



INŠTITUT ZA NARODNOSTNA VPRAŠANJA
INSTITUTE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES

***Current challenges and perspectives in minority protection,
with a special focus on Central and Eastern Europe***

An academic workshop at Institute for Ethnic Studies, Ljubljana, 27-28 March 2025

&

Pre-workshop presentation in Lendava, 26 March 2025

CONCEPT NOTE

The national and international protection of national/ethnic/linguistic and other (social) minorities faces many challenges that seem to be multiplying in the diversified and globalized world in which populism(s) and nationalism(s) grow. Yet, the field becomes increasingly peripheral in both international law and social sciences. The progress based upon optimism, even some enthusiasm regarding the development of minority protection in the 1980s and 1990s has been lost, and it seems that the space is narrowing in the recent decades.

To begin with a striking and long-lasting problem: despite many years of scholarly effort in law and other disciplines, there is still no universally accepted definition of minorities and other identity-related concepts, such as ethnicity, race or nationality. Yet, international law habitually operates with these terms when recognizing group-specific rights or providing protection from discrimination, without actually setting out definitions of the protected groups (conceptualization) or membership criteria therein (operationalization).

This is not merely an unresolved theoretical issue, but a practical deficiency with crucial importance for the protection of minority communities and persons belonging to them. The lack of international regulation leaves States with too much discretion which leads to divergent interpretations and, more often than not, a lower level of protection. Divergent views are well reflected in the national legal regulations of the status of ethnic communities: some States simply refuse to recognize the existence of minorities in their territory; others recognize only certain groups; yet others apply a narrow concept, confining protection only to their linguistic or national minorities, or differentiate in the rights and status of traditional vs. modern (migrant) minorities.

Furthermore, ambiguity in defining the targeted communities and membership criteria for minority protection mechanisms and social inclusion measures may hinder the achievement of policy goals, whereas the potential for abuse (ethnobusiness, ethnocorruption) can open avenues for further discrimination and marginalization. For example, several abuses occurred during the 2002–2003 elections of minority self-governments in Hungary. There, in the absence of formal identification or registration, anyone could participate: not only persons actually belonging to the given minority, but practically anyone was able to vote and be elected. The possibility of making false declarations about minority affiliation not only interferes with the right to establish minority self-governments, but it also negatively affects the exercise of other minority rights. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is widespread in the CEE region.

Among important issues frequently discussed in these contexts are the self-identification of diverse communities and persons belonging to them (who feel members of these communities and, ideally, are recognized as such by other members) as well as perceptions and



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identification of these communities by the others in contemporary diverse societies. In different situations and contexts, individuals possess and/or express multiple individual and collective identities, with ethnic identities representing a significant dimension. All individual and collective identities – multiple and fluid in their contents and nature – are dynamic and continuously evolving processes (i.e., life-long identity processes).

Intertwined with these problematic issues, a disappointing trend emerges: after the „boom” in the protection of minority rights in the 1990s, the interest of law- and policy-makers as well as academia in minority issues has been steadily declining in recent years. The human rights- and diversity-based approaches have been replaced by the old security policy approach in East- and Central-Europe, where electoral autocracies and hybrid regimes „nationalize” the minority issue and representation mechanisms by sweeping problems and essential issues under the carpet. Exploring the reasons of and possible solutions to this extremely important problem is the main goal of the workshop.

The workshop aims to address the above issues based on the extensive expertise of scholars from Slovenia (Institute for Ethnic Studies) and Hungary (Ludovika University of Public Service, HUN-REN Institute for Legal Studies, HUN-REN Institute for Minority Studies, and Széchenyi István University). We believe that the complex, dynamic and continuously evolving nature of the minority issue warrants a holistic approach, therefore we have invited our participants from diverse disciplines, including international law, political science, international relations, sociolinguistics, history, sociology, geography and diplomacy.



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PRE-WORKSHOP PROGRAM (Lendava)

26 March 2025 (Wednesday)

18:00-19:30: presentation by Attila Kovács to the Hungarian delegation arriving from the Ludovika University – location: headquarters of the Muravidéki Magyar Önkormányzati Nemzeti Közösség / Pomurska madžarska samoupravna narodna skupnost – title of presentation: *A szlovéniai magyar közösség jelenlegi helyzete (Current situation of the Hungarian community in Slovenia)*

PROGRAM OF THE WORKSHOP (Ljubljana)

27 March 2025 (Thursday) 15:00-18:00

15:00-15:05: welcome speech by Sonja Novak Lukanovič

15:05-15:10: introductory speech by Iván Gyurcsík

15:10-16:30 Session 1 (in English) *Who are the minorities? Who belongs to a minority? - Conceptual ambiguities in defining minority communities and membership* (introductory speech and moderation by Noémi Nagy)

16:30-16:40: break

16:40-18:00 Session 2 (in English): *Ethnobusiness, ethnocorruption – the abuse of minority rights* (introductory speech and moderation by András L. Pap)

18:00-: dinner

28 March 2025 (Friday) 09:00-12:00

09:00-10:30: Session 3 (in English): *Multiple / fluid identities* (introductory speech and moderation by Mitja Žagar)

10:30-10:40: break

10:40-12:00 Session 4 (in Hungarian): *The failing interest in minority protection – reasons, solutions, perspectives* (introductory speech and moderation by Iván Gyurcsík)

12:00-: lunch

INVITED PARTICIPANTS

- All researchers from IES are invited, including Prof. dr. Sonja Novak Lukanovič (director), Prof. dr. Mitja Žagar, dr. Noémi Nagy (main organizer, MSCA/ERA Postdoctoral Research Fellow), etc.
- Minority Policy Research Group of the Ludovika University of Public Service (Budapest): Ambassador Iván Gyurcsík (head); Judit Galambos (administrative colleague); Dániel Gászó, Iván Halász, Erik Palusek (researchers)
- HUN-REN Institute for Legal Studies (Budapest): Nóra Chronowski, Eszter Kovács Szitkay, András L. Pap
- HUN-REN Institute for Minority Studies (Budapest): Balázs Dobos, Edgár Dobos
- Széchenyi István University, Deák Ferenc Faculty of Law and Political Sciences (Győr): Tamás Korhecz