

Ethnic Germans as a Language Minority in Central and Eastern Europe: Legislative and Policy Frameworks in Poland, Hungary and Romania

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Introduction

In many cases, language is a vital component of individual and group identity and figures prominently among the aspects by which ethnic minorities distinguish themselves from majority populations in their host-countries. Thus, the very survival of a minority population as a distinct ethnocultural group often depends upon provision for the continued preservation of its mother tongue as a living language. This can normally only be achieved if this language is used in public as well as the private sphere and is taught as a first language at schools, which, in turn, is only possible if political and legal conditions are in place that allow minorities to 'live' in their language. Such conditions include, above all, a commitment by the relevant state not to discriminate against people who speak a language other than the language of the titular nation. However, general non-discrimination legislation and its enforcement are often not enough to enable a minority to preserve its language. The *Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities* emphasise that the legislative framework also needs to provide for complete equality in the use of individual and place names, must allow language use in the practice and profession of religion and religious ceremonies, that it should extend permissively into community life, the media, and public administration, and that adequate funding should be provided for the implementation of such laws. Where appropriate, cross-border cooperation should be permitted with countries to whose populations the members of the minority feel ethnically or linguistically related (High Commissioner on National Minorities 1998).

Against this background, this chapter examines the legislative and policy frameworks in three Central and Eastern European states with German-speaking minorities – Poland, Hungary and Romania. Our analysis focuses on issues that are particularly significant in connection with the ability of a minority to preserve its language. These include language laws and other legal provisions regarding the official status and use of languages, language access in education, representation of minority languages in and through the media, and opportunities for cross-border cooperation within one language community. We contend that the present status of each of the German

minorities and their abilities to preserve their mother tongue cannot be comprehensively explained without due consideration of a wide range of contemporary and historical factors. Among the former, legal and policy frameworks are as important as are the territorial concentration of the minority communities and their age structures. Among the latter, the policies of assimilation, discrimination and forced migration pursued to differing degrees in all three countries over the past half century since the end of the Second World War are equally significant if one wants to account for the present situation and prospects of each of the minorities under discussion. Thus, while Hungary, Poland and Romania have all ratified the Framework Convention on the Protection of Minorities and Hungary has additionally ratified, and Romania signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the resultant relatively permissive legislative framework and the minority policies adopted within may have been too little too late to create conditions conducive to the long-term preservation of German language minorities in all three countries.

The German Minority in Hungary¹

In the 1991 census, just under 900,000 people in Hungary declared their nationality or ethnic identity as other than Hungarian, thus giving minorities a total share of just under 9% of Hungary's ten million population. The most numerous among them were Roma, followed by Germans and Slovaks. Smaller minority groups include Jews, Croats, and Romanians, as well as Greeks, Serbs, Slovenes, Armenians, and Bulgarians.

After 1945, as in Poland and Romania, the German minority, which can trace its earliest origins to migration and colonisation in the 13th century, was held collectively responsible for Nazi atrocities in Hungary during the Second World War. Approximately 200,000 of its members were expelled to the American and Soviet occupation zones immediately after the war before the Allies put a stop to the expulsions. Between 1950 and the early 1990s, another 20,000 ethnic Germans emigrated to the Federal Republic. Preliminary results from census of February 2001 indicate that 62,233 individuals declared themselves to be of German nationality.

¹ Additional information in this section was found in Government of Hungary (1999), Hungarian Helsinki Committee (1999), Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2000) and Government of Hungary (2001).

This number in fact represents an increase of over 100% since the census of 1991, when only 30,824 declared themselves to be German. This data indicates that an identity shift has occurred among some Hungarian citizens. Of those Hungarian citizens who claimed German nationality in 2001, only 33,792 stated that German was their mother tongue. How many of these are fluent in German is an altogether different matter. With regard to the overall number of ethnic Germans, although some would dispute the aforementioned figures as erring on the low side, there is little reason to assume that this is the case. There is no evidence to confirm any supposition that self-declaration of German ethnicity opens a Pandora's box of discriminatory practices.

The reduction of the German minority in post-1945 Hungary had a significant impact upon language use and awareness among those who remained in the country, especially as vital community structures had been destroyed. Even in communities where today more than half of the population is ethnic German, the language is rarely used regularly in public life. This includes religious services, where efforts to re-initiating religious services in German have found success in several settlements during the recent years.

Hungarian Minority Policy 1945-1990

As in Poland, albeit on a very different scale, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War the ethnic German minority experienced a period of collective victimisation and expulsion, when approximately 200,000 members of the minority were expelled from Hungary, adding to the approximately 50,000 who had fled with the retreating German army. Officially, the main criterion for expulsion was membership in the German minority's principal organisation in Hungary, the *Volksbund*, which had been classified as a Nazi organisation. Although this was true for the period from the mid-1930s onwards, the *Volksbund* traced its history back far longer, and in 1945 its membership included many who had been members long before its nazification. In addition to members of the *Volksbund*, many ethnic Germans were also expelled simply because of their German roots or mother tongue. The expulsion of approximately half of Hungary's pre-war ethnic German population deprived the remaining members of the minority of almost their entire intellectual, economic and political elite and made compact and practically homogeneous German settlements in Hungary a thing of the past. It is also important to see the impact

that the expulsion of the ethnic Germans in Hungary had on their opportunities to preserve a distinct ethnocultural identity in the wider context of population transfers in Central and Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1950. On a smaller scale, ethnic Hungarians had been expelled in particular from those territories that Hungary had won in the first and second Vienna arbitration awards in southern Slovakia and Romania (Transylvania) and Yugoslavia (Vojvodina). Hungarians expelled from these areas were often resettled in (formerly) German villages, thus adding to the difficulty to maintain viable community structures suitable for the preservation of living German language in the country.

From the 1950s onwards, the communist regime in Hungary primarily pursued a policy of indifference and neglect towards the country's ethnic minorities. There was some limited provision of minority-language education for members of the German minority, but following the expulsions, many ethnic Germans in Hungary embarked on a course of 'voluntary' assimilation, resulting in a rapid language shift towards Hungarian as the principal language within the community, replacing almost entirely local German dialects.

Post-communist Developments

From the 1980s onwards, changes towards a more liberal minority policy began to take effect when the communist regime began to open up and gradually transform itself. Today, Hungary has an extensive network of legislation regulating the situation of ethnic minorities in the country. The constitution recognises national and ethnic minorities as integral parts of society and obliges the state to protect them and to ensure their collective participation in public life. The state is also required to create conditions within which minorities can foster their culture, use their mother tongues, and provide school instruction conducted in native languages. The state allows guarantees the right of minorities to use their names in their own language. The Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities of 1993 provides a complex system of general regulations, individual and group rights, local and national minority self-government and cultural autonomy, and (with regard the private and semi-public) spheres sanctions the unrestricted use of minority languages. The provisions of this law are backed up by according regulations in the Law on Public Education (1993), in the National Curriculum (1994), in laws regulating the procedures of civil and criminal law, and in laws on the conduct of local authorities.

Closely modelled on the bilateral treaty between Germany and Poland, that between Hungary and the Federal Republic of 1992 makes explicit and far-reaching provisions for the protection of the German minority in Hungary, including the possibility of support from Germany. A similar agreement exists between Hungary and Austria.

Within the public education system, the German minority has its own educational structure, comprising native language schools, bilingual schools and so-called language training schools, where efforts are made to teach part of the curriculum in German. The German minority maintains its own native language libraries with support of public libraries of the local community governments. School libraries of educational institutions participating in minority education stock literary and non-literary works in German. Native language education of students from the German minority is provided, among others, by 140 to 150 visiting teachers. For the second half of the 1990s, total student numbers at pre-school and primary school level were just above 50,000. Most of them, however, went to language training schools, with the smallest number attending native language schools (below 1,000). Despite improvements in the provision with school facilities, textbooks, native language teachers, etc., the language skills of most of the younger members of the minority are significantly below those of older generations, particularly because of the functionality of Hungarian in daily life and the attractiveness of English. The lack of situations in which German remains used and useful thus decreases constantly and the language therefore continues to lose its appeal. The Hungarian government makes available about €150,000 worth of extra funds annually for cultural and educational programmes and there is significant support from Germany and Austria.

The cultural life of the German minority is organised at local and national level by private associations and the minority self-government.² These private associations include the Association of German Writers and Artists in Hungary, founded in 1990, the German Theatre at Szekszárd, founded in 1986, the *German Nationality Museum*, founded in 1972, the Alliance of School Societies of Germans in Hungary, the Saint Gellért Catholic Association, founded in 1991, and the National Council of German Song, Music and Dance Groups, founded in 1996, which acts as umbrella for

² According to Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, any minority has the right to establish a minority municipal government or directly or indirectly formed local minority self-governments in townships, towns, or the districts of the capital city, as well as a national minority self-government. Minority self-governments may, among other things, establish and run institutions concerned with culture, education and print and electronic media.

almost 400 member organisations. Hungarian Television has broadcast programmes in German since 1978. Since 1998 programmes in German are broadcast daily for 90 minutes at regional level and for 30 minutes at national level, totalling 840 minutes of weekly programming time. This marks considerable progress to the situation before when there was only a half-hour programme every two weeks (Nelde 2000: 126). The German weekly *Neue Zeitung* receives annual subsidies of approximately €100,000, and the German national self-government council in Budapest publishes its own periodicals.

Cross-border cooperation functions well and is encouraged. The two primary legal instruments for bilateral German-Hungarian cooperation are the Treaty between the Republic of Hungary and Federal Republic of Germany on Friendly Cooperation and Partnership in Europe and the Joint Declaration by the Government of the Republic of Hungary and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on Assistance for the German Minority in Hungary and on the Teaching of German as a Foreign Language, both of which were signed in 1992. In addition, there are numerous twinning arrangements with villages or towns in Germany and Austria, and the National Self-Government of German Hungarians has also established ties with German minorities elsewhere, including with Germans from Denmark and South-Tyrol. In the context of existing bilateral treaties and agreements, Germany and Austria support the professional and linguistic training of teachers, provide funding for schools, offer assistance for curriculum development school book design and production, and supply scholarships for secondary, college and university education and scientific exchange programmes. Funds are also made available for libraries and the German Theatre in Szekszárd. Some 165 local self-administration offices, set up by the German minority under the provisions of the 1993 Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, have been furnished and equipped with German assistance.

The German Minority in Poland³

Only approximately 2% of Poland's population of over 38 million are considered to be members of an indigenous ethnic minority. Until the results of the census of May 2001 are finally published, we must work with sometimes radically different estimates. What is indisputable is that Poland is ethnically highly homogeneous with

the largest minority groups being the Ukrainians, Germans and Belarusians. Other minorities include Roma, Jews, Ruthenes, Lithuanians, and Slovaks.

Ethnic Germans in Poland, whose origins as a national minority in the country primarily date back to the territorial revisions after the First and Second World Wars (when large parts of formerly German territory were annexed to Poland), have only since 1989 been a recognised national minority of some 300-500,000 people.⁴ They are territorially concentrated in the Opole Voivodship, where German is still used in everyday life, especially in the south and east of the Voivodship. There are also small and declining German communities in parts of the Silesian Voivodship and the Warmia-Masuria Voivodship. The size of the minority has remained largely stable since the early 1990s, but between 1950 and 1992, almost 1.5 million ethnic Germans left the country and emigrated to the Federal Republic. This was primarily a reaction to the severe level of discrimination and the perpetually dire economic situation that they had faced during the era of communist rule.

Polish Minority Policy 1945-1990

As far as the Polish authorities were concerned, the vast majority of post-war citizens who once held German passports or considered themselves to be of German ethnicity were not German at all. This group of people, which may have totalled as many as 1.2 million must be distinguished from a much smaller group, known officially as the 'designated German minority', that numbered no more than 250,000. Official policy was geared towards the former group was one of 're-Polonisation'. With regard to the latter group expressions of German cultural identity were permitted, as members of the 'designated German minority' were not considered ethnic Poles.

Following the completion of the expulsion process in 1950, the objective of the Polish government was to perfect the eradication all 'alien' influences from various groups of 'Germanicised Poles' in order to promote their speedy assimilation into Polish society. This entailed establishing an absolute ban on the use of German as a medium of communication in areas where such people resided in number. In order

³ This section is partly based on earlier research published in Wolff (2001 and 2002b). Further information was found in Government of Poland (2002), and Polish Helsinki Committee (1999).

⁴ The main German minority organisation, the *Verband der deutschen Gesellschaften* (VdG) claimed a paid-up membership of 275,000 as of January 2003) but acknowledges that not all ethnic Germans in Poland are members of the organisation.

to better promote such policies of assimilation, the physical landscape was itself changed. Wherever possible all traces of German culture were removed. This involved the chiselling out of inscriptions, the eradication of German topographical names and the re-interpretation of history.

However, there is reason to query the efficacy of these policies. First of all, in the 1950s the state and communist party were both weak, even within a comparative Polish context. To what extent they actually possessed wholly effective means through which they could implement such policies is open to question. Enforcing the linguistic ban in schools and within public spaces, particularly in large towns and cities was relatively easy. On the other hand, a large majority of these people lived either in rural areas or de facto inner-city ghettos. Penetration of such closed communities on the part of the communist party was uneven. Moreover, in many cases monolingual German speakers were well past school age. The extent to which they could actually be forbidden to speak German, especially within their relatively closed circles is debatable. This is particularly true of women, as they were less likely to be in paid employment than were their male counterparts, and in general were less likely to engage with wider Polish society. Gradually, however, Polish did become more widespread, partly because it had greater functionality and also because many 'Germanicised Poles' were either to some degree bilingual, or in fact spoke no or little German at all, but had come to identify with the German state and culture despite this apparent linguistic contradiction. This was above all true in the southern part of former East Prussia, today's Warmia-Masuria Voivodship.

In comparison, the situation of the designated German minority was quite different. In the summer of 1945, it became clear to sections of the emergent political elite that in the short to medium-term, skilled German labour would be needed to help run factories, especially in the industrial centres of Lower Silesia. Around 80,000 skilled workers and their families were thus either exempted from expulsion or forced to remain in Poland. Given that this group of people had been recognised by the Polish authorities as being 'indisputably German', they were not subjected to a campaign of re-Polonisation as were their counterparts in rural Upper Silesia, Masuria and East Pomerania. The Polish government moved reasonably quickly to support the maintenance of German language and culture, albeit within narrowly prescribed ideological parameters. Thus, as the memories of war slowly began to diminish, and

some kind of normality returned, so the situation of the designated German minority began to improve. Following various legislative decisions, the possibilities for this group officially to maintain its identity grew in scope. German schools together with a variety of tertiary colleges were gradually opened throughout industrial cities in Lower Silesia and, to a significantly lesser extent, Pomerania. In addition, the Polish government, in conjunction with its East German counterpart, embarked upon a series of measures designed to maintain elements of German culture. These included, among others, the establishment of German theatre and dance groups and of a German-language press, but excluded the preservation of any physical traces of the German cultural heritage which were systematically destroyed, either by deliberate action or neglect.

Following the conclusion of the Treaty of Görlitz in 1950, whereby East Germany recognised Poland's western border, the GDR's government assumed a formal protective role for the 'designated German minority'. For example, members of the minority, who had initially been declared stateless, were offered the opportunity of acquiring East German passports. Funding was made available for various cultural activities, and eventually re-settlement was facilitated for those who wished to emigrate when such an alternative became a realistic possibility in the late 1950s.

In the late 1950s, changes in political attitudes coupled with a changed socio-economic situation, spelled the beginning of the end of the 'designated German minority'. In 1957 virtually all restrictions on the minority were removed, and they were placed on the same legal footing as other recognised minorities in Poland. At the same time emigration restrictions were further relaxed as sufficient numbers of Poles were now available to replace the formerly essential German labour. Final regularisation of their position came with the promulgation of the Law on Nationality of 15 February 1962, and the offer of a Polish passport to those who desired it. The vast majority, however, opted for migration to either of the German states.

Post-communist Developments

Since the end of communism in Poland, the situation of national minorities, and in particular that of ethnic Germans has much improved. Legal provisions that relate to minority languages and their users in Poland are laid down, among others in the country's constitution of 1997, the Law on Radio and Television (1992), the Law on

the Educational System (1991). Article 27 of the constitution stipulates that 'Polish shall be the official language in the Republic of Poland. This provision shall not infringe upon national minority rights resulting from ratified international agreements.' Article 35, Paragraph 1, further states that the 'Republic of Poland shall ensure Polish citizens belonging to national or ethnic minorities the freedom to maintain and develop their own language, to maintain customs and traditions, and to develop their own culture', while Paragraph 2 lays down that '[n]ational and ethnic minorities shall have the right to establish educational and cultural institutions, institutions designed to protect religious identity, as well as to participate in the resolution of matters connected with their cultural identity'. Another part of the reason for the marked improvement since 1989 can be located within the extensive legal framework for cooperation between Poland and Germany in the fields of education and culture. The major legal instruments include the *Treaty between the Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany on Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation* (1991), the *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on Polish and German Youth Cooperation* (1991), the *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on the Establishment and Operation of the Representative Office of the German Academic Exchange Service* (1997), and the *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on Cultural Cooperation* (1997).

On the basis of national legislation and agreements with Germany, funding for the minority in the areas of education and culture comes from both Polish and German sources. The German government has provided staff support to improve the quality of German language teaching in Poland. The number of teachers sent to Poland has increased from just one in 1989 to over one hundred by 1994, and has remained at that level. In addition, four federal government-sponsored experts on German language teaching have been working in Poland since 1994; the German Academic Exchange Service funds twenty-six lecturers at Polish universities, and is in the process of establishing a new German-Polish research institute in (collaboration with the University of) Wrocław. In addition, the Goethe Institute has supplied eight lecturers for the further training of Polish teachers of German. However, the chronic lack of teachers of German in German minority schools remains the most important

and yet unresolved problem. Very few qualified German school-teachers are prepared to relocate to Poland even on a temporary basis. Since 1993, members of the German minority in Poland have had access to a special grant programme to study in Germany for a period of up to twelve months. The federal government also provides partial funding for TV and radio broadcasts and print media of the German minority and supplies German newspapers and magazines to the cultural organisations of the minority. While the German minority in Poland remains one of the two priority groups supported by the German government, the majority of the funds in the approximately €40 million budget for German minorities in Central and Eastern Europe is assigned to projects in the former Soviet Union, especially in Russia and Kazakhstan. However, declining financial support from Germany is partly compensated by the Polish government which makes about half of all funding for minorities available to the German minority.⁵

Members of the minority have access to educational institutions where German is either taught as a second language or is the medium of instruction. As Polish law requires a minimum of seven students in each class requests such provision be made available, in effect access to German-language teaching, is largely restricted to the Opole Voivodship. As of January 2003, German was the main language of instruction in 182 primary schools and 34 grammar schools in the Opole Voivodship. The Voivodship also played host to two bilingual primary schools. A further four grammar schools provided bilingual classes. In addition German-language lectures are delivered at Opole Polytechnic, and a number of colleges offer teacher training courses in German as a foreign language. Elsewhere in Poland primary and secondary German-language education barely exists outside of a few large cities. Students graduating from all such establishments are guaranteed full and equal access to universities. All Polish universities have departments of German philology.

The German minority in Poland has four print media – the weekly *Schlesisches Wochenblatt*, as well as one monthly, one bi-monthly and one quarterly magazine. One regional TV station (in the Opole Voivodship) broadcasts a regular, albeit short programme in German, while a number of others have programmes in Polish aimed at the German minority. Radio Opole broadcasts three times a week in German and

⁵ The latest available figures are for the financial year of 2000. Then, the Polish government spent almost €3million out of a budget of €6.5million on projects in support of the German minority. Since then, the overall budget, however, has decreased.

bilingually in German and Polish, and four other radio stations have weekly programmes in German.

There are no restrictions on cross-border cooperation, the framework for which is covered by the bilateral treaties and agreements between Germany and Poland. In addition, some members of the Germany minority have benefited from the establishment of the Praded/Pradziad Euroregion in 1997, which straddles the border between Poland and the Czech Republic. These measures came too late to arrest the decline of the German population and language in the Silesian and especially the Warmia-Masuria Voivodships. There is however, every sign that in the Opole Voivodship the policy of linguistic regeneration has succeeded, in increasing the number of people with a working knowledge of the language. Any increase in German national consciousness is, as much as anything else, the unintended consequence of the botched 're-Polonisation' campaign, and the superior economic performance of the Federal Republic in comparison to Poland.

The German Minority in Romania⁶

According to the 1992 census, Romania comprises sixteen national minorities within a total population of almost 23 million people, the largest of them being the Hungarian minority, followed by the Roma and German communities. The 1992 census recorded 120,000 ethnic Germans as living in the country. However, due to further emigration since then, the current size of the German minority in Romania is estimated at around 50-70,000.⁷ Although scattered over the Romanian Banat area and Transylvania, there remain a large number of predominantly German settlements in which German is used widely and commonly. Other minority groups in the country include Ukrainians, Russians-Lippovans, Turks, Serbs and Tartars, as well as a number of smaller groups with less than 10,000 members.

Historically, the German minority in Romania is made up of two distinct groups. The Transylvanian Saxons, who originated in the Moselle and northern Lorraine areas of present-day France and in Luxembourg and Flanders, arrived as colonists as early as the middle of the 12th century. The Banat or Danube Swabians began to settle in the so-called Banat area (comprising a region divided by the Treaty of Trianon between

⁶ This section is partly based on earlier research published in Wolff (2001 and 2002b). Further information was found in Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2001) and Government of Romania (2002).

Romania, Hungary and former Yugoslavia) in the first decades of the 18th century. Just before the beginning of the Second World War, about 750,000 ethnic Germans lived in Romania. Subsequently, several developments effected the decline in size of the minority. These included the *Heim ins Reich* resettlement policies of the Nazi regime, the evacuation of large numbers of Germans from Romania with the retreating German Wehrmacht at the end of the Second World War, a total of about 15,000 war dead (mostly male members of the minority who were conscripted or had volunteered for the SS), and the deportation of about 70,000 ethnic Germans to labour camps after the end of the war, many of whom did not return. In contrast to both Hungary and Poland, Romania did not expel any of its ethnic Germans after 1945, but from the 1970s onwards allowed their emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany. With about 220,000 ethnic Germans left in 1989, many of them in their historic settlements and maintaining functioning community structures (including educational facilities teaching German as a mother tongue), the future of the minority seemed secure. However, the violent toppling of the communist regime in 1989/1990 and the subsequent upheavals during the early period of Romania's transition to democracy led over half of the pre-1989 members of the minority to migrate to Germany. This figure included many of the young and most consciously German among them. Despite this, there are still signs that the remaining members of the German minority have preserved a relatively strong sense of ethnocultural identity.

Romanian Minority Policy, 1945-1990

When compared to the situation of ethnic Germans in Poland and Hungary in the period after the Second World War, that of the German minority in Romania appears to have been significantly better in two respects. For one, there were no expulsions. Thus, even though about 70,000 male ethnic Germans were deported to labour camps in Ukraine and approximately 100,000 fled with the retreating German army, the minority and its social and community structures were left largely intact. Second, until the mid-1960s Romania pursued a relatively minority-friendly policy. This began as early as February 1945, when the re-constituted Romanian parliament passed the so-called minority statutes. These did not immediately apply to the German minority, and the citizenship status of its members remained uncertain for a number of years. However, once the citizenship rights of ethnic Germans had been restored, they had

⁷ A new census was held in March 2002, but at the time of writing its results had not yet become public.

access to mother-tongue education, were allowed their own daily and weekly press and book publications in German, and funds were made available for cultural programmes organised by the German minority. In addition, there was airtime for German –language radio and television broadcasts. All of this, of course, has to be seen in the context of a communist regime, which recognised early on that the reach of the communist party could be increased by a more liberal minority policy.

Significant changes to this approach were introduced in the mid-1960s, when the regime unilaterally decided to abandon its ‘multicultural’ approach and henceforth consider Romania a homogeneous nation-state. The subsequent policy of repressing expressions of different ethnocultural identities and of vigorously assimilating ethnic minorities affected the German community less than other ethnic minorities in Romania. In contrast, in particular to the situation of Hungarians, German continued to enjoy, albeit in a more limited way, opportunities to express, preserve and develop their distinct ethnocultural identity. The main reason for this was the fact that the Romanian communist regime had discovered its German minority to be a source of hard-currency income. In the context of West Germany’s *neue Ostpolitik*,⁸ over 150,000 ethnic Germans were given exit visas to the Federal Republic between 1977 and 1988, against a per-capita fee of between 8,000 and 12,000 Deutschmarks. While on the one hand, pressure was applied on member of the minority to emigrate, the communist authorities at the same time ensured that there were sufficient opportunities for them to retain their German culture. In addition, some structural factors also contributed to the relatively great extent to which the minority managed to preserve its distinct ethnocultural identity. These included the fact that the two elements of the minority – Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians – each lived in relatively compact areas, and they were, for the most part, settled in rural areas, often in almost entirely German villages and small towns where German remained the every-day language of communication. Nevertheless, all post-war censuses show a steady decline in the number of ethnic Germans in the country: by 1966, the number of people who declared themselves to be German had already about halved from the 1930 census (380,000 compared to 750,000). By the time of the next census in 1977, approximately 360,000 ethnic Germans lived in

⁸ *Neue Ostpolitik*, the new set of policies adopted by the West German federal government under Willy Brandt after 1969, was aimed at achieving rapprochement with the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. It included a policy of humanitarian relief (*menschliche Erleichterungen*) aimed at the populations behind the iron curtain in general, but also at members of ethnic German minorities for whom improved opportunities for emigration to the Federal Republic were sought.

Romania, and after increased emigration over the following decade, by the time the communist regime collapsed in 1989/90, there were only just over 200,000 of them left. By 1996, another 180,000 emigrated, reducing the current number of ethnic Germans in Romania to a dwindling 50-70,000. Emigration has also meant that many traditional German settlements have been abandoned completely or in part, reducing the minority even further, with all the knock-on effects that entails for the use of German in daily public life, education and culture. In addition, the opportunity for emigration has been taken up by many more young people, so that the age structure of the minority today is rather unfavourable.

Post-communist Developments

Following the initial nationalist turn in minority policy after 1990, a change in government in 1996 enabled Romania to make significant progress in adopting laws and policies aimed at establishing and implementing regulations of minority protection. Several articles in the constitution provide the wider legal framework for this. Article 6 establishes 'the right of persons belonging to national minorities, to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity' even though it denies a right to positive discrimination for members of national minorities on the basis of 'the principles of equality and non-discrimination in relation to the other Romanian citizens'. Article 32 guarantees the 'right of persons belonging to national minorities to learn their mother tongue, and their right to be educated in this language', while Article 59 ensures that 'organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, which fail to obtain the number of votes for representation in Parliament, have the right to one Deputy seat each', thus securing representation of all recognised national minorities in the national parliament. Article 127 declares that Romanian citizens 'belonging to national minorities ... have the right to take cognizance of all acts and files of the case, to speak before the Court and formulate conclusions, through an interpreter ...' In addition to these constitutional provisions, there are a number of other bills and regulations pertaining to minority protection in Romania, in particular in relation to media and education. A bilateral treaty between Germany and Romania was concluded in 1992, followed by agreements on cultural cooperation (1995) and school cooperation (1996). These have been the basis for strong and positive relations between the two countries which have also benefited the situation of the German minority in Romania.

In the area of education, members of the Germany minority have access to the whole range of educational institutions existing in Romania, including those that have been specifically established to cater for the needs of mother tongue education in German. In an effort to create an adequate education system for its national minorities, the Romanian government has made provisions for the opening of multicultural schools that have classes for children of the German minority (and/or other national minorities) in addition to classes for Romanian children. In 1997-8, there were a total of 286 such institutions that catered for around 20,000 pupils in Bucharest, as well as in eight counties within areas of significant German settlement. In 1998, a teacher training college was established in Sibiu with financial and personnel support from Germany, and in 1999 the University of Bucharest, in collaboration with the Goethe Institute, launched a course for the training of primary school teachers of German. Babes-Bolyai University offers twelve subjects for study in German (including history, applied modern languages, physics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, geography, philosophy, arts). The University College of Bistrica runs a course in tourism management and German. In 2000, preparations were finalised for the setting-up of a multicultural German-Hungarian-Ukrainian university in Transylvania. A total of over 400 teachers at primary and secondary levels provide instruction in German as a mother tongue, while an additional 60, co-sponsored by the German government, work in teacher training.

The German minority still has a rich cultural life, even though some of the most impressive and long-standing traditions have significantly declined, including an independent German literary tradition from which such important German contemporary writers such as Herta Müller and Richard Wagner originated. Four German cultural centres exist in Iasi, Cluj, Sibiu and Timisoara, providing a varied programme of activities and access to resources, such as newspapers, books and films in German. A strong tradition in the area of print and electronic media also continues: several local German newspapers and radio stations exist in areas of minority settlements. In addition, two nationwide cultural magazines are published in German, co-financed by the Romanian government. A total of 24 hours and 40 minutes per week of TV broadcasts by state television are specifically aimed at the German minority; in addition, there is a two-hour weekly German-language broadcast on national television, as well as 45 minutes per week of German-

language programming on TV Cluj-Napoca which reaches ten districts in the northwest and west of Transylvania. This is complemented by approximately 14 hours of German-language local radio programming per week.

The German government has helped the German minority in Romania extensively in the preservation of its cultural traditions. Between 1990 and 2000, it provided a total of approximately €90million of funds in support of the German minority in Romania. Increasing rapidly in the first half of the 1990s, funding remained relatively stable until 2000, when the federal government decided that the German minority in Romania was no longer a funding priority. Nevertheless, funding, especially in the education and cultural sectors, continues to date, albeit it at more modest levels.

Conclusion

Since the collapse of communism in East-Central Europe and the Balkans, the situation of the German minority in each of the countries we have considered has improved immeasurably. In theory, that of the Germans in Hungary is the best. The extensive and intricate minority rights regime affords all minorities a wide degree of protection. Despite a less comprehensive legal code, the German minority in Poland also finds itself in a relatively strong position. With regard to the German minority in Romania, their position is handicapped by their dwindling numbers and heavily skewed age profile. The questionable 'post-communist' credentials of much of the Romanian political elite combined with a consistently woeful economic situation have conspired to make emigration to Germany an attractive option for all but the elderly and those with a fierce attachment to the *Heimat*.

Of the three groups under consideration here, the outlook for the German community in Poland is probably brightest given its sheer size and the fact that approximately 80% of them live in three counties of the Opolskie Voivodship. This territorial concentration has enabled them to preserve viable community structures and a social framework in which knowledge of the German language retains its importance. This has occurred despite the fact that after the Second World War the parents and grandparents of the current generation were classified as 'Germanicised Poles', and subjected to a failed policy of 're-Polonisation.' As in Hungary there has been a great deal of linguistic assimilation. However, the situation in Hungary is less favourable – here the process of language shift from German to Hungarian seems to

be unstoppable. This contrasts vividly with the Polish example where some degree of bilingualism is the rule. Nevertheless the German minority in Hungary has managed to preserve a sense of distinct ethnocultural identity, indicating that, while language may be an important factor, it is not the only one that helps determine the survival of an ethnoculturally distinct group. Despite the apparent doubling of the ethnic German population between 1991 and 2001, the pattern of internal German settlement indicates that the maintenance of a distinct German identity in Hungary is becoming ever more problematic.

Finally, we should note that in all three countries, where EU membership is likely to become a reality between 2004 and 2007, English has great functionality as a second language. No matter the desire for younger generations to recover mother tongue skills, in the face of the English language onslaught those who wish to secure the place of German (or almost any foreign language other than English), face formidable problems. To what extent they can be overcome, remains to be seen.

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