

SMALL AUTOCHTHONOUS ETHNIC GROUPS AND THE MULTICULTURAL MODEL OF CIVIL SOCIETY Three Examples from the Alpine-Danube-Adriatic Region¹

This paper focuses on the triangle created by Civil Society, Ethnicity and State and their interrelationships. Out of these three aspects, retaining ethnicity is most important for ethnic groups and minorities.

It will also present three examples of small ethnic groups in the Alpine-Danube-Adriatic region and each group's place within the triangle of Civil Society, Ethnicity and State. Many of them have become victims of national and ethnocentric movements. In most cases they developed a hiding strategy in order to retain their ethnic identity vis-à-vis tendencies towards assimilation. In different ways they were also confronted with identity management from the outside.

By focusing on small ethnic groups and hidden minorities, contexts will be discussed that guide us to a multicultural and multiethnic civil society.

I will conclude by discussing the following questions: a) How can a multiethnic model of Civil Society be protected by a differentiated legal framework? b) Which basic political requirements are necessary to

stop the assimilation process and guarantee the survival of small ethnic groups?

Keywords: small ethnic groups, hidden minorities, multiculturalism, legislation

MAJHNE AVTOHTONE ETNIČNE SKUPINE IN VEČKULTURNI MODEL CIVILNE DRUŽBE

TRIJE PRIMERI S PODROČJA ALP, DONAVE IN JADRANA

Tema tega članka je trikotnik med civilno družbo, etničnostjo in državo in njihovi medsebojni odnosi. Za etnične skupine in manjšine je najpomembnejša med njimi ohranitev etnične pripadnosti.

Predstavil bo tri primere majhnih etničnih skupin na področju Alp, Donave in Jadrana ter mesto vsake od njih v trikotniku civilna družba, etničnost in država. Mnoge so bile žrtve nacionalnih in etnokratskih gibanj. Pogosto so razvile strategijo skrivanja, da bi ohranile svojo etnično identiteto nasproti asimilacijskim težnjam. Na različne načine so se bile prisiljene soočati z vsiljevanjem identitete od zunaj.

Obravnavani bodo konteksti na poti do večkulture in večetnične civilne družbe, pri čemer se bomo osredotočili na majhne etnične skupine in skrite manjšine.

Zaključili bomo z naslednjim vprašanjem: a) kako lahko večetnični model civilne družbe zaščitimo z diferencirano zakonodajo? b) katere so osnovne politične zahteve za zaustavitve asimilacijskih procesov in zagotovitev preživetja majhnih etničnih skupin?

Ključne besede: majhne etnične skupine, skrite manjšine, multikulturalizem, zakonodaja

1) THE TRIANGLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY, ETHNICITY AND STATE

The relationships between *Civil Society*, *Ethnicity* and *State* are extremely dynamic.² Ethnicity, as it was mentioned before, is most important for retaining the identity of small ethnic groups. In general, Ethnicity strengthens the solidarity of a group - a community where different social classes share common values, react to the same symbols and share common obligations and duties as well as aspiring towards common goals. Therein lies the basis of the distribution of power.³

There is an obscure relationship between ethnicity and state. It mostly leads to a one-dimensional ethnic structure. The most powerful instrument in creating ethnical homogenisation is the state's educational system.⁴

2.1) SMALL ETHNIC GROUPS, HIDDEN MINORITIES – TWO TERMS, ONE RESEARCH CONCEPT

Particularly small ethnic groups are confronted with being contrasted to the *others* – the ethnic minority against the ethnic majority – even though both the majority and minority share ethnic collectives such as people, nation and nation-state.⁵ Within the national minorities, autochthonous local minorities can be distinguished from minorities formed by migrants. This paper will focus on the first category: autochthonous local minorities.

It is a fact that ethnic minorities with many members, “working” legal protection, its own education system and living cultural traditions are, of course, more able to resist ethnical homogenisation and assimilation. In contrast, members of *small ethnic groups* and *hidden minorities* often did not and still do not possess essential material, social and psychological resources⁶ which would enable them to develop and realize the idea of being a minority in a common sense. They predominantly do not want to be recognised as a minority and are not “willing to

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² cf. M. Hildermeier, J. Kocka, Ch. Conrad (eds.): *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft in Ost und West. Begriff, Geschichte, Chancen*. Frankfurt/M, New York 2000.

See further W.-D. Bukow, M. Ottersbach (eds.): *Die Zivilgesellschaft in der Zerreißprobe*, Opladen 1999.

³ cf. George Schöpflin: *Civil Society, Ethnizität und der Staat: eine dreiseitige Beziehung*. In: E. Brix (ed.), *Civil Society in Österreich*. Wien 1998, p. 51.

⁴ cf. Ebda, p. 53.

⁵ cf. Friedrich Heckmann: *Ethnische Minderheiten, Volk und Nation. Soziologie interethnischer Beziehungen*. Stuttgart 1992, p. 46.

⁶ Heiner Keupp et al: *Identitätskonstruktionen. Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne*. (= rowohlt's enzyklopädie 55 634) Reinbeck 1999, p. 53.

preserve their [own] characteristics”⁷. This is certainly one main characteristic of *hidden minorities* in general.

2.2) THREE EXAMPLES FROM THE ALPINE-DANUBE-ADRIATIC REGION

Many small autochthonous ethnic groups in the Alpine-Danube-Adriatic Region live on or near borders. Border regions, located on the fringes of nation states, usually lack precise boundaries⁸ and have always been attractive to researchers considering both the separating effect of the border and how the borders serves as an economical and cultural bridge.⁹ “Border identity” is an important part of identity construction of small ethnic groups living on and near a border.

The first example is ‘Styrian Slovenes’. They are a typical *hidden minority*.¹⁰ On the Austrian side of the Austrian-Slovenian border, live the German and Slovene speaking people. Distinctive signs of a specific Slovene ethnic culture¹¹ are not present in public and they are reduced to the private sphere of life. The bilingual inhabitants are careful to specify whether they speak Slovene or German,¹² because a public identification with Slovene codes is socially stigmatized. In the case of such complex ethnic structures, cultural anthropologists use the term *switching identity* or *code-switching*, to describe the oscillation between the Slovene origin and the German assimilation. The Styrian Slovenes were never recognized as a minority in accordance with the 7th article in the Austrian State Treaty of 1955,¹³ which guarantees minority rights for various ethnic groups in Austria. In this case, we see a strong state, which denied this ethnic group minority rights and bilingual education, against a weakly developed Slovene ethnicity and the weak instruments of its civil society. There is only one organization which de-

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⁷ Mirjam Polzer-Srienz: Die Repräsentation ethnischer Gruppen im staatlichen Willensbildungs-prozeß. Ein Rechtsvergleich Österreich-Slowenien. Unpubl. jur. diss. Graz 1999. Mirjam Polzer-Srienz refers to I Art.2 1e) of the basic rights of European ethnic groups. cf. Österreichisches Volksgruppenzentrum (ed.): Internationales und Europäisches Volksgruppenrecht. (= Österreichische Volksgruppenhandbücher 8) Klagenfurt 1995, p. 104.

⁸ cf. Anthony Cohen: Boundaries of Consciousness, Consciousness of Boundaries. Critical questions for Anthropology. In: Vermeulen/Govers (eds.), The Anthropology of Ethnicity. Beyond ‘Ethnic groups and boundaries’. Amsterdam 1994, pp. 59-79.

⁹ cf. T. Wendl/M. Rösler: Frontiers and borderlands. The rise of an anthropological research genre. In: Wendl/Rösler (eds.): Frontiers and borderlands. Anthropological Perspectives. Frankfurt/M. et al 1999, p. 1.

¹⁰ Klaus-Jürgen Hermanik: Die versteckte slowenischsprachige Minderheit in der Steiermark. http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/04_01/hermanik.htm

¹¹ cf. Stuart Hall: Ethnizität: Identität und Differenz. In: J. Engelmann (ed.), Die kleinen Unterschiede. Der Cultural Studies-Reader. Frankfurt M/New York 1999, pp. 83-122.

¹² cf. Andrea Haberl-Zemljčič: Želja po nevidnosti v Radgonskem kotu. In: M. Žagar et al (eds.), Živeti z mejo. Materinščina, dejavniki osebnosti in skupnosti narodnostne identitete. Ljubljana 2000, pp. 269-282.

¹³ cf. Gerhard Baumgartner: 6 x Österreich. Geschichte und aktuelle Situation der Volksgruppen. (= Edition Minderheiten 1) Klagenfurt 1995, p. 52.

mands minority rights for Styrian Slovenes but this organization is not even accepted by the Styrian Slovenes. It is deemed more as a identity-manager than as an ethnical supporter.

The second example is the Serbs from Csepel island (Danube) in Hungary.¹⁴ Similar to the Styrian Slovenes they are presently all bilingual and include a very small number of people [3.500 census 1991, 5.000 estimated by minority organisations]. Unlike the Styrian Slovenes, the Serbs in Hungary have obtained official minority status.¹⁵ Because they are one of the smallest ethnic groups in that area, they were subject to severe language and cultural assimilation during the second half of the 20th century. We may see that legal protection alone will not slow or stop the assimilation process. Additionally, civil organisations in this area are weak. In most cases these organizations focus solely on Serbian folklore and not on the living Serbian folk.

The third example is the German population of the multiethnic Kočevje/Gottschee enclave in Slovenia.¹⁶ The Kočevje region had a well functioning minority life up to World War II until the winter of 1941/42 when Nazi-Germany radically changed it by resettlement of a majority of the Gottschee German population. Today, there lives only a small number of Germans in the Kočevje area and they all are bilingual, speaking both German and Slovene. After World War II, the Gottschee Germans did not regain their official minority status from the former Yugoslavia or from Slovenia. But in contrast to the Styrian Slovenes, the German Kočevje/Gottschee remnants are still able to articulate themselves in German and Slovene. In present they do not hide either one of their two identities. It is remarkable that some of the elders in Kočevje/Gottschee of Slovene ethnic origin declare themselves German-Gottscheean. Ethnologists call this behaviour mimicry. In short, state support of the minority is very weak. The influence of multiethnic (German and Slovene) civil institutions is much stronger in Kočevje/Gottschee-region and is crucial in assisting the survival of the small ethnic group. At least it has to be remarked, that in some cases we can find in Kočevje/Gottschee-region – similar to the Styrian Slovenes – strong identity management from outside.

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¹⁴ cf. Biljana Sikimić: Ethnolinguistic research of Serbs on the island of Csepel, Hungary: possibilities and perspectives. Graz 2004 (in print).

¹⁵ cf. Herbert Küpper: Das neue Minderheitenrecht in Ungarn. München 1998.

See further Brigitte Mihok: Vergleichende Studie zur Situation der Minderheiten in Ungarn und Rumänien (1989-1996) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Roma. Frankfurt/M et al 1999.

¹⁶ cf. Arnold Suppan (ed.): Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Zwischen Adria und Karawanken, Berlin (1998).

See further Mitja Ferenc: Kočevska. Izgubljena kulturnega dediščina kočevskih Nemcev. Ljubljana (1993).

3) THE NEED OF A MULTICULTURAL MULTIETHNIC MODEL OF CIVIL SOCIETY

These few examples should show that in various states of the Alpine- Danube- Adriatic Region each ethnic majority tries to sidestep the claims of the ethnic minorities applying for linguistic or cultural plurality. In other words, each majority tries to turn questions of ethnicity into questions of State or questions of Civil Society.

The best solution for the support of ethnic groups in general and for small ethnic groups and hidden minorities in particular would be that several ethnic groups within a state are constituent for all norms of citizenship. The state would have to accept, that citizenship is 'coloured' by more than one ethnicity.¹⁷ In this context, a multiethnic state would be, of course, confronted with a bundle of problems. A focal interest would be the ongoing search for a consensus. This would be a formidable challenge for the political management. Therefore it would be necessary to split the power in order to limit ethnical interests of each majority population and to shift interests from state and ethnicity to the third corner of the triangle, Civil Society. This shift would be based on the understanding that Civil Society is itself multiethnically and multiculturally structured.

The few previous examples have shown that the instruments of Civil Society to help small ethnic groups survive must be multiethnic to be mutual.

There is a further need for a model of multicultural education, particularly in the borderlands of the Alpine- Danube-Adriatic region. The different states with different educational systems should orientate on 'positive models' of multicultural and multilingual education: eg. The educational practice in various communities of Slovenes in Italy, Italians and Hungarians in Slovenia, Italians in Croatia, Carinthian Slovenes and Croats in Austria, Germans in Hungary, Hungarians in Serbia.¹⁸

Above all we have to underline that each minority, each small ethnic group/hidden minority has to create Civil Society instruments by themselves.

A short example resp. comparison should illustrate this need: The Slovenes in Carinthia formed various societies for various interests at all times. Those local structures led to a "Civil Society mikrokosmos", which helps in the same way (or in some cases in a better way) than legal protection to retain the assimilation process. Slovenes in Styria did never make an effort to build up such local societies;

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¹⁷ cf. Schöpfli, Civil Society, Ethnizität und der Staat, p. 51.

¹⁸ cf. Valeria Heuberger et al (eds.): Nationen, Nationalitäten, Minderheiten. Wien, München 1998.

as it was mentioned above the only organization supporting the Styrian Slovenes named "Article 7 Cultural Society" came not into being through autochthonous Styrian Slovenes. The lack of local civil organizations in Austrian-Styria was of course one of the main reasons, which enforced the remnants of the small ethnic group to hide themselves as best as they could. The single Styrian Slovene does/did not have the possibility to share common values of ethnicity within a civil organisation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the multiethnic and multicultural model of Civil Society I attempt to answer the following two questions:

- a) Can a multiethnic model of Civil Society be protected by a differentiated legal framework?
- b) Which basic political requirements are necessary in order to stop the process of assimilation and guarantee the survival of small ethnic groups and hidden minorities?
- a) Protection of an multiethnic Civil Society seems to be possible, if the legal framework of the 'European Convention for the Protection of Minorities' comes more and more to reality within the State. There it is explicitly written "that minorities contribute to the pluriformity and cultural diversity within European States" and Article 3 mentions that minorities "shall have the right to the respect, safeguard and development of their ethnical, religious, or linguistic identity".¹⁹ At the same time Civil Society must accept its ethnic plurality.
- b) The question of political requirements is connected with the question of "including and excluding individuals and groups".²⁰ It is also concerned with how to involve a member of Civil Society within its cultural, economic, political and social aspects? This further implies that it is the duty of each Civil Society to include individuals and groups from different ethnic origins and develop its own basic political requirements. Presently, the weakness of Civil Society is shown by waiting for solutions to come from "above"; From the State, from religions or from other outside organizations.

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¹⁹ Österreichisches Volksgruppenzentrum (ed.): Internationales und Europäisches Volksgruppenrecht. (= Österreichische Volksgruppenhandbücher 8) Klagenfurt 1995, p. 63. and p. 64.

²⁰ Willem van Rejen: 'Civil Society' zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne. In: E. Brix (ed.), Civil Society in Österreich. Wien 1998, p. 67.

Since the 1990s, Civil Societies in the Alpine-Danube-Adriatic region have become more and more influenced by European Citizenship. These societies have become affected by various international organizations, predominantly through the work of various NGOs²¹. Therefore let us conclude with another two questions: How much will European citizenship influence ethnic identities in future? Is there a support of the small ethnic groups/hidden minorities survival?

