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I would like to extend the conversation away from social science and prediction and those theories that look to the causes of conflicts. What I would like to discuss is our understanding of discourse. Discourse is crucially important, as agents are able to create or change structure through discourse, and we create social circumstances and ultimately, institutions through discursive frames that we employ. These discursive frames give us opportunities of persuasion, and ultimately become internalized to create institutions - we can see this happening through history until the present time.

I would like to direct attention to the tendency to frame minority problems around conflict. Social science theories tend to frame their research questions around conflict. In this case, of course the discourse of minorities assumes that the 'problem' has to do with conflict, and therefore the 'solution' is the absence of conflict. By implication therefore, when there is no conflict there is no minority question that we should be engaged with, so the issues which should become the center of our attention, those that occur before threats have been constructed, frequently never make it onto the political agenda

Currently, when we define minorities in international law and policy, emphasis is placed upon the following key characteristics – nondominance, an implicit desire to maintain differential characteristics of ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and the idea of numeric inferiority between minority groups and the larger (majority) society. And again our focus of course is in terms of what is missing, what we do not have.

It is therefore worth considering what might happen if we change our public policy discourse. This is an important point of reflection for ECMI as it fits very well into the strategy that ECMI has identified and the synergy that is noted in the strategy document between the security cluster and the justice and governance cluster. What if instead of constructing the 'minority' as a political, social and economic 'outsider' the minority was reconstructed as a person that wishes to express him or herself in terms of a distinct ethnicity, culture, language, religion, etc. equally with others who share these characteristics and at the same time also through intercultural dialogues with other members of society. In this reframing, the 'minority' is no longer the object of public policies directed at them with a view to preventing or ameliorating conflict but the equal subject of an intersubjective political narrative.

I look forward to the idea of a research network that might reflect on these potential reframings more fully and in greater depth. The key idea in so doing would be to try and shape the conversation that defines

what a minority is and what a minority ought to be, in such way that it becomes focused not on conflict and conflict prevention but rather fully on governance and on the understanding that the minority question is not a temporary aberration that requires remedial measures to overcome but instead an ongoing way of political discourse that is going to be a permanent feature of democracy. Identities are multiple and overlapping and in some circumstance all of us become minorities, not all the time, but some of the time. And if we begin to think about ourselves in that way, then this realization becomes an opportunity for reframing, reshaping, and restructuring the ways in which we think about minority 'questions' within Europe, with a view to overcoming that micro-macro gap that currently exists in this policy area.

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