„Voice or Exit“ (HU-Berlin, 14.-16.06.2001)

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Conference Report: Voice or Exit: Comparative Perspectives on Ethnic Minorities in 20th Century Europe, Humboldt University, Berlin, June 14-16, 2001

The conference „Voice or Exit: Comparative Perspectives on Ethnic Minorities in 20th Century Europe“ took place in Humboldt University, Berlin (Social Science Department, Population Studies) on June 14-16th, 2001. The event was made possible through a generous support from the German Marshall Fund, Office Berlin. The conference brought together scholars from Europe, East and West, and the USA, often at a different stage of their academic career. The presentations and discussions reflected a variety of research subjects and methodological considerations, originating from the distinct concerns of history, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, political science, and human rights law.

The key-note lecture of Andreas Wimmer initiated the debate around the „tyranny of the national.” Wimmer criticized the „methodological nationalism“ of many disciplines, pointed out the interconnectedness between nationalism and modernization, and analyzed the emergence of the nation along the lines of legal definition, social security, military considerations, political representation, and identity. He examined nationalism as a compromise between the population and its elites in which the weakness or strength of the state determines the manifestation of nationalism as either ethnic chauvinism or xenophobia/racism.

The conference proceeded in addressing nationalism and ethnicity in a comprehensive yet context-specific way. The two initial panels centered on historical aspects of minority-majority relations and the complexity of inter-ethnic relations in interwar Europe. Daniel Miller shed light on the Czechoslovak colonization policies in the Hungarian and German border areas where Czechs and Slovaks, not Germans, Jews, or Hungarians, were encouraged to create farming enterprises after World War One. The land reform served economic and social considerations but constituted mainly a weapon against the unfavorable ethnic composition in the border areas. Chad Bryant described ethnic „amphibians,” or people who switch between identities, among the Germans and Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia under Nazi occupation. The policy to grant German citizenship to Slavs was superceded by a concern about the „quality of the race“ and inability to set strict criteria for German-ness. Yet the 1945 Postdam ! Agreement reversed the fate of the amphibians and many recent Germans were expelled from the Czech Republic as traitors. The existence of ethnic unity was also far from evident among the various German political organizations in the three German-populated areas of Poland, as Winson Chu demonstrated. The German governments also maintained the rift between Prussian and non-Prussian Germans. Demographic trends, the Polish and German states, and National Socialist ideology all influenced the expression of Germanness in Poland.

Predictably, similar ambiguities of national identity were present in the history of South-Eastern Europe. Onur Yildirim explored the historiographical traditions concerning the Turco-Greek Population exchange of 1923, emblematic for the experience of forced migration. He criticized the cost-and-benefit historical analyses, approved of scholarship highlighting the incomplete refugees' incorporation, and demonstrated that the exchange was an important not only for Greek but also for Turkish history. How the present modifies the past was revealed by Theodora Dragostinova in an examination of the 1906 migration of Greeks from Bulgaria, distinguished by fluidity of national identity, that has been traditionally interpreted as an expression of historical hatreds between Greeks and Bulgarians. An „erasure“ of history started in the interwar period as a result of property compensation negotiations, in which powerful elites „forgot“ and „silenced“ examples of tolerant minority-majorit! y interaction. Mila Mancheva discussed Kemalism in the context of the

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Turkish minority's place in Bulgarian society. She made clear how the minority pursued distinct ethnic politics but not political secession from Bulgaria. Though most Turkish leaders identified Kemalism as a movement for secularization and modernization, Bulgarian officials often depicted it as a manifestation of Turkish nationalism, a strategy that allowed their intervention in the cultural matters of the minority.

These „perspectives from the past" provided a nice continuity of problematic and methodology from the interwar period to the Post-communist present, discussed in the next two panels dedicated to ethnic politics „under transition." Carina Korostelina focused on the multiple identities in Ukraine and specifically Crimea, and examined Soviet, national, ethnic, and regional identities in a comparison between Russians and Crimean Tatars. Apparently ethnic identity emerges as the most important for the Crimean Tatars while regional and Soviet identity connected with ethnicity for the Russians. Analyzing Ukraine as a „nationalizing state," Mykola Riabchuk accentuated the existence of a „swing group" of Russophones and Ukrainophones with no clear identity in contrast to the committed Ukrainophones and Russians. Even Ukrainian rulers who define national independence as their main objective often judge „cultural ambiguity" as more welcome in the process of de-Sovietization. The dilemmas! of national minorities in Poland after the 1989 were reviewed in Slawomir Lodzinski's presentation. He highlighted the interconnectedness between Polish national identity and the presence of minorities in Poland and concluded that the attitudes of ethnic minorities have altered due to legal changes and policies oriented towards them. The attitudes of the Poles towards minorities have become more open as well, despite the existence of less favored minority groups, such as the Roma and Ukrainians. Conversely, the process of democratization caused deterioration in the relations of the Roma population with the majority in the Czech Republic, as examined by Jana Barthel. Social isolation is evident in education, housing, labor, and the limited political representation. The author considered policy-making to be the key to understanding the marginalization of the community, and argued that only integration in national politics could improve their social status. Irina Molodikova ana- lyzed the reasons for the immigration of ethnic Russians in Latvia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation after 1989. Even though in surveys the wish to join the motherland comes first, she claimed that not ethnic tensions and discrimination, but the economic factor, was the major reason for the outflow. An analysis of the relationship between decentralization and ethnoterritorial autonomy in Romania was presented in Narcisa Grigorescu's paper. She explained the tension within policies involving citizens in decision-making yet also reflecting ethnic minority demands for rights. Grigorescu emphasized the challenge in balancing the interests of the „core nation" and ethnic minorities, and stated that Romania's failed transition from a centralized state aggravated the feeling of disenfranchisement of the Hungarian minority.

The „responses to ethnopolitical challenges" of the European Union as well as the diverse institutional arrangements in individual nation-states constituted the topic of the following two panels. The European Union's encouragement for institutional representation of minorities and monitoring of their rights vis-à-vis the majority was judged as crucial. Melanie Ram addressed the EU influence on minority rights in candidate states, taking as the example the Citizenship Law in the Czech Republic and the Hungarian Language Law in Romania. Focusing on legal amendments and governmental structures for minority issues, she critically examined the timing of the reforms, the character of the domestic debate, and the limits to EU influence. Antoine Roger undertook another comparative study of EU influences, analyzing Bulgaria, Romania, and Latvia. Noticing that minority parties in each country adopt a different political stance, he suggested that the economic situation of the 'motherla! nd' and its closeness to EU membership influence the policies of ethnic minority parties in the host country. Christophe Scheidhauer illuminated the limited enforcement mechanisms of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. As the main reason for its weakness, apart from political

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factors, was considered the divergence about the nature of the regional or minority languages. The author drew attention to the vague nature of many terms employed in the Charter, including „traditional“, „group“, „area“, and „language.” A new term was coined by Zoltan Kantor who, starting from Brubaker, proposed the notion „nationalizing minority“ to describe the process through which the minority develops as a nation and attempts to transform politically the state. The author focused on the variety of competing minority projects in the Hungarian communities in Romania that eventually result in the nationalizing minority's politics. The role of the Hungarian Ombudsman in regulating r! acial discrimination was explored by Andrea Krizsan who made clear the different levels of antidiscrimination politics: racial meanings, racially significant practices, and racially tainted distribution. She pointed out that a specialized body cannot per se solve discrimination problems because of the absence of a workable definition of more complex forms of racial discrimination, such as „indirect discrimination.” The concept of „ethnic unmixing“ was scrutinized in Tobias Vogel's analysis of territorial partitioning and population transfers as methods of ethnic conflict resolution. Studying the events in the Balkans, he emphasized that „ethnic unmixing“ ignores the fact that, besides „ethnic groups,” people are persons with individual preferences and inalienable rights. Such political decisions constitute practical instruments of diplomacy and blatantly contradict the concept of humanitarianism.

The last two sessions provided examples for the institutionalization and representation of inter-ethnic interaction from various „illustrative case studies.” Ayse Betul Celik depicted Kurdish ethnic life in Istanbul in the 1990s through a study of „hometown associations“ facilitating migration as well as more politically-minded institutions and private companies. She revealed the transformation of traditional, territorial identities into modern, political institutions, demanding cultural rights for their members. Robert Greenberg examined the contest over linguistic idiom among the three Slavic-speaking communities, Slavic Muslim, Serbian, and Croatian, in Bosnia. After the Bosnian War, an attempt at the codification of new languages magnified linguistic differences, previously treated as regional variations in the Serbo-Croatian language. Analyzing Bosnian Serb identity, Greenberg argued that the evidence for a separate ethnic identity based on language was exaggerated. Sebas! tian Schroeder reminded how the Poles in Lithuania are torn between several national (Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian) and international (Soviet, European) identities. During the Soviet era, the Poles showed patterns of assimilation to the Russian way of life. After Lithuanian independence in 1991, the Polish minority did not evolve into irredentism, largely for lack of support from Russia or Poland, and developed into an ethnic party. The symbolic competition between Hungarian and Romanian inhabitants in the Transylvanian city of Cluj were the focus of Margit Feischmidt's anthropological study. She explained how the state, the economy, and ethnic institutions, especially education, define ethnic categories and relations. The key question posed was the social organization of ethnic differences, and, in particular, the relationship between social class and ethnicity. Anahit Minasyan compared the experiences after World War II of Armenians and Jews in France who emigrated to Sov! iet Armenia or Israel respectively. The members of both groups were dedicated to their new nation-states, and managed to increase their international recognition and legitimacy. They faced harsh living conditions and discrimination after resettlement yet while the Armenians grew discontent with Soviet society the Jews were largely satisfied. A lesson for an ethnic conflict resolution was proposed in Jens Woelk's work that took as an example the autonomy of South Tyrol. Emphasizing the impact of the international sphere on ethnic conflict, his presentation traced the complex negotiation process between the different political actors that resulted in a workable legal arrangement for South Tyrol. A key feature of that process, according to Woelk, was its essentially non-political character.

The variety of theoretical approaches and the abundance of examples were the main strengths of the conference. A focus on Eastern Europe apparently reigns in the field

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yet the discussions made clear that the „under transition“ status of these countries is not an indicator of their historical peculiarity or theoretical distinctiveness. In this respect, the critical examination of Western European politics and influences was extremely illuminating. The participants agreed that a focus on ethnic and cultural exceptionalism cannot explain the manifestation and institutionalization of inter-ethnic relations without the examination of the economic, social, and political fields. The interconnectedness between identity and social relations, the complementarity of individual consciousness and the social aggregate, and the relationship between the cultural or discursive performance and its sociopolitical roots were the unifying themes in the discussions. Judging from the interests of t! he participants in the conference, much of the new research in the field will gravitate around these ideas.

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