

Prof. Dr. Tove H. Malloy
ECMI Director

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr Chairman
Members of the Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your Committee today regarding current minority issues in Europe and the work of the European Centre for Minority Issues.

As you will know, the ECMI celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2016. So if the members will allow me, I would like to say a few words about our progress over the 20 years. In this connection I will address some of the most pressing challenges that governments and national minorities face in the current political climate in Europe.

Next, I will present a few of our current projects in Ukraine and the West Balkans as well as our cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office during the German Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016. I will explain how these projects relate to the model of minority governance in the German-Danish border region.

It is a pleasure to introduce our young colleague and PhD candidate, Ms Sonja Wolf, who will assist me in parts of the presentation.

20 YEARS WORKING WITH AND FOR MINORITIES IN EUROPE

The ECMI was established in 1996 with a mandate to facilitate dialogue between minorities and majorities as well as to promote good governance in the area of minority protection in Europe, including promoting the model and approaches followed in the German-Danish border region. The geographic scope was defined as all of Europe that is the member states of the Council of Europe. Our statutes outline the profile as research, action, publication and dissemination.

We started with a director, a political analyst, a few researchers, a librarian and a project coordinator. Soon thereafter field offices began to pop up as projects were designed for the regions in Eastern Europe where minority protection was a concern. We have had field offices in 8 countries and today we have offices in Georgia and Kosovo plus a representative in Ukraine. Overall, since 1996, the ECMI has been active in action projects in 15 countries, mainly in Eastern European countries, such as Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia (Kaliningrad), Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Cyprus. Currently, we have around 190 persons on the payroll across 4 countries. In Flensburg, we have 16 contracted and 3 consultants.

We cooperate with all the relevant inter-governmental organisations in Europe, such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the European Commission's TAIEX office and DG Near office, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Minorities, as well as other UN and EU offices.

At the national level, we have cooperated with almost all the foreign ministries in Western Europe – they fund our action projects in the field.

At the regional and bi-national level, we cooperate with both public and private operators, including both the German and Danish foreign ministries as well as IFA, GIZ, DAAD, DANIDA and a number of German and Danish foundations.

At the local level, we teach at the two universities, EUF and SDU. We have supported FUEN with scientific analysis over the years and now cooperate in the field in the Western Balkans. We cooperate with all the minorities whenever we have study visits, and our interns always visit Flensburghus, Haus des Nordschleswigers and the Frisian Institute during their stay. We are members of DFN and the Cultural Committee of Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig. Of course, we cooperate closely with the State Chancellery of Schleswig-Holstein and with Stadt Flensburg.

Allow me to give you an overview in terms of numbers:

We have organized 6 summer schools since 2011 and taught a winter semester Minority Seminar at EUF since 2012. We have hosted 231 interns and 27 visiting researchers from 55 different countries since the first year.

We have published among others

- 30 books
- 95 working papers
- Around 100 (37 + 65) policy briefs
- 68 reports
- 13 yearbooks
- 40 issues of JEMIE
- 25 (12 + 13) handbooks or guidelines
- Numerous studies

Our annual budget in 2016 was around 1.7 million EUR including field offices of which 54% are the fixed grants from founders and 46% are from external grants.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

I will now turn to the challenges that governments and national minorities face in our current political climate.

If this meeting had taken place in February 2014, I would have been far more optimistic about minority protection. I would have argued that Europe had finally transformed minority governance management from being a conflict paradigm to being a diversity paradigm. The conflicts of the 1990s in the Balkans had been transformed into budding democratic dialogue, and the frozen dialogues in the post-Soviet space had become warmer due to a weakened Russia. Diplomatic solutions were on the horizon. At the same time, the European regime on minority protection, such as the European Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, had experienced a decade of good progress in the implementation of minority rights. Some countries even recognized national minorities who had been waiting for years for recognition, while others expanded the rights and protection of national minorities. I would even argue that there was an increasing understanding of the right to self-definition; a right we know from Article 1 of the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations but which many countries do not respect.

This optimistic vision unfortunately shattered in March 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and began the purge of Crimean Tatars that is still going on. It is estimated that around 30.000 Tatars from Crimea have resettled to mainland Ukraine since 2014. At the same time, the war in Eastern Ukraine has intensified the polarization between East and West, and the spill over of this is seen in the cooling down of the dialogue between Russia and Europe regarding the

other occupied territories of Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan. It could also be questioned whether it is impeding the negotiations between North and South Cyprus.

Allow me to emphasize that these on-going “conflicts” are not national minority conflicts. National minorities do not wage conflicts; governments wage conflicts, and sometimes conflicts involve territory where national minorities reside. But rarely, if ever, do national minorities begin conflicts. For this reason, we cannot talk about the number of national minority conflicts. In fact, the conflicts I have just mentioned are all geo-political conflicts.

What we can discuss is the status of national minority protection, and here we have seen a back-tracking at the same time as the geo-political climate has worsened. As a member of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention, I have visited Albania, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Kosovo, Serbia and the United Kingdom. While some countries continue the implementation of minority rights, many are stalling or even rolling back implementation. Some countries that used to cooperate, such as Malta and Spain, have retracted on their commitment to minority rights. Of course, France, Greece and Bulgaria do not recognize any minorities and France and Greece refuse to sign any international conventions on minority protection. Others, such as Kosovo and Macedonia are becoming less and less manageable with regard to maintaining the democratic dialogue between minorities and majorities. These need to be watched in the future.

Allow me to mention two aspects of serious concern in almost all European countries today:

First, the rise of right-wing populism in politics and in the public debate is very troubling for the protection of members of national minorities. This is because this trend in the political debate is particularly hostile to groups of difference; minorities are increasingly seen as a threat to unity and sovereignty. This is expressed through hate speech and hate crimes. While national minorities have not been the hardest hit, Roma have experienced an increase in attacks based on hate and intolerance. We have also seen even here in Germany that traditional national minorities, such as members of the Sorbian minority, have been attacked. The spill over from hate campaigns against newcomers towards hate against national minorities should be monitored carefully in the future, and governments should be made responsible for developing legal and institutional safeguards against this.

Second, particularly serious remains the lack of protection of Roma and Sinti across Europe. Since the adoption of the EU Strategy for Roma in 2011, a number of countries have been very reluctant to deliver national strategies, including western countries such as the United Kingdom. Others, such as Hungary and Slovakia, continue very controversial approaches to education of Roma by segregating Roma children from other children. Finally, there is the increasing reluctance to provide housing for Roma, both permanent and temporary accommodation. The main issue with regard to Roma protection is their access to social rights. Due to the financial and economic crises this has been put on the back burner by some governments. They should be held responsible for not providing the most basic human rights to such a large segment of Europe’s population.

ECMI CURRENT PROJECTS

So let me move on to talk about the most recent ECMI projects, including one, which tries to address some of the issues that Roma are facing in relation to social protection.

In early 2016, the ECMI and FUEN in cooperation with the GIZ and the State Chancellery of Schleswig-Holstein began designing a project targeting Roma exclusion in four countries in the Western Balkans, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. After focus group dialogue and careful analysis, the project team identified access to social rights as the main concern regarding Roma in these countries. The project will therefore transfer knowledge from Schleswig-Holstein to the target countries about access to rights for vulnerable groups, such as Roma and Sinti. The project is planned for three years, and the minorities in Schleswig-Holstein participate in training civil servants and NGOs in the target countries.

Another major project where we use some of the experiences from this region is our Eastern Partnership Programme for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we seek to establish permanent dialogue institutions between national minorities and authorities. We also train all parties in minority rights and non-discrimination, and we advise the authorities on the best solutions for the better integration of society. It is a three-year programme, which will end in July. We are currently seeking funding to continue another three years because there is much more to be done, and we are receiving requests for trainings from local authorities, especially in Ukraine.

In March 2016, the German Federal Foreign Office contracted the ECMI to carry out a study on national minorities and bridge building in international relations and within diverse societies. Project partners were the European Academy in Bolzano/Bozen and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. The project was part of the German OSCE Chairmanship's objective in the Human Dimension basket of the OSCE cooperation, and it was inspired by the knowledge from this region, including the findings from the 2006 study, Kompetenzanalyse. For a short description of the project's methodology and findings, I ask Ms Wolf to explain the methodology and results of the project.

Finally, allow me to mention our summer school, which always include one or two days of teaching about this border region. Two years ago, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations at the summer school, and last year we went to Lviv in Ukraine to focus on minority issues in Ukraine in comparison to this region. This year, we will be back in Flensburg where we will celebrate the German-Georgian friendship year by focusing on minority issues in these two countries. The participants in our summer school come from all over the world, including Japan, Africa and Latin America. They are students and young professionals. Unfortunately, we do not have permanent funding for the summer school. Every year we must look for donors. The State Chancellery has supported us several times, and we are very grateful for the support.

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE FROM SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

To conclude, the model applied for the protection of national minorities in the German-Danish border region is very valuable and important for the rest of Europe. Many minorities look to this region for ideas and support. Both the political accommodation and the cultural autonomy provided the Danish minority in Schleswig-Holstein and the German minority in Southern Denmark are good practice examples that could be copied by other border regions where similar size minorities reside. For larger minorities constituting a higher percentage of the population, these models may not work; they will likely wish for more power in local and regional government. With regard to the education system for the two national minorities in the border region, one needs to be careful. Both Germany and Denmark allow a segregated school system for the minorities; this works well in the border region due to the high rate of bilingualism, but it would not work in many other settings. We have examples of segregated education from the Balkans, and this is not resulting in integration like here. Bilingualism in education is a must for good integration.

Finally, the language policies of both Germany and Denmark leave some to be desired compared to other border regions in Europe. Schleswig-Holstein has taken the first good steps in 2015 and 2016 with the amendments of legislation in public administration. But Denmark is not showing the political will to create bilingualism in Southern Denmark. Bilingualism in the public space is more developed in other regions, such as Carinthia and South Tyrol or Wales. It is therefore important to stress that no one size fits all, and a model that works in one historical or geographic setting would not necessarily work in another. What works is learning from each other and listening to each other. This has worked in the Danish-German border region: trust through reconciliation is the strength that the region can promote and must protect.

Thank you for your attention.