although the distinction between Burgenland-Croatian and Croatian gives some indication on minority affiliation or migration background, the figure is not conclusive as a distinction between Burgenland-Croatian and Croatian was only introduced with the 2001 census. It was contested by the Croatian organisations with the argument that the self-reference term is usually Croatian.

church and the traditional parties still play a significant role. The complex geographical situation, the scattered settlements that are home to the minority populations and their long concentration in the agricultural sector hindered a more centralised minority structure. The Dorfgemeinschaft is still an important basis of social organisation of minority activities.

Burgenland's economically marginal and difficult economic situation has given rise to substantial emigration, within Austria mainly towards the capital city of Vienna. The development of the past two decades has disenclaved Burgenland from a position on the periphery of Western Europe to a region in a more central position. Until the late 1980s Burgenland's long external border with Hungary and with Slovakia was part of Iron Curtain, a border between two different political, economic and ideological systems, a quasi hermetical border. The fall of the Iron Curtain has made cross-border contacts on a larger scale possible. Austria's accession to the EU in 1995 was a further milestone: with the acknowledgement of the EU objective 1 status and the large Interreg programmes Burgenland became Austria's largest receiver of EU regional funds. Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004, next step in European integration, will result in the lifting of border controls when Hungary will have joined the Schengen agreement, a step planned for 2007. Fostering cross-border activities and multilingualism have become an important part of the official discourse on Burgenland's economic and political situation.

In the early 1990s question of interethnic relations and intercultural communication moved to the top of the agenda with the disintegration of larger political units and the outbreak of ethnic tensions. Especially the war in former Yugoslavia, the presence of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and the bomb attack in 1995 on the Roma settlement near Oberwart, in which four inhabitants were killed, made the Burgenland authorities more aware of the pressing need to act. A new school law was drafted which improves the status of the minority languages and which makes access to bi- or multilingual education possible throughout the whole province. In 2000 bilingual topographic signs were posed in 47 municipalities, half a century after this right had been guaranteed in the State treaty.

The EUROREG study on Austria's southern region Burgenland

Within the overall aim of the EUROREG project of examining whether regional and minority rights changed in the context of European integration, the specific focus of the study on the situation of multilingual and multinational Burgenland was on the political and cultural meanings constituting the Austrian border. The political changes in the last two decades changed the meaning of the border and 'dis-enclaved' the region of Burgenland from its marginal position. The main research questions that were addressed with regards to this case study were:

- 1) How does the reorientation of the regional government's economic development policy from the national to a larger European space affect institutional changes in the field of minority policy?
- 2) Do these cultural strategies also entail new structural opportunities for the region's minorities?

In this report we present the main findings of the case study which confirm that the process of European integration has led to changes in the field of minority policy in the region. Our findings indicate that especially the opening of the border and the 'relocation' of the Burgenland from the periphery to a more central position has had a

positive effect in the sense that cultural diversity and multilingualism are increasingly seen as an important potential for the region. Also the European human rights instruments, the Council of Europe's Charter on Regional and Minority Languages as well as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, have in particular a considerable impact on the improvement of the situation of the Roma in the province. Minorities could profit from structural funding, but the disparities between rural areas – where minorities often settle – and regional subcentres are still considerable.

Research was based on an extensive search of secondary sources (academic publications and studies, policy documents, media texts, political speeches) and on a series of qualitative interviews carried out mainly in 2005, in 2007 some complementary talks were held.

Main findings

Being part of Austria's federal state, the regional government of Burgenland has pursued an autonomous development strategy in the context of the country's integration in the EU in the 1990s, and the opening of borders and the new economic opportunities that opened. Departing from earlier policies aimed at assimilation and/or exclusion of minorities, such a strategy has been accompanied by recognition and promotion of its cultural diversity stemming from the presence of autochthonous Croatian, Hungarian and Roma minorities. It has also sought to integrate them in the region's economy and institutions. This new approach has gone hand in hand with liberalization of minority rights and abolition of restrictions to the latter after 1988: Topographic signs in the minority language were set up in 2000. The new school law foresees the possibility of bilingual schooling in German and in all three minority languages throughout the whole territory of Burgenland. Mainly for Hungarian this possibility is increasingly also seized by parents, who do not speak the minority language(s). This re-orientation can be seen as an 'intercultural turn' that reflects a 'post-national idea' and projects an image of the region defined by openness and a cosmopolitan culture.

In Burgenland, the autochthonous Croat, Hungarian and Roma minorities have responded very differently to the regional government's new territorial and economic development policy that strategically promotes cultural diversity. All three groups have asserted a distinct ethnic-cultural identity since the 1980s. Unlike the Croats, the Hungarians and the Roma have not actively been incorporated into regional government institutions and economic strategies, neither they figure as applicants in EU-funded programs. The opening of the border with Hungary triggered cultural reassertion of Burgenland's Hungarians and increased the utility of Hungarian language in the region's economic relations across the border. However, the widely dispersed and internally divided Hungarian population has not made use of this to press for linguistic rights and/or to integrate in the regional government structures. Similarly, despite its cultural mobilization, the Roma population has weak political organization and has not integrated in the region's institutions and political parties.

In contrast, the autochthonous Croat population has responded positively to the opportunities that opened with Burgenland's new regional strategy to integrate in the region's government and economic structures. In the 1980s, a new generation of Croatian leaders and activists in Burgenland challenged the German assimilation approach of the older generation and began to assert its rights as a distinct national-cultural community. Reflecting the minority's political integration until then, but also

its main source of internal fragmentation was the division between those affiliated with the Socialist party (SP) and those supporting the conservative VP. The constitution of the Advisory Council for the Croatian nationality in 1993 was an attempt to overcome such internal divisions and reflected the assertion of a distinct national identity. The federal government's decision in 2000 to install bilingual topographic signs in forty seven villages in Burgenland was the outcome of the cultural struggles since the 1980s and 1990s. The same year, the newly SP-elected regional governor of Burgenland made the Chairman of the Croatian Advisory Council his political secretary.

In sum, the responses of the different minority groups and the degree in which they adjust to the regional changes in Burgenland vary depending on their different historical experiences, organizational structures and legal situations. Croats utilized the opportunity to integrate in regional government institutions and benefit from the symbolic recognition of cultural diversity. This has been facilitated by their pre-existing political organization and close ties with Austria's two main political parties. Even though responsible for intra-communal divisions among Croats, their links with political parties have facilitated since the 1990s their access to power and their successful incorporation in regional development strategies. Well-integrated in and closely associated with Burgenland's government institutions, autochthonous Croatian elites share with the Austrian population the territorial economic objectives of regional policy, and have had greater access to EU resources. Croatian-run organizations have been beneficiaries of EU-funded projects.

In the perspective of overcoming assimilationist and ethnicizing policies and of embracing a post-national diversity paradigm, the most interesting initiatives are the activities of the multilingual and multicultural associations that have developed in each of the three subregions of the Burgenland. All three cultural centres, OHO (Oberwart) in the south, KUGA (Groß Warasdorf) in the centre region and Cszelly Mühle (Oslip) in the north, have developed out of independent civil society initiatives that arose from the social movements of the 1970s/80s. All three centres can attract diverse audiences and are especially important in addressing the young. Although they mainly focus on cultural activities on a non-ethnic basis and on education, they could successfully compete for EU structural funding and qualify as partners in different EU programmes.

European integration, new border situation

The eight decades following the establishment of the Trianon borders have drawn a clear dividing line between border communities in Hungary and in Austria. The fact that the borders with Hungary and Slovakia, the so called Iron Curtain, had for four decades the connotation of a practically impermeable separation between two ideologically different and economically incompatible systems, has made collective memory about a shared past in the region very vague and remote. The less than twenty years that have elapsed since the end of the two block logic in Europe and the opening of the border are still short in comparison. The socio-political transformations since 1989 have in some sense relocated Burgenland in a more central place on the European map as Burgenland made a transition from a complete dead-end position along a sealed border to a transit region in the core of the expanding European and EU space.

Nevertheless, the geo-political redefinition of the border from a Cold War to a

Schengen border has contributed to the still strong feeling that the border has not disappeared and that there is some apprehension of the 'other' on the other side. There was in fact a kind of inversion of the connotation of the border: The Iron Curtain from the Burgenland perspective deprived citizens of the Eastern block from the right of free circulation, the border was so to say 'on the other side'. Now the Schengen border is often conceived as a border that protects from potentially threatening migration, the border has moved to the Burgenland side. The Austrian military forces responsible together with the police forces for the border control have a permanent and visible presence all along the border line. Although official cross-border contacts have increased significantly, the border is still present in daily life and personal cross-border contacts have not developed sufficiently. The opening of the borders has no doubt had a major impact on redesigning regional minority and language policies and on the public opinion with regards to the usefulness of language learning and of making the regions multilingual and multicultural character more visible. Still, there is a long way to go and confidence building measures that involve citizens, especially young people, on either side of the border in concrete projects and activities are needed to bring cross-border cooperation from a more abstract political level closer to the citizens.

Another transborder perspective is also opening up with the Balkan region approaching the EU. Although Burgenland does not have a common border with Croatia, the common language with the Balkan space offers possibilities of cooperation interesting for both sides.

Structural questions

The Burgenland has traditionally been a region with a weak economy, an important labour migration and a high percentage of commuters who travel on a weekly or daily basis to Vienna or to Graz. The three minorities are still largely represented in small villages in the primary sector. The divide between the province capital Eisenstadt, the local subcentres on the one hand and small villages on the other is noticeable. When Austria joined the EU in 1994, Burgenland became the largest receiver of EU funds in the country. During the second period of the objective 1 funding (2000-2006), counterbalancing regional inequalities and increasing the competitiveness of medium and small enterprises were the main objectives. In the framework of the LEADER and the INTERREG IIA and PHARE budget lines cross-border projects with neighbouring regions in Hungary could trigger a new dynamic in the already since 1992 existing regional cross-border structures. In 1998 the EUREGIO West/Nyugat Pannonia was created bringing together Burgenland and Western Hungarian regions to discuss the economic, social and cultural questions of the area and to propose concrete projects. The opening of the border and the intensification of cross-border cooperation allow some of the villages which are cut off from the Austrian transport axes to reorientate themselves towards the regional subcentres in Hungary which used to be pivotal points for the region before the Iron Curtain. The bilingualism which reigned until 1948 on both sides of the border becomes an attractive option again. Also the Croatian minority has a role to fulfil in cross-border relations as Croatian is also spoken on either side of the border with Hungary and with Slovakia.

Structural funding gave a boost to the economy and also to self confidence, attracted small business and given rise to a number of projects in different sectors. Smaller associations and organisations (municipalities and others) have considerable

difficulties in accessing the EU programmes. This is not only due to lack of information but there is above all considerable fear of being caught in ventures too big for small bodies and of not being able to meet the complication administrative demands. Minorities as well as the growing number of culturally diverse initiatives are rather in the field of civil society and of NGOs. Only very few of them could actually profit directly from EU funding in projects in which they were the main project executing organisation.

Human rights, minority protection and cultural issues

In the past minority language speakers were stigmatized in a double sense as speakers of a language with low prestige, an archaic (rural, backward) code that was a kind of non-language, a dialect, and they were seen as speakers of a 'deficient' German, a German with an accent. Also the fact that the Burgenland minority languages were associated with the Eastern block, made them figure low on the linguistic market and unattractive for learners. The strong tendencies to abandon the minority languages, or reduce their use to the strictly private domain, have not been reversed according to the last census, but there is some reason for guarded optimism. The number of children enrolled for bilingual education or for learning Hungarian, Croatian or Romani as a subject has been rising in the past years. Today an increasing number of German speaking parents enrol their children for bilingual school. New school laws that cater for mobility and allow for bilingual classes and learning of the Burgenland minority languages throughout the whole province have adapted the historical territorial minority laws to the new social patterns. Also for 'weekend-Burgenlanders' whose children attend school and kindergarten in Vienna initiatives for bilingual education and language learning exist. Since 1992 Croatian and Hungarian languages figure as medium of instruction in the Panonian secondary school. The University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) in the province's capital Eisenstadt offers special courses for all students in the regional and minority languages. Despite of this enlarged language offer, at the shift from primary school to secondary school many children still abandon learning a minority language. Another problem is the lack of skilled teachers for bilingual education and a lack in appropriate teaching materials. Although the University of Graz has in the framework of the Romani project at the department of linguistics contributed substantially to the development of Romani, much remains to be done. The non-ethnicizing school policies, that do not couple access to minority languages with a principle of declaration of ethnic affiliation, have already proven to be a success. Increasing cross-border activities and the fact that Hungarian has already become an official EU language and that Croatian opens access to an economically interesting area, has stimulated a more general interest in the minority languages. It is for Romani that specific efforts are needed.

In other domains than school and language learning, additional efforts are necessary, to create a language friendly atmosphere likely to stimulate a more widespread bi- and multilingualism. E.g. the representation of the minority languages in the media is far from satisfactory. Programmes in the public service station are only marginal and the quadrilingual private radio station had to be closed down after the government stopped all subsidies after the year 2000.

Despite the laws that allow for the use of minority languages in administration since 1987 and the bilingual signs since 2000, the visibility of the minority and cross border languages still remains too low. Crossing the border into Hungary shows that German is much more visible in Hungary than Hungarian in Austria. What was in the

beginning probably mainly meant for stimulating shopping tourism in the border area, has the potential of linking with the bilingual traditions of the region in the pre-Iron-Curtain period. The notion that linguistic diversity is a feature that characterizes European identity which was e.g. expressed in the Year of Languages in Europe in 2001, has some impact on the status and prestige of the minority languages in the Burgenland.

As language policy indicates, there is a certain reorientation from a policy of assimilation coupled with a scheme of minority protection to a policy of cultural diversity. How much of this change can be directly attributed to EU interventions is difficult to say. The situation of the different minorities in Burgenland has changed significantly over the past two decades, the opening of the border, the regional structural readjustments and the more general awareness for the advantages of multilingualism have contributed to a more positive attitude towards the Burgenland minorities.

Policy recommendations

Following the findings of our case study, we would like to present the following policy recommendations:

As regards structural funding and (economic) regional development

Making EU funding schemes more easily accessible for smaller project initiatives is a precondition the enhanced participation of minority groupings, of smaller rural communes with a high percentage of minority populations and for NGOs and civil society initiatives active in the field of intercultural communication,

- part of the overall budget could be earmarked for such smaller NGO ventures
- provide accompanying measures and counselling for the planning, initiation, monitoring and evaluation of such small projects
- foresee some support (technical and financial) to compensate for the additional expenses and costs due to multilingual project management
- specifically encourage all development initiatives in marginalized remote areas not well connected to the transport infrastructure
- make projects which involve minorities and minorities in a common activity more visible that they can serve as examples of good practice.

As regards political and cultural aspects

- **Fostering cross-border and translocal cooperation** means valorizing the bi- or multilingual and intercultural competences of minorities as cultural capital. The participation of Hungary and Slovakia in the Schengen space and eventually also in the common Euro currency space, will contribute to anchor socially and culturally the more permeable nature of the border. The potential of Hungarian and Croatian in cross-border developments will become more obvious. Nevertheless, in the mean time,
- facilitate not only cross-border cooperation on a regional level, but also make the physical border crossing in smaller locations situated away from the bigger transport axes possible;
- invest to reactivate the old cross-border infrastructure as streets and paths that linked neighbouring villages on either side of the border to allow rapprochement in

- daily life;
- accompany the shift of the Schengen border from the Austro-Hungarian to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border with ample public information to encourage citizens to grasp the new opportunities arising from this new step in European integration;
 - allow in the field of education for cross-border cooperation beyond the field of language learning already covered by Socrates and similar programmes (e.g. opening of common bilingual schools in the border region).

Design and implement a comprehensive language policy plan for promoting regional multilingualism in a cross-border dimension. The plan should integrate minority languages, cross-border languages, languages of migration present in the region and 'foreign' languages. The aim of the plan is to valorize and strengthen the linguistic cultural capital already present in the view of realizing individual and social multilingualism as an economic and cultural resource. Elements that form part of the language plan:

- create a language resource centre (in cooperation with universities and other institutions) to coordinate and implement the plan and to function as a service point for all (language and translation hotline, linguistic documentation and database ...)
- make bi- and multilingual education available throughout the region on all levels (kindergarten, primary and secondary school, professional education, tertiary education, adult education); foster language learning also outside school (especially innovative approaches like learning partnerships in 'tandem learning', language tourism offers ...); offer on-the-job training for teachers to qualify for bilingual education
- support enterprises, institutions and organisations in designing an implementing company language plan which fosters multilingualism on all levels (including advertising, PR, on-the-job training ...)
- make multilingual competencies an asset in job offers (beginning with public services)
- promote general social language and cultural competence as a factor for stimulating cultural and creative economy in the view of generating growth and the creation of job opportunities
- make the multilingual character of the region visible in all kinds of inscriptions and signs in the public space as well as in the regional media
- promote multilingualism as a constitutive feature of the regional specificity and as a key factor in the development of tourism, cultural and creative industries.

Human rights, minority protection, cultural diversity

2008, the EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue, will offer a good occasion of emphasising intercultural dialogue in the region as this EU activity will also focus on encouraging the mobilisation of civil society and actors at local levels. Culture, education, youth, sport and citizenship will be the main implementation fields (see decision No 1983/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, 18/12/2006).

- especially promote the diverse multilingual and cultural diversity initiatives that do not limit their activities to one of the minority groups, but that are likely to contribute to enhanced contact between different groups as well as between majority and minorities
- cater for projects that link minorities and migrant communities and for the non-discrimination of Roma.