

Written by Liudmila Blinova in dedication to OSCE Lithuanian chairmanship 2011

Change of social and political situation with minorities in Europe.

It is argued that with the fall of communism the system of international relations faced crucial changes. The most vital changes came with the activities of the transnational and regional organizations in European region. For example, after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the European Community intensified its integration process and even enlarged to eastward. Furthermore, some social analysts argue that the economic development of Western European countries was so prosperous that Eastern European countries started to look forward towards integration. However, while analyzing the enlarged EU, there have been also disputable questions raised in regards to the common identity and sub identities placement in the process of integration. Within the regional integration the issue of minorities' rights and their definition lifted a high concern.

When one examines the history of EU integration, it is obvious that one can detect the friction between 'inter-governmentalists' and 'supra-nationalists'. Since the creation of European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), some of the states of Europe were in favor of the supranational approach while others, on the contrary, were highly concerned with their own sovereignty. For example, Charles De Gaulle's and Margaret Thatcher's vision of Europe remarkably differed from the views held by the founders of the European Communities. However, it does not mean that Charles De Gaulle and

Margaret Thatcher were against a united Europe. They were just in favor of realism theory and saw the supranational vision of Europe as unrealistic.

Europe

In this sense, when one does research about EU integration, European integration should not be only associated with the supranational track. The process of European integration can be better understood by inter-governmentalism as well. Moreover, when question comes to the issues of common identity, minorities' rights and sub-identities placement in transnational Europe, - it is relevant to review the Inter-governmentalism theory because it clarifies inter-state bargaining among the member countries on top political issues.

Currently the aim of creating a common identity allots a difficult task on Eurocentric scholars. One of the main reasons is that the enlargement process in Europe diversified it further culturally as well as traditionally. Within this conception, there are obvious difficulties which the EU now faces not only with the integration of the poor countries, but also with minorities whose rights are not equal in the member states countries.

The next important point in regards to the enlarged European Union worth to come up with, is the idea of the common European identity. As it is argued by social scientists, the EU came to this historical success through the step by step policy, which started from economic area spilling over to political one too. However, in current EU policy it is obvious that all member states are stuck with the cultural aspect. When question reached the cultural, traditional values and heritage it turned out to be very complicated.

Certainly, there is a group of scholars who argue that European countries have shared

common traditional and cultural values and heritage at least partially. According to Anthony D. Smith:

There are shared traditions, legal and political, and shared heritages, religious and cultural. Not all Europeans share in all of them; some share in particular traditions and heritages only minimally. But at one time or another all Europe's communities have participated in at least some of these traditions and heritages, in some degree (Smith 1999, p.241-242).

In terms of shared values we can agree with Anthony Smith's arguments. The reason for being that regardless of the division between the richest Western Europe and a poor Eastern Europe, differences between industrialized and agricultural European countries, is in the idea that the nations of Europe have at least partially shared literature, arts and music. However, the main puzzle derives from the place of minorities in the enlarged Europe. The EU territory has big minority groups such as Kurds and Turks in Germany, Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe, Russian speaking minority in the Baltic countries. Nevertheless, while tracing the definition of the minority, the above mentioned groups of minorities turn out to the definition.

In order to approach the subject of placing minorities in Europe, it would be relevant to trace and highlight the definition or formulation of minority. Smith presents it as follows: "while some minorities are groups, many are not, and the same population may at different times have or lack the social organization it needs to form group. The continuity of situations in which the disadvantaged collectivities are demographic majorities in their societies" (Smith, p.3). If one applies this formulation to the European context, it also raises debates over the question, - who are minorities in small countries such as Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania? In the Baltic countries the biggest groups of Russian

minorities have been living since the Soviet time, which stayed and now claim the equal rights, whereas realistically Baltic governments do not necessarily consider them as minorities on the equal basis.

In regards to Wagley's definition of minority, Smith drew attention to the fact that, "Irrespective of the requisite physical or cultural traits, minority membership must be transmitted by rules of descent, a criterion that automatically excludes metics, refugees, immigrants, captives, concurred peoples and all whose collective disadvantages are due to social mobility" (Smith, p.6). This interpretation lifts the complexity of minority in Europe at higher level. If one relies to this definition neither Germany nor France have no minorities. One can ask questions then: Who are Turkish and Kurdish people in Germany although they are settled for more than three generations? Are they still immigrants? How long they should be settled in the territory of the receiving state in order to be a minority?

While analyzing Wirth's concept of minority and Wagley's interpretation, Smith also highlighted that their definition reduces its applicability to the minority groups in different societies. In their interpretation the main reason is stated as follows: "A minority has an objectively disadvantageous position in ...the four following public fields: (a) the legal system (b) the educational system (c) the labor market (d) the housing market" (Smith, p.9). As the analysis of the definition shows, the term minority is still ambiguously formulated in social science.

In European context, one can note that all European countries still face a problem of minorities' integration into their society. Of course, it varies from Western European to

Eastern European countries. Though, generally speaking in terms of national policy, the citizenship is a policy all European countries have complexities with. It would be hard to compare the citizenship policy of European countries and USA or Canadian ones. In terms of citizenship rights and nationality, the position of some minorities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not equal; it differs from one country to another.

The EU citizenship, if to pay attention to this issue, is purposed for the all habitants of the EU territory. At the same time, in order to be the EU citizen, an applicant should possess a national citizenship of one of the EU member states. Therefore, minorities in Lithuania who have no Lithuanian citizenship, or Russian minorities in Estonia, Latvia with Russian passport or so called '*Alien Passport*', who live from the Soviet time, stay beyond the European Citizenship Common Policy. They still though make their ways by permanent or temporary residence permits to facilitate their mobility within European Union.

In order to elaborate the minority problem in the EU member states and Europe as a whole a careful respectful education of minorities is a must among states with this sensitive issue. Minorities' education will broaden their horizons and assist in the orientation and integration within the society they live in to provide them with the opportunity to enjoy fully citizens' rights most of them have already obtained.

The developing of common European identity may also end a deadlock.

*Bibliography: Smith, Anthony D., (1999). *Myths and Memories of the Nation*: Oxford University Press, Smith, M.G. *Some Minority Problems and a Solution**