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MINORITY ISSUES



**Dynamics of Cooperation in the OSCE Area:
National Minorities and Bridge Building**

Executive Summary*

*Full report will be released in January 2017 on www.ecmi.de

Introduction

This Report has been compiled in support of the 2016 German OSCE Chairmanship's focus on "the situation of minorities in times of crisis, their positive contribution to social integration and their potential to build bridges in international relations." The Report presents 24 positive initiatives at bridge building taken throughout the OSCE area, including seven examples of legal instruments in cross-border regions and 17 examples of projects covering a number of themes identified in the political, cultural and socio-economic sectors. The examples were selected on the basis of three objective selection criteria:

- *Involvement of more than one group of actors (public or private)*
- *Active involvement of a minority*
- *Visible intentions to bridge gaps/divides between minorities and majorities*

The Report does not aim to compare the examples, nor does it offer comprehensive normative or sustainability evaluation of the initiatives in their respective political settings; rather, the purpose is to discover, describe and present examples of productive cooperation among diverse actors aimed at overcoming cultural divides.

Increasing visibility

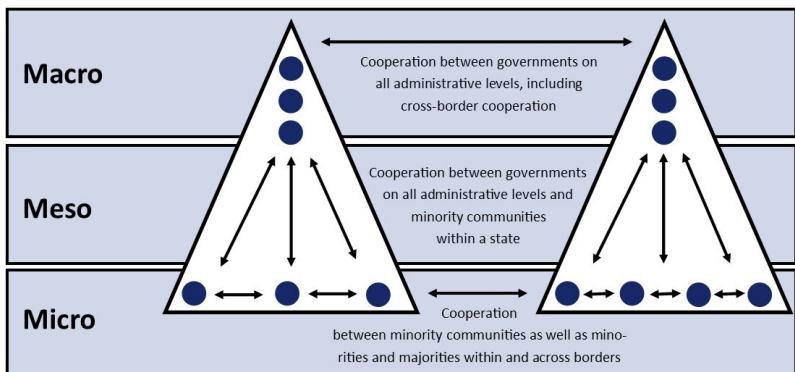
The underlying assumption of the research has been that bridge building exists across the OSCE area, but examples involving minorities have not been visible in the current debates on social integration and international relations. While there is good knowledge about the legal and policy frameworks promoting minority protection, there is little known evidence that members of minorities participate in dialogue initiatives taken under such frameworks. This Report shows that even where legal and policy frameworks do not yet exist, initiatives are taken to overcome divides and to cooperate across divides for common goals. Bringing attention to the bridge building role of minorities is not only useful for governments, civil society and minority organizations alike, it is instrumental in combatting conflict and division within and between mainstream societies. By increasing the visibility of the productive initiatives of collaborations between public and private actors at several levels, this Report highlights the potentials for fostering intercultural dialogue and harmonious cooperation in diverse societies and among states.

The protection and inclusion of national minorities in all spheres of public life has been an integral part of the OSCE's human dimension work since the 1990 Ministerial Council in Copenhagen. The Council's Concluding Document as well as norms set out in the HCNM's various soft-law documents, such as the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life, the Bolzano Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations and the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies, governs the OSCE participating States' obligations with regard to national minorities. These documents also form part of an emerging

acquis of norms within international organizations that aim to secure the rights and protection of minorities.

Methodology

In this Report, bridge building is examined at three levels of cooperation, the macro, the meso and the micro levels.



Macro level initiatives span across territorial borders, whereas meso level initiatives exist within state boundaries. Micro level initiatives are found at the grass-root level and cover both cross-border initiatives and intra-state initiatives. The macro level represents the governance framework that enables initiatives to be taken at all levels. This includes legal recognition and frameworks of cross-border cooperation (CBC) (bilateral agreements and cross-border programmes), international public law instruments (Council of Europe and European Union), private law instruments (associations and Euro-regions), informal instruments and practices (networks) as well as kin-state relations. The meso level represents the vertical relationships within the state that emerge from formal as well as informal cooperation and dialogue. Formal relationships may include

permanent and *ad hoc* institutions of dialogue, while informal relationships may involve networks formed to address specific and topical issues facing local communities. The micro level represents bottom-up initiatives and is thus the most diverse level in terms of relationships. Initiatives at the micro level include self-driven networks and innovators, who seek to foster change in the way society is addressing specific issues.

However, data collection showed that not all initiatives are clear-cut, as institutions and actors cooperating in initiatives are interconnected in the complex systems of national and international socio-political and economic relations. They intersect in the fields of politics, economy, education, media, social services, and culture and hence allow for thematic categorization in the context of the different fields and sectors. A total of 191 initiatives were examined, and 101 initiatives were identified as productive. They fall into the specific thematic fields of political participation, institutional infrastructure, economy (including tourism and environment), education, media, culture, intercultural communication, and health care and social services.

Results

The 24 examples of productive initiatives discussed in this Report cover cooperation between or within 29 participating States of the OSCE. All examples have been identified on the basis of involving minorities. The governance examples include multilateral initiatives involving five countries and their border regions, good neighbourly cooperation, legal entities of territorial groupings, economic cross-border cooperation, bilateral and trilateral environmental cooperation and bilateral co-operation in the areas of education and culture. The political participation

examples cover advisory and consultative bodies as well as umbrella organisations representing minorities. The institutional infrastructure example promotes personal safety in a mixed community, while the economic examples promote equality and non-discrimination of minorities in regional development as well as examples of entrepreneurship. The education examples promote the right to mother tongue education and culture in kin-state relations, while the inter-cultural dialogue examples promote cultural traditions and protection of cultural heritage. Finally, the healthcare and services examples develop projects that promote basic needs in mixed communities.

Overall, this Report documents that minorities work in their home communities to help improve not only infrastructure and basic services, the environment, and access to education, but also to protect and maintain cultural heritage and cultural traditions. More importantly, in contradistinction to the security prism view of minorities, this study has shown that when personal security is at stake, minorities may act as facilitators and promoters of solutions that protect all members of society. It would appear that peaceful and constructive cooperation across participating State borders is becoming an integral part of national and ethnic minority activities, and therefore an important contribution to friendly and good-neighbourly relations and international peace.

Recommendations

The Report offers a number of recommendations to participating States in order to continue supporting this development, including encouraging participating States:

- To take political action that **enhances the visibility** of minorities in national, regional and local governance in order to stimulate a more positive image of minorities and counter the view that minorities are a risk factor to peaceful societies, by recognizing publicly that they promote peaceful dialogue, inclusion and social cohesion.
- To recognize that cooperation on the basis of kin-state/ minority relations is, by and large, not a threat to national integrity and sovereignty. Fostering positive contacts and cooperation at the international political level can be **beneficial for all communities**. Trans-frontier cooperation between local and regional authorities and minority communities can contribute to tolerance and prosperity, strengthen inter-state relations, and encourage dialogue on minority issues.
- To create **governance frameworks and cooperation infrastructure** (CBC, bilateral, multilateral agreements), if not already in existence, and continue to update with new norms while ensuring inclusion of all minority groups in these cooperation schemes. Bridge building also requires establishing platforms of communication between minorities and authorities while ensuring the inclusion of minorities in policy-making through consultative mechanisms. This will promote trust and social cohesion among all actors while also securing peace and stability.



EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES

The **European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)** conducts practice and policy-oriented research, provides information and documentation, and offers advisory services concerning minority-majority relations in Europe. The Centre co-operates with the academic community, the media and the general public through the timely provision of information and analysis.

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