

Book of Abstracts

Nation-Building and Minority Strategies in a Changing International Environment

Construcția națiunii și strategii minoritare într-o ordine globală în schimbare

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Bailey, Rene (University of Sheffield, United Kingdom)

Being ‘Felvidéki’: Identity Constructions in Southern Slovakia Eighty Years after the Beneš Decrees

The paper presents an interpretive account of what it means to be Hungarian – or ‘Felvidéki’ – in Slovakia today. Taking the post-war Beneš Decrees (1945–1948) as the starting point, it considers the scars they have left and their enduring significance for Slovakia’s Hungarian population, particularly in relation to citizenship, language rights and cultural heritage. The analysis takes an anthropological approach, focusing on four interrelated questions: how do the Felvidéki Magyarok bear the burden of their history? How is this history memorialised? What is its impact on majority-minority relations? How does Hungarian heritage and identity manifest in Slovakia today? The findings are historically structured across three time periods: the suppression of cultural memory and historical knowledge during the Cold War; the opening of the archives and capture of first-hand testimony during the post-Cold War thaw; and the return swing of the pendulum since 2009, making the topic highly sensitive and politically charged once again. Linking this historical assessment with the lived experience of Hungarians in Slovakia today, the paper outlines the ways in which this ethnic community navigates a route between preserving its culture and heritage, proclaiming its place within the Slovak state, and exorcising the ghosts of the past.

Balatsoukas, Alexandros (University of Kyoto, Japan)

Removal, Reciprocity, Performance: Three Faces of Greek Minority Policy Between the Wars

Current scholarship reads the present international moment as the erosion of an interwar settlement that once protected minorities and now does so no longer. Interwar Greece (1920–1940) suggests a more unsettling proposition: the regime that emerged from the Paris–Lausanne system never produced one model of minority management but standardized three, and the present is not the decline of the first but the reassertion of the others. Following its catastrophic defeat in Anatolia and constrained by Allied tutelage, Greece (at once nationalizing state, kin-state, and refugee-receiving polity) pioneered the operational vocabulary of twentieth-century minority politics under the explicit authorization of the League of Nations.

The first technology was removal: the 1923 Lausanne Convention, history's first internationally sanctioned compulsory population exchange, displaced roughly 1.6 million people and replaced the principle of protection with the principle of demographic homogenization, financed through League-syndicated refugee loans. The second was reciprocity-as-hostage: the Muslims of Western Thrace and the Greeks of Constantinople, exempted from exchange, were retained as mutually held minorities whose survival was bound to the treatment of their counterpart; securitization *avant la lettre*, written into treaty law. The third was performative protection: the 1925 Abecedar, a Slavic primer printed in Latin script and presented to Geneva as proof of Minorities Treaty compliance, while the Politis–Kalfov Protocol recognizing the Slavophone minority was abrogated under Yugoslav pressure within months and the book itself never reached a classroom.

Together these technologies do not describe successive failures of a single regime, but rather they describe a menu. Today's majoritarian state is not abandoning the interwar order; it is selecting from it.

Bănică, Mirel (Institute for the History of Religions, Romanian Academy, Romania)

Trade, Change, and the Day-to-Day Integration of New Asian Immigrants in Bucharest: An Ethnographic Perspective

My paper proposes an analysis of urban food spaces as social infrastructures of emerging multiculturalism in Romania and, more broadly, in Eastern Europe. Over the past decade, Romania has become an increasingly prominent destination for Asian economic migration (from Vietnam, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, etc.), and the food and service sectors represent one of the main areas of social and professional integration. In this context, “ethnic” restaurants, markets, and food courts can be viewed as prime spaces for intercultural contact and identity negotiation.

This presentation is based on the premise that food functions simultaneously as material practice and social language, providing a unique framework for observing processes of informal integration and everyday interactions between migrants and the local population. The analysis is based on ethnographic field research conducted in the summer of 2025 in the Obor Market area (Bucharest) and employs participant observation, informal interviews, and contextual analysis of the space. Particular attention was paid to religious and identity-related symbols within these shops and restaurants, as well as to their ad hoc display and ritualization.

This paper proposes conceptualizing these spaces as liminal zones, situated at the intersection of food globalization, local culinary traditions, and transnational mobility. Within this framework, everyday interactions—ordering, serving, casual conversation, co-presence, and the exchange of useful information—are analyzed as microsocial mechanisms for bridging cultural divides and producing a pragmatic, non-institutional multiculturalism that often escapes the attention of authorities and the mass media. The phenomenon is all the more interesting as it takes place in Obor Market, one of the oldest and most significant lieux de mémoire in the city of Bucharest.

Through this approach, the presentation will contribute to the literature on migration and contemporary urban studies, arguing that the integration of new minorities occurs largely through everyday practices and ordinary spaces of urban life, before becoming the subject of public policies or official discourses.

Berescu, Cătălin (Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, Romania)

Romanoforo. How to make a Roma capital city?

There's a somehow intense, somehow shy conversation around the Roma nation. While labels like “ethnic group”, “minority” or “community” are dominating the political sphere, the idea of a Roma nation struggles and drags in various corners of the internet or flickers during the intonation of *Gelem, gelem* at the start of Roma conferences.

As for the term *nation* itself, it proves that, despite the universal disdain of the intellectual milieu for the nation-state, it still has an enormous resilience, proven by the horrible present-day conflicts. The Roma people don't have a territory, therefore a nation without a state cannot develop its culture, homogenize its language, properly promote its identity, etc. The concept of a Roma nation is merely a metaphor.

However, as shown throughout history, groups with a very strong cultural identity – as the Roma are – always find different ways to aggregate and aim for self-governance. We live in a place and a time in which local self-governance is not only possible, but cherished, and in which borders are infinitely more permeable than before. My contribution aims to investigate the tenets of a utopian city of the Roma, one that would have to satisfy the multiple conditions imposed by the constitutions of the current states, the EU objectives, the international law, and to give a possible answer to the struggles for identity and unity that are overwhelmingly expressed by Roma activists nowadays.

My exercise is not just an urban planning stunt, because I will present some general design schemes, but an instigation to reflection upon alternative forms of governance.

Beretka, Katinka (Faculty of Law and Business Studies Dr Lazar Vrkatić, Novi Sad, Serbia)

Representing Many: Minority MPs and the Limits of Multi-Ethnic Parliamentary Representation in Serbia and Croatia

This paper examines the institutional and practical dimensions of parliamentary representation of national minorities in Serbia and Croatia, focusing on the relationship between formal inclusion and the substantive articulation of minority interests. While distinct arrangements of minority representation adopted in both states are frequently cited as examples of minority inclusion, less attention has been paid to how minority MPs actually perform their representative role and navigate competing expectations within changing political environments.

Moving beyond a purely legal-institutional analysis, the paper investigates the parliamentary activity of minority representatives through a qualitative analysis of parliamentary debates, legislative initiatives, voting patterns, and public interventions. Particular attention is devoted to a relatively understudied category of minority MPs: representatives elected to represent multiple national minorities simultaneously. Such arrangements, often justified by demographic realities and institutional efficiency, raise important questions about ethnic agency, mediation, and the representation of diverse interests within a single political mandate.

The paper explores whether multi-minority representatives are able to balance the potentially divergent interests of distinct ethnic constituencies, or whether patterns of representation tend to reflect the representative's own ethnic identification, thereby reproducing internal hierarchies among minorities.

By comparing Serbia and Croatia, the study contributes to broader debates on minority political participation, strategies of interest representation, and the effectiveness of institutional safeguards in post-socialist societies. The findings suggest that while existing frameworks facilitate minority access to parliamentary institutions, they do not necessarily

ensure equitable representation of diverse minority interests, particularly in contexts where representatives are expected to mediate between multiple ethnocultural constituencies.

Bethlendi, András (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)

Domosity: Equality Beyond Equal Access

In the 1990s, several international instruments established standards for the protection of national minorities. Yet, despite repeated criticism by Council of Europe monitoring bodies and extensive scholarly engagement, these standards have produced limited practical progress. In many European states, the number and relative share of national minorities have declined, while recognition and effective protection of their cultural rights have weakened. The EU has avoided deeper engagement with national minority issues; Council of Europe monitoring has often remained fragmented and weak; the European Court of Human Rights has not meaningfully advanced the accommodation of national minorities' cultural needs; and states increasingly face little criticism for stagnation or regression.

At the same time, scholarly and political attention has shifted toward other vulnerable groups, including migrants, sexual minorities, women, and the Roma. This paper responds by proposing a theoretical and doctrinal rethinking of non-discrimination. It situates national minorities and other non-dominant minority groups within a common socio-legal framework built around '*domosity*': the quality of feeling at home in society through a seamless, unmarked, taken-for-granted sense of belonging combined with meaningful self-determination. By conceptualizing '*domosity*' as a dimension of equality, the paper argues that non-discrimination doctrine must move beyond the present doctrine of equal access to rights.

Biletska, Yuliya (Karabuk University, Turkey)

Two Boundaries, Two Logics: National and Host-Acquired Othering among Ukrainian Forced and Marriage Migrants in Turkey

Drawing on an original survey of 916 Ukrainians in Turkey (May 2023), this paper argues that displaced minorities engage in two analytically distinct forms of symbolic boundary-making that are too often collapsed into a single notion of "intolerance." Using a neighbour social-distance battery, we identify two coexisting boundaries with opposite social logics. The first is a boundary against Russians, rejected as neighbours by 70% of respondents. This boundary is geopolitical and homeland-derived: it is near-universal and, in logistic models, unrelated to respondents' integration into Turkey, it does not vary by Turkish citizenship, length of stay, or war-refugee status. It is an act of national identity directed at the kin-aggressor state. The second is a boundary against Syrians, Turkey's own securitised refugee group, rejected by 34%. This boundary is host-acquired: it is significantly stronger among respondents embedded in Turkish society through intermarriage and, most tellingly, among those who have themselves experienced discrimination in Turkey, while war refugees are no more hostile than others. Anti-Syrian distance is thus produced inside the host society through contact and the personal experience of being othered, reproducing Turkey's migration hierarchy in a process of lateral, defensive bordering. The juxtaposition demonstrates that

integration into a host society entails not only linguistic and civic adaptation but the inheritance of its out-group hierarchies.

Carlà, Andrea – Mattia Zeba (Institute for Minority Rights, EURAC Research, Bolzano/Bozen, Italy)

Language Rights and Judicial Practice in South Tyrol: Multilingualism, Implementation, and Challenge

South Tyrol is generally considered a model to deal with ethnic tensions and protect linguistic minorities due to a sophisticated power-sharing system and the provision of language rights. Among these is the right to use one's mother tongue in judicial proceedings.

This paper has a twofold goal. First it will analyze in detail the system of language rights in the South Tyrolean justice system, tracing its evolution and the debates surrounding its development and implementation. Second, based on semi-structured interviews with individuals employed in the justice system (lawyers, judges and clerks), it will discuss people's experience with working in bilingual judiciary contexts, bringing to light how and to what extent language rights on paper are implemented in reality, the organization and functioning of South Tyrolean courts, and unexpected challenges surrounding the right to use mother tongue in the South Tyrolean judiciary system.

By doing so, the paper sheds light on linguistic rights, their practical implementation in the judiciary, and their role in ensuring fairness and equality in multilingual societies like South Tyrol.

Cercel, Cristian (Institute of Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies, Tübingen, Germany)

Lorrainian Blood? The Extension of French-German Entanglements to Interwar Banat

This presentation engages with the discourses on 'Lorrainians' in the Yugoslav and Romanian Banat from the end of the First World War to the beginning of the Second World War, and with the related ethno-political efforts to claim and assert a Lorrainian (and hence French) identity for (some) of the Germanophones in Banat largely known as Swabians. The point of reference of these efforts was the Lorrainian (and Alsatian) origin of some of the eighteenth-century settlers to Habsburg Hungary. The presentation emphasizes that these discourses and these efforts unfolded as transregional connections between the Banat and Lorraine and were directly linked with the French-German conflict over the left bank of the Rhine in general and over Alsace-Lorraine in particular. Furthermore, it points out that the question of the 'Lorrainians' in Banat was one of the meeting points of *Westforschung* and *Ostforschung*. Thus, the presentation shows that French-German entanglements extended to and resonated in the East of Europe and that Banat Swabian history is connected with French-German entangled history.

Csergő, Zsuzsa (Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, Canada)

The Architecture of Minority Democratic Agency in Majoritarian States

This paper develops a recursive theory of minority democratic agency (MDA) to explain how ethnic minorities in majoritarian states gain, exercise, and lose the capacity for collective political action. Drawing on a paired comparative analysis of Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia, Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia, and Poles and Russian-speakers in Lithuania, it identifies an institutional pathway to MDA, understood as recursively generated through the interplay of three dimensions: (a) structural conditions (numbers, places, time, and status); (b) organizational resources (the characteristics of meso-level institutional capital); and (c) the institutional work of minority political and social actors in multiple relational fields (intra-minority, minority-titular, inter-minority, and cross-border relations). The theory emphasizes how collective minority agency, once constituted, feeds back into the institutional and relational conditions shaping its development.

Dambrauskas, Karolis (Vilnius University and Lithuanian Centre for Social Science, Lithuania)

Ethnicity and Property in Post-Socialist Land Restitution: Hungarian and Polish Minorities in Romania and Lithuania

This paper compares the relationship between ethnicity and property in post-socialist land restitution in Romania and Lithuania, focusing on the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and the Polish minority in south-eastern Lithuania. Restitution was intended to redress historical dispossession in both countries, but the process has remained incomplete — and in places reversed — especially for minority claimants. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with claimants and local officials, the paper shows how ethnicity and restitution outcomes are mutually entangled: in some cases, claims were hindered by cut-off dates that excluded pre-collectivisation dispossession from redress; in others, ethnicity emerged as an unintended by-product of formally neutral policies, as when in-kind compensation altered the ethnodemographic composition of minority-populated areas. Restitution remains a salient and unresolved issue for both minorities. The paper argues that this ethnic dimension can only be understood by situating restitution outcomes within the broader historical and political transformations Romania and Lithuania have undergone since 1989.

Dobos, Balázs (ELTE Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Minority Studies, Hungary) – Ágnes M. Balázs (National University of Public Service, Hungary)

The Representation of Minorities in Parliaments or the Representation of Parliaments among Minorities?

Since the fall of Communist regimes, several Central and Eastern European countries have ensured the political participation of their recognized national and ethnic minorities by creating preferential or even guaranteed seats for them in parliaments, for example in Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Romania, and Slovenia. The filling of these specific minority seats and the election of representatives, as well as in many cases the parliamentary activities of

the MPs, have sparked controversy both within and between minorities, as well as among the wider public. The question of who win these mandates is often decided in elections without intra-group alternatives. In addition, according to the relevant findings in the literature, these kinds of mandates are prone to co-option by governments in exchange for minor concessions, thereby these mechanisms may often result in patronage and clientelist politics, may heavily depend on the state, and the often self-interested MPs seek to maintain constantly their support and secure their privileged positions, while to date, relatively little empirical analysis has been published on the systematic exploration of their activities. In light of the above, the major aim of this study is, on the one hand, to identify the contentious issues surrounding the election of these minority MPs and, on the other hand, to examine the specific parliamentary activities of MPs in a comparative manner, in four countries (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia) during the last two parliamentary cycles through a thorough analysis of parliamentary websites and other sources. In particular, it seeks to address the extent to which these minority MPs make use of the formal tools at their disposal (speeches, questions, legislative initiatives) and the extent to which they can influence those issues that are likely to be important to their communities.

Duraj, Rudina (Center for Arbëresh Studies and Publications, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Albania)

This research examines the legal and structural disparities faced by the Arbëresh linguistic minority in Italy. Focusing on the intersection of Legal frameworks and mechanisms for societal cohesion, empowerment, and inclusion/exclusion in both national and international settings, this study explores how Italian and European laws impact the recognition, protection, and empowerment of the Arbëresh communities.

This paper argues that legal inequalities at European, national, and regional levels produce structural disadvantages for Arbëresh communities, both collectively and individually. Members of these communities are often unable to use their language in education, public administration, or media, resulting in social exclusion, weakened cultural transmission, and reduced civic participation. By contrasting legal provisions with the everyday realities of the Arbëresh, the study reveals a disconnect between normative legal commitments and their practical enforcement. It advocates for a pluralistic and integrated legal approach that not only ensures protection but fosters linguistic and cultural vitality through active inclusion. Addressing these disparities is crucial for promoting social cohesion and genuine equality for linguistic minorities in transnational contexts.

Engl, Alice – Alexandra Tomaselli – Sergiu Constantin (Institute for Minority Rights, EURAC Research, Bolzano/Bozen, Italy)

Embedded Multilateral Kin-State Activism: Italy and its Historical Minorities in Southeast Europe

Research on kin-state activism in Europe has largely focused on cases in which engagement with co-ethnic communities abroad has contributed to minority securitization, diplomatic conflict, and regional instability, such as Hungary and Russia. This article redirects attention

to Italy as an under-researched kin-state whose approach departs markedly from these dominant models.

The article conceptualizes Italy's engagement with historical Italian communities in Southeast Europe as embedded multilateral kin-state activism. Italy operates primarily through bilateral agreements and international minority-rights regimes. Its engagement prioritizes cultural and linguistic promotion, education, local economic development, gender empowerment, and support for grassroots initiatives, while consistently affirming host-state sovereignty and refraining from politically mobilizing diaspora communities or framing them as instruments of external influence.

Empirically, the article shows that Italian kin-state activism has remained largely non-contentious in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Romania, despite complex post-conflict and ethnopolitical environments. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Romania in particular, Italian minorities are numerically very small, socially embedded, and politically non-salient, limiting perceptions of threat and reducing incentives for securitizing responses by host states. The case of Italy demonstrates that kin-state engagement does not inherently generate security dilemmas. Italy's role illustrates how respect for host-country sovereignty can be combined with active diaspora support, leveraging bilateral and multilateral frameworks to safeguard minority rights, preserve cultural heritage, and foster cross-border cooperation. By examining this neglected case, the article highlights the importance of multilateral embeddedness and minority scale and visibility in shaping outcomes of kin-state activism, identifying conditions under which such engagement can contribute to minority resilience and regional stability rather than conflict.

Fábián, Gyula (Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Romania)

Negarea sau ignorarea Holocaustului de către unele instanțe judecătorești din România

Într-o lume aflată în schimbare în care judecarea colectivă a evreilor minoritari a revenit în actualitate, merită să observăm și să analizăm poziția contemporană a instanțelor judecătorești din România privind fenomenul Holocaustului, deoarece într-o țară în care este relativizată răspunderea celor care au orchestrat acest genocid sau celor care neagă fără echivoc că ar fi avut loc, nici o altă minoritate nu se poate simți în siguranță pe termen lung.

În contribuția mea de conferință doresc să prezint, să analizez și mai ales să evaluez o hotărâre adoptată de Înalta Curte de Casație și Justiție din România, respectiv o hotărâre adoptată de Curtea de Apel București în care judecătorii au fost chemați sau puși în situația de a se pronunța cu privire la acte de participare la Holocaust, respectiv de negare a acestui genocid. În demersul meu mă voi sprijini inclusiv pe poziția punctuală a Curții Europene a Drepturilor Omului cu privire la prima hotărâre, dar și pe jurisprudența incidentă a acesteia în general.

Gidó, Attila (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj, Romania)

Along Different Paths. Hungarian Jews in Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period

Of Hungary's Jewish population, which numbered more than 930,000, approximately half – around 461,000 people – found themselves under the authority of the new nation-states established after the First World War. The largest Jewish communities in these territories were located in Czechoslovakia (Upper Hungary and Subcarpathia: 231,000), Romania (Transylvania, Banat, Maramureş, and Crişana: 182,000), and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Vojvodina: 43,000).

In my presentation, I compare the efforts of Jewish communities in these three major regions to organize themselves, the extent and process of their separation from the Hungarian minority, and the institutional frameworks within which Jewish ethnic politics developed. My primary focus is on the debate between the Jewish political and social elites who believed in continuing the strategy of Hungarian cultural assimilation and those who adopted an approach based on ethnic identity. I also examine the indicators that can be used to measure the process of dissimilation. Finally, I explore the opportunities for integration that became available to Jews within the new nation-states.

Hajnáczky, Tamás (Archiepiscopal College of Veszprém and Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Hungary)

The Origins of Gypsy/Roma Ethnic Mobilization in Hungary

In Hungary, during the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, ethnic mobilization among the Gypsy/Roma community was primarily associated with Gypsy musicians. During this period, ethnic mobilization was not primarily linked to the BoyashGypsies, the Vlach Roma, or the non-musician Hungarian Gypsies. There were economic, social, and cultural reasons for this. As early as the 1880s, Gypsy musicians wanted to establish a mutual aid society. The first initiative ultimately failed. A few decades later, in 1908, Gypsy musicians established their own advocacy organization, the Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians. The association published a newsletter titled *Magyar Czigányzenészek Lapja* [Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Journal]. After World War I, Gypsy musicians founded the National Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians. The national organization established nearly forty "local groups," had many thousands of members, and also published a newsletter. In 1935, Gypsy musicians founded the National Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians, which published a journal titled *Magyar Cigányzene* [Hungarian Gypsy Music]. In my presentation, I will discuss the advocacy and mutual aid activities of these associations and Gypsy musicians' gazettes. I will also describe the measures taken by the association to protect Gypsy music and the cultural interests of Gypsy musicians.

Iakob, Attila (Muzeul de Artă Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

Transformarea culturii în armă. Comunitatea maghiară din Transilvania în multiplul reticul al evoluțiilor de la începutul secolului XXI

Transformarea culturii în armă ("the weaponization of culture") a devenit un instrument de lucru prea uzual pentru actorii statali sau non-statali din ultimele decenii (vezi de ex. Peter Pomerantsev și Michael Weiss, sau Andriy Tyushka). Desigur acest mod de promovare a intereselor politice sau a celor de stat nu este unul nou, acesta se înscrie foarte bine în tiparul paradigmei realiste sau chiar al celei liberale din relațiile internaționale, fiind la rândul lui un element însăși al Războiului Rece. Totuși lumea interconectată social, politic, economic sau cultural devine, din ce în ce mai mult, victimă a efectelor negative ale mecanismelor de exploatare a diferendelor, pentru a câștiga competiția/lupta politică națională, regională sau globală. Diferența culturală, opinia discordantă, valorile minoritare au devenit arme în instrumentarul politic, care deja produc efecte negative serioase la nivelul securității societale și a evoluției sănătoase a națiunilor/statelor. În acest context, comunitatea maghiară din Transilvania este pusă în fața unor evoluțiilor în care trebuie să navigheze printre evoluțiile globale (vezi de ex. Anthony Giddens, Arjun Appadurai, Manuel Castells, Erzsébet Strausz sau Saskia Sassen) și cele locale/regionale, și să facă față unor evoluții politice, sociale sau economice, care, nu întotdeauna, favorizează buna sa evoluție.

Propunerea de studiu dorește să analizeze și să creeze o imagine asupra următoarelor probleme: (1) impactul evoluțiilor globale/aspectelor globalismului cultural asupra comunității maghiare din Transilvania, (2) rolul și locul culturii comunității în spațiul global și european, (3) impactul politicilor de stat ale Ungariei și României asupra evoluției comunității maghiare din perspectivă culturală (pentru cadrul est european vezi ex. Andrea Pető, Erzsébet Strausz, Luca Váradi) . Pentru a atinge aceste obiective, analiza se va axa pe tiparele și modelele de influență cu care se confruntă individul și societatea, pe pachetul de valori promovate sau atacate în cadrul mecanismelor care au dus la transformarea culturii în armă, cum ar fi calitatea morală-imorală a societății occidentale, protocronismul istoric, lupta pentru credință, utilitatea sau inutilitatea valorilor liberale etc.

Kajo, Erkjad (Aix-Marseille University, France)

Three Vertices, One State: Albania as Nationalizing Power, Kin-State, and Ward of the League

Scholarly diagnoses of the present routinely describe an international minority-rights regime in decline; hollowed by sovereigntist backlash, the securitization of difference, and the return of assimilationist majoritarianism. Interwar Albania (1920–1939) suggests these are not symptoms of the regime's decay but conditions present at its birth. Admitted to the League of Nations in 1920 on the condition of a minority-protection declaration imposed disproportionately on small Balkan states as a civilizational entrance exam, Albania occupied a structurally singular position: at once a nationalizing state toward its Greek, Slav, and Vlach minorities, an external homeland for the Albanians of Kosovo and Çamëria, and a probationary semi-sovereign under Great-Power tutelage. From this triple vantage it improvised a minority strategy whose signature move was the weaponization of equality itself. When King Zog's government abolished all private schools in 1933, it defended the

closure of Greek-language minority schools in the impeccably liberal idiom of uniform civic equality, every citizen treated identically. The resulting Permanent Court of International Justice opinion, *Minority Schools in Albania* (1935), compelled international law to articulate for the first time the now-canonical distinction between equality "in law" and equality "in fact." Albania thus did not merely receive the interwar minority regime; it co-authored that regime's foundational jurisprudence by violating it. Read as genealogy rather than precedent, the Albanian case implies that today's majoritarian invocations of formal equality against minority difference are not a departure from the interwar settlement but its return.

Kántor, Zoltán (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Research Institute for Hungarian Minorities Abroad, Hungary)

Minority Nation-Building Revisited

This presentation revisits the concept of minority nation-building in light of the institutional, political and transnational practices through which Hungarian minority communities in Central and Eastern Europe reproduce themselves as national communities. Building on my earlier article on "minority nation-building", the presentation asks how national reproduction takes place when the community concerned does not control a sovereign state, but nevertheless maintains a dense network of representative, educational, cultural, ecclesiastical, media and civil institutions.

The central argument is that minority nation-building should be understood not merely as identity preservation, but as an ongoing process of institution-building, boundary maintenance, elite formation and social reproduction. Hungarian minority communities organise themselves through political parties, minority self-governance structures, schools, churches, cultural associations, youth organisations, media outlets, research institutes and informal local networks. These institutions do not simply "serve" an already existing minority population; they actively produce the social spaces in which Hungarian language use, historical memory, political representation and intergenerational transmission remain possible.

The presentation also examines the role of kin-state support in this process. Hungary's policies toward external Hungarian communities provide financial, symbolic and institutional resources that may strengthen minority nation-building, especially in education, culture, media, church life and community development. At the same time, kin-state involvement raises analytical questions about autonomy, dependency, legitimacy and the relationship between local community needs and broader national policy agendas.

By comparing different mechanisms of self-organisation and external support, the presentation seeks to refine the concept of minority nation-building for contemporary debates on nationalism, diaspora politics and minority governance. It argues that Hungarian minority nation-building is best analysed as a multi-level process: locally embedded, regionally organised, institutionally mediated and transnationally supported. This approach allows us to understand minority communities not only as objects of protection, but as active agents of national reproduction.

Keresztes, Bence (University of Debrecen, Hungary)

The Hungarian Democratic Opposition and the Situation of the Hungarian Minority in Romania in the 1980s

In my presentation I would like to speak about one of the chapters of my PhD dissertation, which is generally role about the Western press interpretation of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition.

In my presentation, I would speak about how Western newspapers and human rights-oriented media interpreted and connected two parallel developments in the early 1980s: the increasing repression of the Hungarian democratic opposition in Hungary and the dismantling of the *Ellenpontok* samizdat network among the Hungarian minority in Romania. While these events unfolded in different political contexts, Western journalists, émigré activists, and human rights organizations frequently framed them as interconnected manifestations of broader restrictions on civil liberties and minority rights within the Soviet bloc.

Drawing on Western press coverage, human rights reports, and contemporary opposition sources, the paper explores how narratives concerning the Hungarian democratic opposition became linked to the situation of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. Particular attention is devoted to the circulation of information between dissident networks, foreign correspondents, and international advocacy actors, highlighting the transnational dimensions of minority-rights activism during the late Cold War.

The presentation also investigates the international reception of the Memorandum concerning the situation of Hungarians in Romania that was presented at the Madrid Follow-up Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). It argues that the document contributed to bringing the issue of the Hungarian minority in Romania into broader international discussions on human rights and minority protection, while simultaneously creating new channels of cooperation between opposition groups, diaspora organizations, and Western advocacy networks.

By situating these developments within the framework of transnational minority politics and Cold War human rights discourse, the presentation seeks to demonstrate how international publicity became an important resource for both democratic opposition movements and minority-rights mobilization in East Central Europe.

Kiss, Ágnes (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj, Romania)

Pogroms without a File: Anti-Roma Violence in Late Socialist Romania

According to oral testimonies, in May 1988, approximately 170 Roma inhabitants of Ditrău (Harghita County, Romania) were expelled after several nights of collective violence. Yet archival research in the records of local administration, the Communist Party, the Catholic Church, and the Securitate has so far found no direct documentation of this event or of similar episodes of collective anti-Roma violence in the county. This paper examines this archival silence and asks how a highly bureaucratized authoritarian state dealt with Roma-related issues in general, and collective anti-Roma violence in particular. Rather than treating the absence of records as a simple evidentiary gap, it interprets it as the product of institutional

categorization, divided responsibilities, and selective state attention. By situating Ditrău in the broader history of anti-Roma violence before and after 1989, the paper also challenges accounts that locate pogroms in the post-socialist transition.

Kiss, Tamás (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj, Romania)

My presentation explores the complex relationship between the collective agency of minorities and democratic functioning, specifically investigating whether a trade-off exists where robust collective agency diminishes individual equal access and participation within a minority community. While prominent minority-friendly scholars argue that ethnic politics enhances democratic resilience, this paper presents a more nuanced "yes and no" argument by systematically distinguishing between inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic fields. Rather than employing a security or secessionist framework, the analysis focuses on minority-governed institutions and the minority itself as a substate political community within the common political space of the home country. Reformulating the core question, the paper asks if sustaining collective agency in a majoritarian nation-state creates a trade-off with equal participation in intra-ethnic deliberation and decision-making. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's theoretical framework, I argue that such a trade-off does exist unless explicit institutional mechanisms are constructed to sustain internal democracy and pluralism. This dynamic is empirically illustrated through the case of Romania's Hungarian minority, which possesses a highly dense network of minority institutions. The paper concludes by highlighting the non-democratic consequences of unmediated collective agency, including ethnic authoritarianism, internal and intersectional subordination, and a distinct interest representation gap.

Kovács, Nóra (ELTE Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Minority Studies, Hungary)

Embodied Regional Integration: Intimacy, Mobility and Cross-Border Inter-Ethnic Tango Relationships from a Hungarian Perspective

The proposed anthropological paper argues that social Argentine tango functions as a micro-infrastructure of regional integration in Central and Eastern Europe, where repeated embodied intimacy creates durable local, cross-border and interethnic ties. These ties operate independently from formal political or institutional frameworks. Integration in this context is intimate, and it happens in and through the physical body. The argument stems from an empirical observation: Hungarian tango dancers travel a lot to international tango weekends to dance. They used to prefer events in Western Europe, but their mobility patterns have changed for the dynamically developing Central and Eastern European region. The study seeks to connect three dimensions: 1) the movement system and the ethnically mixed spaces of social Argentine tango; with all their specificities (such as the close embrace, the improvisational style, and the frequent partner change); 2) the intimate relationships that form among tango dancers, including various forms of inter-ethnic romantic partnership; and

3) the role of these relationships as personal bridges within Hungary and across the surrounding region. The theoretical framework of the paper is centered around the idea of intimacy as integration and its connection to improvised couple dancing. The empirical data comes from interviews, online document analyses, and observant participation.

Kuzmany, Börries (University of Vienna, Austria)

A History of Non-Territorial Autonomy: Accommodating National Diversity in Modern Europe, 1848-1939 (keynote lecture)

This lecture explores the travelling idea and application of non-territorial autonomy, a concept based on collective rights to deal with national diversity within a state. The talk tackles the concept's origins in the Habsburg and Russian empires, its interpretation and implementation in the interwar European nation states, and its discussion in the arena of international minority protection. In the period from the mid-19th century to the beginning of the Second World War, it proved to be a highly flexible political instrument that could adapt not only to different European political contexts but also to divergent ideological needs. Originally, it arose from the liberal conception of rule of law and fundamental equality; subsequently, however, this idea was also conceived in illiberal terms. Hence, on its journey through Europe's intellectual and political history, non-territorial autonomy was oftentimes transferred and transformed.

Leshchyshyn, Anastasia (McGill University, Canada)

“The Toxic Residue of our Mother Tongue”: Ukraine at War, Linguistic Estrangement, and Challenges to the International Minority Languages Regime

On account of Russia's centuries-long political domination of Ukraine, a phenomenon of widespread multilingualism complicates efforts to distinguish between “Ukrainian-speakers” and “Russian-speakers” in Ukrainian society. Yet the application of a majority-minority framework to the case of Ukraine – in accordance with the comparative literature on language policy – continues to imply that these categories of language use are clearly defined, with speakers maintaining correspondingly distinct political attitudes and interests. The framework also problematically equates the Russian language with those spoken by a fraction of Ukraine's population, such as Crimean Tatar, for which “linguistic protection” is an undisputed imperative. My doctoral dissertation will thus apply an interpretivist lens to questions of long-standing ambiguities in language use and linguistic identities in Ukraine and aims to develop *alternative vocabularies for linguistic accommodation* that evolve from “bottom-up” theorizations of language practice in decolonial contexts.

Building on surveys that have identified an increasing preference for the use of Ukrainian over Russian in wartime Ukraine (Kulyk, 2024), the dissertation endeavours to identify empirical manifestations of what is preliminarily referred to as a process of “linguistic estrangement” of the Russian language in the country. Drawing on theorizations of meaning-making that understand culture as “semiotic practice” (Wedeen, 2002) and language as activity (Wittgenstein, 1953), the concept is meant to encapsulate the process by which the Russian language has increasingly acquired “foreign” connotations despite its widespread use

domestically and has failed to solidify as a cornerstone of Ukrainian citizens' identity. As the meaning of the Russian language changes, these changes will affect *how* language matters and functions within Ukraine – including its increased “securitization” (Carlà & Constantin, 2025) – and inform discourses on the country's evolving language and minority rights policies.

Lin, Yuxiang (Tianjin University, China)

DPS as a Vehicle of Democratic Backsliding or Resilience? Selective Service Provision as Mechanism

This research examines whether ethnic parties act as vehicles of democratic resilience or democratic backsliding, focusing on Bulgaria's Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS). While existing scholarship offers conflicting expectations about the role of ethnic parties, it has paid limited attention to the everyday mechanisms through which these parties sustain support and shape democratic outcomes. Drawing on original fieldwork and interview evidence, the article identifies selective service provision as a key mechanism linking ethnic party organisation to democratic quality. In contexts of weak state capacity, DPS compensates for gaps in public service delivery by mobilising local networks and providing targeted, often informal, solutions. While such practices can enhance short-term satisfaction, inclusion, and local stability, they also personalise access to public goods, reinforce dependency on party networks, and weaken impersonal, rule-based accountability. At the same time, ethnic identity becomes embedded in patterns of resource allocation, functioning as a channel through which access to services is structured and political support is sustained. Crucially, the article shows that these practices are accompanied by an attention-shifting dynamic, whereby political discourse prioritises tangible outputs—such as infrastructure and service delivery—over institutional concerns such as checks and balances. This process normalises limited accountability and contributes to more subtle forms of democratic backsliding. By shifting the focus from national-level institutions to everyday governance practices, the article reconceptualises ethnic parties as ambivalent actors whose organisational strategies can simultaneously sustain and erode democracy.

Novák, Zoltán (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj, Romania)

Intellectuals and Power. Sütő András's Journey between Ideology, Power, Faith, and Disillusionment

This presentation examines András Sütő's changing relationship with political power in communist Romania, focusing on the tensions between ideological loyalty, intellectual autonomy, and responsibility towards the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Drawing on theoretical approaches to intellectuals' political attitudes, moral conscience, and cooperation between the state and society, it traces Sütő's trajectory from an active supporter of communist ideology in the 1950s, through his institutional integration and public engagement in the 1960s and early 1970s, to his gradual transformation into an ethnic dissident from the second half of the 1980s. Particular attention is paid to the changing nationality policies of the Ceaușescu regime, the erosion of minority institutions, and the growing conflict between Sütő's political commitments and his attachment to his ethnic community. By examining

historical archival sources and documents produced by the Securitate, the research seeks to reassess existing interpretations of Sütő's political evolution and to demonstrate how cooperation, compromise, disillusionment, and resistance developed in relation to changing political circumstances. Rather than representing a complete rejection of communist ideology, Sütő's transformation primarily reflected his opposition to the regime's increasingly explicit anti-Hungarian policies.

Omer, Metin (Ovidius University Constanța, Romania)

Kinship, Memory, and Mobilization: Crimean Tatar Forced Migrants in Romania after the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine

This paper examines the involvement of the Crimean Tatar diaspora in Romania in helping Crimean Tatars displaced first by the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and then by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, arguing that the annexation's consequences extended beyond Crimea's indigenous population to reshape the diaspora itself. Drawing on field observations and interviews conducted between 2022 and 2025 with refugees, community leaders, and representative organizations, the paper traces how the Tatar community of Dobrudja mobilized on both occasions, influenced less by the general Ukrainian refugee crisis than by transnational kinship ties and historical memory of exile.

After 2014, this involvement took institutional form through the World Congress of Crimean Tatars, which gained new importance in assisting those leaving the peninsula. The annexation also affected the Dobrudja community directly: a tradition of visits to Crimea since 1991 became difficult after 2014 and impossible after 2022, severing a vital link to the ancestral homeland. At the same time, Russian attempts to gain influence among Tatar organizations in Romania sowed new divisions, weakening the diaspora's capacity for coordinated support.

Between February and June 2022, approximately 200 Crimean Tatars remained in Romania and another 300 transited toward Turkey and Western Europe, assisted by the Muftiate of the Muslim Cult in Romania, the Democratic Union of Tatar Turkish Muslims of Romania (DUMTTR), and individual volunteers. None of the refugees interviewed had come directly from Crimea: all had left the peninsula after 2014 and resettled around Odesa and Vinnytsia before being displaced a second time in 2022.

Building on Filiz Tutku Aydın's (2021) framework of Crimean Tatar diasporic mobilization, the paper traces this continuum of displacement from 2014 to 2022 to contribute to debates on kin-community solidarity, forced migration, and the layered consequences of Russian and Soviet policies toward the Crimean Tatars.

Pačariz, Sabrina (Northeastern University, London, United Kingdom)

Grassroot Mobilization of Minorities in Pro-Democratic Protests: Bosniak Participation in Student Protests in Serbia

This paper will investigate the minority involvement in student protests across Serbia through the case of the University of Novi Pazar, with a particular interest in the impact it has over the perception of state identity and functioning of Serbian society. Recent developments suggest

unprecedented levels of minority participation in the students protests in Serbia. Unlike the pro-democratic demonstrations in the 1990s, the Bosniak population is participating in student protests for the first time, deliberately circumventing the representative bodies (minority councils, parties, and even religious institutions). Considering that the Serbian authoritarian regime is sustained via multiple patronage networks, it comes as no surprise that clientelism has captured the formal representative institutions for minority inclusion. Thus the study proposes to approach minority representation not only through the *whether* aspect of inclusion, by also through the *how*, in order to gain a more wholesome understanding of these issues.

The academic literature has analysed bottom-up approaches to democratisation and the importance of minority inclusion for democratic resilience, but it has not merged these aspects to address the challenges of minority representation in hybrid regimes. The paper is particularly interested in the implications of minority mobilization in pro-democratic protests within the post-conflict context of Serbia. The paper asserts that despite the rising autocratization on elite level, the grassroots mobilisation of minorities suggests a somewhat contradictory rise in democratisation and Europeanisation ‘from below’, through creating alternative routes of inclusion in the political debate. Methodologically, the paper relies on semi-structured interviews with activists, paired up with desktop research.

Pogorzała, Ewa (University of Rzeszów, Poland)

Challenges for the teaching of minority mother tongues as a form of ethnic mobilisation in the 21st century – the case of Poland

The right to be educated in one’s mother tongue and to establish schools where the mother tongue is the language of instruction has traditionally been one of the fundamental demands of national and ethnic minorities. This demand has been put forward by activists from minority organisations and has also served as a form of ethnic mobilisation. As a result, particularly in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the assimilationist paradigm dominates the way in which mother-tongue education is perceived. The choice of language constitutes a declaration of nationality and, consequently, the right to mother-tongue education undergoes a process of politicisation. In Poland, before 1989, a system of schools with non-Polish languages of instruction was established in accordance with the principle of ‘national in form, socialist in content’. After 1989, Poland adopted a number of commitments regarding the international protection of minorities, including those concerning the right to education in the mother tongue, treated as a means of preserving national or ethnic identity. However, this right was arbitrarily restricted to so-called recognised minorities under the 2005 Act. Other groups, such as the Silesians, are also making demands for recognition as a minority. Regression in the area of minority rights was particularly evident between 2015 and 2023. The number of German language lessons has been reduced. One might even speak of the securitisation of minority issues. There have been proposals to scrutinise the content of textbooks used in schools for minorities. A new challenge is the question of whether to allow the teaching of minority languages to migrants. This issue has taken on particular significance following the mass influx of children from Ukraine after February 24, 2022. However, it has sparked a great deal of controversy, and proposals to

introduce a so-called Ukrainian component into schools have even led to accusations of an attempt to "Ukrainize" Polish schools. On the other hand, the Polish state is undertaking a range of measures to support Polish diaspora education and the learning of the Polish language abroad, including as a so-called 'heritage language'. In doing so, it recognises the importance of this form of maintaining contact with the language and culture of the country of origin. The aim of the paper will also be to analyse the challenges associated with the sociolinguistic situation of minorities and the prestige of a given language. New opportunities are also emerging in connection with the development of AI and its use in the study of minority languages and their revitalisation.

Rovny, Jan (Sciences Po, France)

When Do Ethnic Parties Cooperate with Illiberals? (keynote lecture)

Ethnic minorities are circumstantial liberals, which means that they can also be circumstantial illiberals. In this talk, I reflect on the conditions under which ethnic minority parties join governing coalitions with illiberal political forces. Building a theoretical model, tested through a combination of quantitative insights and qualitative case analysis, the talk argues two points. First, ethnic parties may share some common interests with illiberal parties, especially in areas of cultural policy. Second, and more important, ethnic parties want to prevent illiberals entering government without them. The talk ultimately highlights the defensive character of ethnic-illiberal collaboration, and the specific premium ethnic parties place on government participation.

Schmitt, Patrick (Institute of Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies, Tübingen, Germany)

Family Reunification of ethnic Germans from Romania – German Minorities as a Bargaining Chip in Bilateral Negotiations

The collapse of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989 was accompanied by the opening of the country's borders, resulting in a wave of 111,000 Romanian Germans leaving the South-Eastern European state the following year to head for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The emigration of Romania's German minorities after 1989 represents the culmination of a migration process that had begun in the 1950s under the banner of 'family reunification' and was systematised from the late 1960s onwards. Through a secret 'channel', a bargaining process took place, in which the FRG and Romania negotiated agreements on the departure of the Romanian Germans, thereby determining the fate of almost 400,000 citizens. The mechanism behind this was simple: the FRG paid the socialist state much-needed foreign currency, and in return the state allowed its citizens of German nationality to leave for the FRG.

The paper focuses initially on the causes of this migration process among Romania's German minorities, many of whom saw migration to the West as their only chance to escape, repression and everyday restrictions – and the accompanying sense of inequality. The fact that a door to the FRG opened for the Romanian Germans at all was due to their German ethnicity and the Federal Republic's willingness to act as a kin-state for 'its' citizens.

Consequently, attention should also be turned to the two main actors behind family reunification – the FRG and Romania – and their interests and motivations behind the initiative to resolve this ‘national issue’. This paper argues that it was not only the humanitarian concern of family reunification that preoccupied these two actors, as representatives of both states were keen to emphasise, but that foreign and domestic policy considerations, as well as economic factors, also played a central role, thereby reducing the Romanian Germans to mere bargaining chips.

Sienz, Andreas (Institute of Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies, Tübingen, Germany)

Neighbour, Colleague, Friend or Enemy? War Experiences in Multiethnic Transylvanian Villages During the Second World War

Since more than three-quarters of Romania’s population still lived in villages before the start of the Second World War, it is worthwhile to examine the strategies and experiences employed/experienced by a multiethnic rural population in dealing with ethnic issues. A microhistorical approach based on the Transylvanian villages of Apoldu de Sus/Großpold (completed MA project) and Vişeu de Sus/Felsővisó/Oberwischau (PhD project) reveals how, on the one hand, the major political fronts had local repercussions and caused tensions between ethnic groups, but on the other hand, well-established routines enabled pragmatic coexistence. Regarding the period before, during, and after the Second World War, people’s war experiences were shaped by numerous political upheavals that affected individual groups in very different ways. The focus was not only on the Transylvanian Question and the debate over the Second Vienna Arbitration between Romanians and Hungarians, but also on Nazi infiltration of the German communities and the Holocaust targeting Jews and Roma. The situation was exacerbated by deportations that affected different groups depending on the political situation, shifts in power structures—such as those resulting from agrarian reform—and intense national propaganda from various states.

The varying degrees to which these groups are mentioned in archival sources present a challenge that can be partially addressed through anthropological research, yet still leaves unexplained gaps at the local level, because individual groups possessed varying degrees of *agency*, some of which had developed over centuries of privilege. The theoretical concept of *everyday nationalism* (Michael Billig) can help explain how national ideology can spread even in rural settings, while at the same time the idea of *national indifference* (Tara Zahra) functions situationally, as long as no disadvantages are associated with ethnicity. This research aims to show that categories such as nationality or minority are, in principle, handled flexibly in the village context due to mutual dependencies, even when they are imbued with ideological significance.

Solomon, Flavius (“A.D. Xenopol” Institute of History, Iași)

The Nation-State versus the Federal State in Central and Southeastern Europe in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries: A Perspective of the Romanian Socialists

This paper explores a relatively understudied topic in the history of the socialist movement in the Kingdom of Romania in the decades preceding the First World War: its responses to debates and proposals for the political reorganization of states in Central and South-Eastern Europe, against the backdrop of the emergence and growing influence of nationalist movements. Drawing on political programmes, theoretical writings, the correspondence of leading Romanian socialist figures – particularly Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Cristian Racovski – and the left-wing press, the paper examines how Romanian socialists sought to reconcile the principle of national self-determination with the ideal of international working-class solidarity. The analysis focuses primarily on how Romanian left-wing activists engaged with different models for the reorganization of Austria-Hungary and the Balkans, with particular emphasis on the model of a federal state.

Stroschein, Sherrill (University College London, United Kingdom)

Ethnic Minority Parties and Resisting Backsliding in Regional Legislatures

Democratic backsliding can be understood as the removal of political alternatives and pluralism. Backsliding is a process rolled out unevenly across a state, with regional legislatures either falling into line or challenging central authority. Ethnic minorities are populations that often have a default of distance from central state power. Where ethnic minorities are organized into political parties – as in regional ethnic enclaves – challenges to central control are likely to be more sustained. As argued by Rovny (2023), democratic institutions are likely to be more resilient where there are politically-organized ethnic minorities, because they have an existential stake in maintaining pluralism.

Another option for ethnic minorities and their parties is to make deals with a strong central government instead (Kiss et al 2018, Székely 2019). When might ethnic minority parties challenge a strong center, and when might they allow themselves to be coopted? These dynamics illustrate how democratic backsliding unfolds or is resisted at the meso level in different pockets of the state.

This paper examines the party politics of regional legislatures in Romania and Slovakia with substantial Hungarian minorities and Hungarian parties. I examine elections to legislatures in three counties in Romania (județi) and four regions (kraj) in Slovakia – across three decades from the 1990s to the present. The results show that in addition to the challenger-versus-cooptation options outlined above, ethnic minorities use other strategies that are more nuanced. If the main Hungarian party is seen as co-opted, the group may fragment, with an emergence of independent candidates or new challenger parties. Or, “weird coalitions” might be formed between parties at the local level that contradict alliances at the center.

Szabó, Tamás (Department of International Relations and European Studies, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj, Romania)

Bilateral Minority Protection? Analyzing the Operation of Intergovernmental Commissions on National Minorities in CEE

The political transformations of 1989 prompted the Central and Eastern European countries to undertake a fundamental foreign policy orientation. The need to redefine bilateral relations with neighbouring states, maintain regional stability, and address interstate disputes led to the conclusion of a series of bilateral treaties and agreements. In several cases, where minority-related issues burdened bilateral relations, these treaties included key principles and standards for minority protection. To monitor the implementation of these provisions and provide an institutional framework for addressing minority claims, the contracting parties established intergovernmental joint commissions on national minorities.

This research examines the extent to which the operation of intergovernmental commissions on national minorities have contributed to the protection of minority communities and the resolution of minority-related issues over the past decades. By assessing their operation and effectiveness, the presentation evaluates the significance of these institutional mechanisms from a comparative perspective. The analysis of more than a dozen intergovernmental commissions reveals three distinct patterns. First, some commissions have convened regularly since their establishment and have adopted numerous protocols. A second, intermediate category includes those commissions that were initially active but whose functioning was subsequently affected by unresolved disputes or the deterioration of bilateral relations. Finally, the third category consists of commissions whose activities have been paralyzed for years.

Although the development of interstate relations, regularized meetings of intergovernmental commissions, and the implementation of their recommendations would significantly improve the situation of national minorities, the findings suggest that governments – due to political, legislative, or financial considerations – have often hindered their effective functioning.

Szelmenczi, Adrian (cercetător independent / independent researcher)

Politici identitare de stat vs. competențe pentru cultură democratică. Un conflict nerezolvat la nivelul programei educaționale oficiale din România

Prezentarea pe care o propun ia în discuție tensiunea existentă la nivelul programei educaționale oficiale între angajamentele României de a implementa cerințe formulate de Consiliul Europei cu privire la promovarea drepturilor persoanelor aparținând minorităților naționale în mediul școlar și conținutul manualelor de educație civică și educație socială predate în școala primară și gimnaziu. În acest context, integrarea cadrului de referință al competențelor pentru cultură democratică al Consiliului Europei (denumit mai departe „RFCDC”) în curricula oficială este o miză importantă din două puncte de vedere. Pe de o parte, implementarea RFCDC creează premisele pentru a promova comunicarea interculturală eficientă în sistemul de învățământ, în special în mediile diverse din punct de vedere etno-cultural și contribuie substanțial nu doar la reducerea abandonului școlar, ci și la

crearea unui mediu școlar sigur pentru toți, indiferent de afilierea sau afilierile culturale. Pe scurt, RFCDC devine un element-cheie al dreptului la educație, în special pentru copiii aparținând minorităților naționale. A doua miză este legată de asigurarea coeziunii societale mai ales în contextul noilor provocări ca fake-news, război hibrid etc. care testează din ce în ce mai mult reziliența societăților democratice.

Această prezentare va arăta că sistemul educațional românesc are nevoie de o schimbare de paradigmă în ceea ce privește reflectarea diversității etno-culturale pentru a putea operaționaliza cu succes RFCDC. În condițiile în care diversitatea societală nu se oprește la porțile școlii, ci devine parte integrantă a mediului de la clasă, decidenții politici au obligația să analizeze în profunzime ce efecte au manualele școlare asupra celor pentru care ele există: a copiilor pe care îi formează ca viitor cetățeni. Voi arăta că există o tensiune reală între modelul cultural și politic promovat în școala românească și valorile și competențele RFCDC și că, în cele din urmă, România nu-și îndeplinește corespunzător angajamentele asumate.

Toró, Tibor (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj, Romania)

Dual power structure or road to ethnic authoritarianism? Local level politics in a Hungarian majority town in Romania

(co-author: Kiss Tamás, Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Romania)

This paper examines local politics in minority dominated municipalities in Romania, focusing on the Hungarian-majority town of Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy). While in Romania the minority policy regime is described as unequal accommodation and focuses on the claim-making of minority elites and minority political agency, this study examines the internal democratic deficits of ethnic politics within minority-led local governance. Specifically, the paper explores how dual power structures and ethnic parallelism create the possibility for the development of local "ethnic autocracy."

Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, including representative survey data, longitudinal electoral results, asset declarations of public sector workers, and social media analysis, we demonstrate how local politics has devolved into a quasi one-party system. In this environment, dominant minority elites use identity politics instrumentally to create the "Hungarian unity." The paper argues that this monolithic model of identity serves primarily to consolidate the power of neoliberal ethnic elites, and hinders the emancipation and equal participation of subordinated and marginalized intra-ethnic categories.

By analyzing these local dynamics, the paper challenges the dominant notion of minority political agency, highlighting the urgent need to address authoritarian tendencies and the suppression of pluralism within minority-controlled institutions.

Trevisan, Luca (Andrássy University, Budapest, Hungary)

Fragmenting the Minority: The Ladin Question in Postwar South Tyrol

This paper investigates the Ladin minority as a revealing case in the post-war management of Italy's borderlands. In the first years of the Cold War, the Italian Republic faced the challenge

of preserving sovereignty over South Tyrol while responding to minority claims, Austria's diplomatic pressure, and the unresolved legacies of Fascist forced Italianisation. Within this context, the Prefecture of Bolzano and the Office of Border Zones became important instruments of borderland governance between 1947 and 1954.

Drawing on Mauro Scroccaro's studies and new archival material, this contribution asks how the Italian state interpreted Ladin mobilisation. It argues that Ladin claims were not incorporated into a neutral framework of minority protection. Rather, they were selectively encouraged when they helped differentiate the Ladins from the German-speaking South Tyroleans and weaken the possibility of a common minority bloc in the province. This dynamic is illustrated by the case of Guido Iori de Rocia, one of the principal advocates of the "unity of the Ladins", whose lobbying activity was generously subsidised by Silvio Innocenti, Prefect of Bolzano in 1946 and subsequently head of the OBZ until 1954.

The Ladin case demonstrates that minority recognition was an ambiguous process: it could support genuine claims to cultural and political visibility while also serving the state's attempt to fragment broader minority mobilisation in South Tyrol. This contribution offers a historical perspective on how democratic states managed ethnocultural diversity by promoting a minority's distinctiveness, providing selective support, and encouraging political differentiation.

Vasilevich, Hanna (EURAC Research, Institute for Minority Rights, Bolzano/Bozen, Italy)

National Minorities as Security Challenges? The Securitization of the Russian-Speaking Minority in Latvia after 2022

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has significantly altered security perceptions across Central and Eastern Europe. In Latvia, debates concerning national security have increasingly intersected with discussions on minority integration, language, and social cohesion. As a result, the position of the Russian-speaking minority has become subject to renewed political and public scrutiny.

This paper examines how the Russian-speaking minority has been represented in political and institutional security discourses in Latvia since 2022. Rather than focusing on specific policy outcomes, it analyses the ways in which minority-related issues are linked to questions of state security, resilience, and loyalty in official narratives. The study draws on securitization theory and explores how security arguments are employed in discussions concerning minority communities in the context of heightened regional tensions.

The paper is based on research conducted within the SEMIRinEE project (Securitization of Minority Rights in Eastern Europe, funded by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen). The analysis combines material collected during fieldwork in Latvia, including expert interviews, with the examination of official statements, policy documents, and public communications by state institutions.

Particular attention is paid to the discursive construction of security challenges and the place assigned to minority communities within these narratives. The Latvian case provides an opportunity to examine how changing geopolitical circumstances influence state approaches to ethnocultural diversity. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the relationship

between security, nationbuilding, and minority governance in contemporary Europe and illustrate how external security shocks can reshape the political framing of minority issues.

Vukman, Péter (University of Szeged, Hungary)

**South Slavic Minorities in Hungary in a Changed International Environment:
Opportunities, Minority Strategies, and Local Conflicts (1945–1948)**

The years immediately following World War II brought significant changes for the South Slavic minorities (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) in Hungary due to the changing foreign policy environment. The new communist Yugoslav leadership led by Josip Broz Tito expected Hungary to become part of the Soviet bloc as well, and its goal was to help the Hungarian communist leadership come to power. This, in turn, served as an incentive for both sides to foster good-neighbourly relations, which provided more favourable conditions for the South Slavic minorities in Hungary. Moreover, unlike in the interwar period, the new Yugoslav leadership took a genuine interest in the fate of the South Slavs in Hungary and also used them as a tool to achieve its goals.

The changes taking place in high politics affected the South Slavic minorities in Hungary. Their leaders sensed an opportunity to broaden their opportunities and expand their rights. In my paper, based on archival sources, I examine what minority strategies the South Slavs in Hungary and their minority leaders employed in this changing environment. I focus primarily on three areas: (1) party politics and party membership; (2) ensuring education in minority language; (3) the possibility of border changes. I consider the examination of these three areas important because, based on my research, the objectives and interests of the Yugoslav leadership, the South Slavic minority leadership in Hungary, and the South Slavs themselves did not always coincide. In my paper, I will also briefly discuss how the expansion of opportunities for South Slavs in Hungary affected interethnic relations at the local level.

From the spring of 1948, the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict signalled a shift in the previously favourable international environment for the South Slavic minorities in Hungary. Bilateral Hungarian–Yugoslav relations deteriorated, and the opportunities and advocacy power of the South Slavic minorities were drastically curtailed. At the end of my paper, I will briefly explore what new minority strategies this situation led to emerge.

Warchala, Michał (Institute of Sociology, Philosophy and Cognitive Sciences, University of National Education Commission in Kraków, Poland)

Populism and Ethnic Nationalism: The New Far-Right Wave in Poland (and Elsewhere)

In his book *What is Populism?* (2018) Jan-Werner Müller, one of the leading experts in populist policies observes that to take roots in a given society populism usually needs some sort of “support” in the form of another political ideology or strong social emotion that would carry populist agenda. This “support” might be racism (as in Donald Trump’s MAGA movement) or anti-immigrant resentment (as in many Western European populist and “sovereignist” movements). In Poland, given its specific historical context, the function in question is performed by ethnic nationalism and antisemitism. Within the 2023-2025 period

we witnessed the new wave of ethnic national ideology and especially of antisemitism that triumphantly (re)entered the Polish political scene in 2023-2024. Populist-nationalist propaganda is directed against both Ukrainians – anti-Ukrainian rhetoric has been on the rise since at least 2024 – and refugees from more remote regions. With growing polarization of the political life and certain elements of the populist agenda (e.g, questions of national security, military spending, border push-backs etc.) being almost routinely used now by mainstream parties, populism and its supports, nationalism and antisemitism, get more and more radicalized proclaiming, for example, the need for Poland's exit from the EU.

In my presentation I would like to talk briefly about the developments that have taken place on the Polish political scene since 2023 putting them in both Central European and global context.

Wolf, Anna – Marc Röggla (Center for Autonomy Experience, EURAC Research, Italy)

Minority Protection versus Good Governance? Lessons from South Tyrol's Autonomy Reforms since 2001

Throughout the last decade, South Tyrol's autonomy framework has undergone gradual revision, from targeted adjustments leading up to the 2026 amendment to the 1972 Autonomy Statute.

This paper provides a normative analysis of the constitutional amendment act and enactment decrees adopted since 2015. It asks how far these reforms reshape the balance between minority protection and legislative autonomy in the context of South Tyrol's autonomy framework. The paper argues that the recent reform trajectory signals a partial shift to put more emphasis on functional autonomy and a clear definition of autonomous competence spheres, while softening some of the minority protection mechanisms.

By mapping the evolving legal framework of the last decade and situating it within current debates in South Tyrol on autonomy and minority protection, the paper assesses the balance between extending legislative autonomy and updating language- and culture-related minority rights mechanisms, asking whether expanded competences enhance the resilience of the autonomy framework. The authors analyse whether recent reforms indicate a shift from identity-based minority rights protection toward a more functional, administration-oriented understanding of autonomy. The paper suggests that for the framework to remain relevant and legitimate in view of societal change, existing language and culture-related protection mechanisms would benefit as well from careful revision.

In light of a changing linguistic landscape and increasing political pressure against regional differentiation, the authors conclude that legal reforms to the autonomy framework should strive for an equilibrium between safeguarding minority rights, promoting social cohesion and guaranteeing a functioning and efficient governance.

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From *Zusammenhalten* and *Harmonie* to Heritage Governance: The Transylvanian Saxons after 1989

This paper develops a multicausal approach to the contemporary situation of national minorities in the context of democratic erosion. Building on the arguments of Peter Mair, Pierre Manent, and Daniel Barbu, it argues that the transition from pluralist-representative democracy towards elitist-constitutional forms of governance provides an important, yet insufficiently explored, context for understanding changing patterns of minority representation and interethnic relations. Rather than treating phenomena such as populism, radicalization, anti-system voting, and declining trust in international institutions solely as causes of democratic erosion, the paper approaches them also as symptoms of a broader transformation in the relationship between citizens, political institutions, and representation.

The case of the Transylvanian Saxons illustrates these transformations particularly clearly in the field of cultural heritage governance. Historically, Saxon communities were structured around complementary normative values such as *Zusammenhalten* (“staying together”) and *Harmonie* (“preserving social peace”) (McArthur 1975, 1981), with community life mediated primarily through established local institutions (Roth 2022). Since 1989, the pluralization of actors involved in ethnomanagement (Cercel 2017; Koranyi & Wittlinger 2011), on the one hand, and the broader transformation of national political regimes towards forms of governance, on the other, have induced significant changes in the ways Saxon communities are represented and managed. Consequently, *Zusammenhalten* has become increasingly symbolic and transnationally reconfigured, while *Harmonie*, once embedded in everyday community relations, has increasingly been replaced by new forms of interaction, predominantly economically oriented, often towards cultural tourism and commodification.

Drawing on cases including the contestation surrounding the Brukenthal statue in Sibiu (Dragoman and Zamfira 2026), competing heritage narratives surrounding the fortified church of Câlnic (Golomoș 2013), and the cancellation of the Urzelinlauf festival in Cincu in 2023, the paper explores how Transylvanian Saxon communities exercise and renegotiate their agency in preserving their collective identity and heritage. At the same time, it examines the political and institutional reconfigurations that increasingly shape community cohesion and interethnic relations.

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From Regional Language to Institutional Nationhood: Comparing Frisian and Low Saxon Minority Strategies in Fryslân

This paper examines competing minority strategies in the Dutch province of Fryslân. While Frisian has developed into an official language with extensive educational, administrative, and legal rights, other historical languages within the province, like the Low Saxon variety spoken in the Stellingwerpen (two municipalities in the province), have achieved only limited recognition. This divergence is remarkable because both communities coexist within the same political and socioeconomic environment and Low Saxon, as well as City-Frisian, had greater social status and broader societal use than Frisian.

Drawing on theories of nation-building, language planning, and minority mobilization, the presentation shows that Frisian and Low Saxon activists had fundamentally different strategic approaches, whereby Frisian activists pursued a nation-building strategy characterized by

linguistic standardization, institution-building, elite mobilization, and engagement with national and European minority-rights frameworks, while Low Saxon activists used a cultural preservation strategy emphasizing local identity, dialect diversity, and community-based cultural activities. These different approaches produced different outcomes in terms of institutional recognition.

Furthermore, the presentation further explores how the success of Frisian nation-building reshaped internal power relations within Fryslân, marginalizing other linguistic communities such as Low Saxon, Bildts, and City Frisian. Finally, it looks at the implications of recent advances in artificial intelligence and machine translation for minority-language politics. AI-based multilingual governance may reduce the institutional costs traditionally associated with language rights and thereby creating new opportunities for smaller language communities that historically lacked the resources to pursue a nation-building project.

The Fryslân case provides broader insights into how minority groups adapt their strategies in changing political and technological environments.