

Political participation and representation of national minorities: the work of intergovernmental committees on national minorities between Hungary and its neighbors

Thesis collection

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I. Background of the research and relevance of the topic

National minority issues and the respect of minority rights, in general, belongs to delicate topics on international, as well as European level raising several aspects and backgrounds that should be taken into account when analyzing any question connected to the mentioned group of people. European states follow different approaches in their policies towards national minorities, and differing views can be observed on the level of individuals and minority experts as well concerning the matter. Regardless of the attitudes of actors towards national minorities, it can generally be stated that the protection of minority rights is of crucial importance. This is first due to the relatively large number of the former: in the European Union, for instance, one person in every seven Europeans belongs to an ethnic minority or speaks a regional or minority language; and in addition to the 28 official languages of the European Union, there are more than 60 regional and minority languages in Europe, spoken by 40 million individuals (Federal Union on European Nationalities, FUEN). Second, minorities of any kind are among the most vulnerable groups in society, often being in a disadvantageous situation due to characteristics that differ from those of the majority. Although individuals belonging to minority groups are entitled, as are any other persons, to respect for their human rights, there is an ongoing debate about to what extent human rights principles can effectively be “translated” to cover the special needs of minorities (Henrard, 2000; Åkermark, 1997).

It should also be noted that securing basic human rights for minorities does not unequivocally mean that these groups will enter into a situation comparable to that of the majority. Despite respect for general principles of equality and non-discrimination, minorities often cannot “reach” the same level of rights in society as members of the majority. Therefore, the situation and rights of minorities should be approached from a different angle. In order for the rights and position of minorities to best approximate those of the majority, in most cases specific rights should be secured and different methods should be followed towards them. These

specific measures should exceed more general human rights measures because, on the one hand, such rights are already and essentially “available” to everyone in society, irrespective of belonging to the majority or to a minority. On the other hand, the basic human rights framework often contains generalized provisions that neglect or fail to take into account the needs and special characteristics of minority groups. The present research recognizes that minority rights belong to the category of human rights, as mentioned, and, in this manner, that their respect in democratic societies should be unequivocally sustained.

In the 1990s, crucial changes occurred both politically, as well as concerning the process of formulating significant documents in connection with the protection of national minorities. In the examined area, in Central Europe in the 1990s certain states have also included the protection of national minorities into the treaties on good neighborliness and cooperation, as well as into other bilateral treaties. Although, in the 1990s this was not a new phenomenon, since during the 1940-1950s, there were other examples of inter-state reconciliations including also the recognition of specific minority protection arrangements in bilateral relations (e.g. Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement in 1946, and the joint German-Danish Declarations in 1955). However, for Central and Eastern European states the conclusion of bilateral treaties in the 1990s was an immense development, not only because the conclusion of treaties promoted a cooperative attitude between the states and relevant actors, but also because bilateral treaties offered an opportunity to formulate minority rights more concretely, taking into consideration the actual situation and needs of the aforementioned group (Bloed and Van Dijk, 1999), and initiating dialogue with them through a range of methods, for instance through the work of the examined intergovernmental joint committees on national minorities.

The focus of the research is on political participation and representation of national minorities, as one of the most important requirements for exercising the rights of the latter is their “appearance” in the social structure of a given state. Democratic policy-making and democratic processes also presuppose securing the opportunity for all members and groups of society to be represented and to participate in the issues concerning, and political life of, states. Political representation and participation is, or should be, in democratic states secured for all members of the society irrespectively of their majority or minority status and in this context, persons belonging to minorities participate as individuals in the policy-making of a given state. At the same time, minority groups, in most cases are not able to represent their interests equally as communities, compared to the majority, or are not able to participate in the decision-making effectively on group-level mainly because they are significantly smaller

in number. For this reason, in order to protect their interests special means and procedures should be introduced to effectively involve minority groups into decision-making processes and into the political life of states. Furthermore, persons belonging to national minorities are able to decide more effectively on matters affecting them, as they have more insightfulness on and experience with crucial issues and problematics related to their group. Present research focuses on a particular form of minority participation and representation that is secured by the intergovernmental or bilateral joint committees on national minorities established between Hungary and its neighbors (Ukraine, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia) through the treaties on good neighborliness and cooperation, or by other bilateral treaties on national minorities in the 1990s and in the 2000s. The practice of bilateral joint committees on national minorities has not only been developed between the Central European states examined here, but in many countries across Europe, although for the sake of comprehensive examination, the highlighted six committees have been selected. The most crucial asset of committees is that these include the representatives of the particular two national minority group, into their decision-making processes, thus secure the group-level representation of minorities. The committees deal with the needs, problems and objectives of national minorities, aiming to protect their rights in their country of residence. In spite of the fact that bilateral committees are intergovernmental bodies, on bilateral level they formulate only recommendations in connection with minority issues and these recommendations do not have legal power in the majority of countries, unless they are legally implemented by government decisions or regulatory action plans into the domestic legal structure. For instance in Hungary, the recommendations, the accepted and signed protocols of bilateral committees on national minorities are accepted by government decisions (*kormányhatározat*) naming the responsible governmental bodies of the implementation of formulated objectives.

The main aim/issue of the research is to examine the effectiveness of political participation and the representation of national minorities *in the work* of intergovernmental joint committees on national minorities between Hungary and its six neighboring countries based on the operation and work of bilateral committees, but primarily on the experience of the minority representatives who take part in such committees. The examination of the “effectiveness” of political participation and representation in the committees is realized through identifying the aspects of effectiveness that should be present during the operation of the mentioned bodies. The personal semi-structured interviews prepared with minority representatives serve as the focus of the research. I summarize and analyze the latter’s most important experiences concerning the effectiveness of committees based on aspects connected

to effectiveness. The reason for focusing on the effectiveness of minority participation and representation in these bodies is the fact that the realization of effective minority participation strongly determines the success of bilateral committees (and of any other bodies in general). Since bilateral joint committees have been established to focus on the rights of national minorities, one of the most crucial aspects when dealing with their effectiveness is the degree to which these representatives are involved into their work in practice and thus possess the power to influence the decisions that are made in these committees. In order to be able to expose the above-mentioned main issue, other areas and topics have to be dealt with that explain, frame, underpin and help understand the capital matter of the thesis. These other examined areas may be considered as *sub-questions* of the research, and mainly cover the analysis of “effective political participation and representation” of national minorities according to international law and history; a presentation of the historical and political Central European context of the issue, and; an introduction and analysis of the joint committees between Hungary and its six neighboring countries. Furthermore, through the analysis of minority committees the thesis aims to present an identifiable regional model of national minority representation based on the practice of intergovernmental joint committees in Central Europe.

In this regard, Chapter 1 provides a short foundation for and overview of the issue under analysis, focusing on the theoretical and methodological frameworks, as well as on the definition of crucial concepts in the analysis. In Chapter II, the general international setting of minority rights and the meaning and background of “effective political participation” is examined, based on a historical and literature overview. The same chapter also presents the general international human rights instruments for political participation and representation, and summarizes the main achievements related to the issue in the scheme of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe, in order to clarify the legal and political documents and framework that have been established over the past decades. Subsequently, Chapter III reviews the historical and political situation of Central European national minorities in general, presenting views and interpretations of some of the scientific literature as well. The chapter also analyzes the role and presence of national minorities in bilateral relations, focusing on the role of kin-states and home states, including international documents about the issue. Subsequently, it also deals with the practice and short history of the conclusion of bilateral treaties in Central and Eastern Europe, emphasizing the issue of the political representation of national minority groups in the documents. Last but not least, the chapter examines the establishment of intergovernmental

committees on national minorities based on a number of bilateral treaties, not focusing strictly on the Central and Eastern European-, but on a wider range of committees and treaties in order to summarize and explain the general characteristics of the aforementioned bodies. In summary, Chapter III lays down the foundation and background of the analysis in connection with national minorities, bilateral treaties, and intergovernmental minority committees.

In Chapter IV, the central issue of the thesis, the intergovernmental committees on national minorities between Hungary and its neighboring states (Ukraine, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia), are introduced, primarily by explaining their operation. Thereafter, the six intergovernmental committees are presented through focusing on their establishment, general operation, and establishing practices, as well as introducing the persons, parties, and organizations of minority representatives participating in given committees. Finally, Chapter V analyses the effectiveness of the work of committees based on interviews prepared with minority representatives participating on both sides of the six committees. Representatives of national minorities shared their views and experiences in connection with the effectiveness of minority representation through the committees, also touching upon a wider range of issues concerning the effectiveness of the work of committees generally. Recommendations are formulated to improve the future work and effectiveness of bilateral committees.

In this regard, the *initial hypothesis* of the thesis is that joint committees on national minorities secure only limited opportunities for political participation and representation of national minorities (only for a limited stratum of the given national minority, which is, in most cases, arbitrarily chosen). In this context– and responding to the *second hypothesis* – the effectiveness of bilateral committees on national minorities does not depend on the legal institution itself, as enshrined in the relevant treaties, but more significantly on the political relations and commitments as well as on the reciprocity between two states.

II. Research methodology

The methodology applied in the examination is twofold. First, the thesis defines the most crucial aspects of the topic, as well as puts the background of effective participation into context. It also reviews the political situation of national minorities in the Central European region. Furthermore, the analysis of national minority protection in Central Europe and the bilateral aspects of political participation through the intergovernmental committees are presented for the sake of increasing understanding of the issue. Knowledge about the general

operation and processes of joint committees in CE context, including other European joint committees on national minorities, is summarized. To realize the above aims, the thesis presents the most crucial international legal and political documents that deal with the political representation and participation of these groups, as well as briefly describes the historical background of national minorities in Central Europe using content analysis of documents, and by reviewing a part of international and Hungarian scientific literature (e.g. Gál, 1999; Komac and Vizi, 2019; Fiala-Butora, 2017; Björn, 2008; Tóth, 2011; Lantschner and Medda-Windischer, 2001; Palermo and Sabanadze, 2001) on the highlighted issues. To examine the operation of bilateral committees, the establishing treaties, and in the case of the six broadly analyzed committees, the available protocols, are reviewed using content analysis as well. In this context, one of the most important results of the research is the collection of available protocols of the examined bilateral committees that has not been realized so far.¹

Second, the examination of the efficiency of minority representation and participation in the six bilateral committees is achieved through the implementation of semi-structured personal interviews with all the minority representatives taking part in the work of the six committees. It should be highlighted that, throughout the years, the circle of minority representatives involved in the work of committees has altered; therefore, the interviews were conducted with the minority representatives who participated in the work of the last committee meeting associated with the specific relation. The semi-structured interviews included predefined questions concerning mainly the effectiveness of minority participation in the given committee, as well as the general operation of the bodies, although interviewees were given the opportunity to express their opinions freely about relevant or pertinent issues connected to the work of committees. The predefined topics for interviews covered the following areas: the definition of minority participation in committees; the degree of involvement of minority representatives in the committee work and their evaluation of the effectiveness of their participation and representation; the methods of their involvement or non-involvement in committee work; opportunities for influencing other members of the committee; recommendations for improving the effectiveness of committee work and of minority participation and representation; and the characterization of their political relations and ties with the kin-state and residing state in general, as well as in connection with committee work.

¹ As part of this research, the collected protocols have been published within the project OTKA-K120469 at <https://kisebbsegkutato.tk.hu/kormanykozi-kisebbsegi-vegyesbizottsagok-jegyzokonyvei>.

The specific interview questions are presented in Chapter V of the thesis, along with the answers given by minority representatives, and the analysis of the issues that were raised.

It should also be noted that the selection of the research topic – the analysis of joint committees between Hungary and its six neighboring countries – occurred because the issue is only slightly and superficially examined in the scientific literature, and its comprehensive analysis is completely lacking. Some research has dealt with the work of particular European as well as Central European intergovernmental committees; however, a broad overview of the joint committees that exist between Hungary and its six neighbors, including the experiences of minority representatives, has not been provided so far.

The theoretical framework of the research is based, on one hand, on the *social constructivist* theory that, in general, considers that “people always construct, or constitute, social reality, even as their being, which can only be social, is constructed for them” (Onuf, 1989, p. 1). It means that the structure of society or social arrangements are basically defined by rules and institutions that are established by society itself. Consequently, according to the general constructivists perspective, people construct and create the world by their thoughts, concepts and notions, and these concepts define the character of relations between people, decision-makers and states. The representatives of the theory believe that the world is not formed “by itself”, but is the result of human thought, way of thinking, spoken words and deeds. In connection with international politics and international relations, constructivism also emphasizes that the former are constructed by decision-makers and by political leaders based on thoughts and concepts that have evolved over years, decades, centuries with respect to other states and other players. It holds true even more for Central European kin-states and home states that dealing with national minority issues is highly determined by past experiences, historical events and certain judgements defining presently followed policies towards the mentioned group. As a result, the outcomes of these policies relate back not only to the concerned group itself, and define not only the present character of relations between neighboring countries, but these also retroact to the higher decision-making level, being a continual and circular process. Putting it simply, as constructivism states, concepts, norms, and relations between groups, towards groups, or between states, and the interpretation of different meanings crucially determine the nature of present relations. The character of bilateral relations and the relationship between national minority groups and the home-state (residing state), national minority groups, and the kin-state is also determined by the

aforementioned concepts. The conclusion of bilateral treaties between the examined states is, as highlighted above, partially based on the implementation of international norms, but also on the willingness and ‘conceptualization’ of states to follow these norms that are incorporated into bilateral and other treaties.

Besides the social-constructivist theory, the theoretical framework uses *Rogers Brubaker’s* triadic nexus in order to explain the dynamics between the neighboring kin-states and minorities. Brubaker found that there is a clear interaction between “national minorities”, the “nationalizing states” (home states) being the countries where they live in and the “external national ‘homelands’” (in other words kin-state) to which they belong by ethnocultural affinity. This triadic nexus involves three distinct and mutually antagonistic nationalisms. The nationalism of nationalizing states refers to ‘claims made in the name of a “core nation” or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms. The core nation is understood as the legitimate “owner” of the state which is conceived as the state of and for the core nation.’ External national homelands directly challenge these nationalisms and “assert states’ rights” - indeed their obligation – to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, assert the rights and protect the interests of “their” ethnonational kin in other states (Brubaker, 1996, pp 4-5). If ethnonational kin is threatened in the nationalizing state, the nationalist strategies of homelands may be in direct opposition with nationalizing nationalisms. National minorities may be caught between these two nationalisms, also having their own nationalism as – i.e. making claims on grounds of their nationality, having a political stance with regard to securing their rights based on their distinct ethnocultural nationality (collective, nationality-based cultural and political rights) (Brubaker, 1996, pp. 5-6). Brubaker also holds that the classic example of the triadic nexus was interwar East Central Europe, since after the First World War tens of millions of people were assigned to other nation-states than their own, and unprecedented attention was paid to the national belonging of persons, as well as territories (Brubaker, 1996, p. 6).

Rogers Brubaker offers a useful methodological tool to understand the political and ideological background influencing both the creation and functioning of joint committees (Brubaker, 1996). In connection with Brubaker, as well as the research topic, *nationalism studies* also underpin the examined issue mainly focusing on the theoretical background of the political instrumentalization of “nation”, on the roots and evolution of modern nationalism. The debates over the origins of nations and nationalism, characterized by the rival approaches of primordial and modernist interpretations focus on the political and historical implications

of the evolution of nations. Modernists argue that the concept of “nation” is a political product of modern nationalism as it emerged in the 19th century and as it was influenced by social changes leading to the evolution of modern nation-state (Gellner, 1984; Hobsbawn, 1990). Other authors argue that modern nationalism has deep historical roots in ethnicity, ethnic communities that created the basis and background for the evolution of nationalism (Armstrong, 1982; Smith, 1998). Large part of the nationalism literature deals with the different characteristics of nationalism. Hechter offered a typology based on the goals of nationalism (state-building, irredentism, unification, etc.) (Hechter, 2000), Smith pointed out that the term ‘nationalism’ may refer to very different interpretative concepts (ideology, evolution of nations, national feelings, etc.) (Smith, 1998). Against this background, Brubaker focused on the actors and representatives of nationalism: how does the *position* of different state and minority actors influence their goals and interpretation of nationalist arguments. Not only states and minorities have different goals because they are in different position, but also kin-states and home-states have a different approach.

During the research, the above mentioned triadic nexus of national minorities, nationalizing states and external national homelands is extended to *quadratic nexus* that being used in the scientific literature as well. The model of Brubaker does not deal with the role of international organizations (EU, Council of Europe, OSCE, NATO), although, these bodies also shape the post-communist identity politics of Central Europe. The quadratic nexus links nationalizing states, national minorities and external national homelands to the aforementioned institutions of an expansive ‘Euro-Atlantic space’ (Smith, 2002, p. 3). International bodies should be taken into consideration besides the other there actors, since the cooperation involved in international organizations and the legal and political framework of these bodies may influence the situation and issues of states, as well as national minorities. As highlighted above, states in their bilateral documents (or in the case of the presently examined bilateral treaties establishing the joint committees on national minorities) also incorporate international standards and refer to specific international documents for dealing with minority protection, as well as with other problematics. This is also why the international environment cannot be omitted from the examination of minority issues, nor – in most cases – from the analysis of bilateral relations. This triadic or quadratic nexus may also explain how – in bilateral relations – the three actors’ identities and interests are shaped by many external factors. Not only do the domestic political-cultural environment or the international normative standards and institutions affect the behavior of states/governments vis-à-vis their minorities, but also the

actions and reactions of kin-states and the minorities themselves. This triadic/quadratic nexus shows clearly that minority claims are also directly influenced by states' attitudes and bilateral relations. Minority representatives may freely act and participate in principle, but the delicate nature of inter-state relations will obviously present an informal but real limit to minority claims. Furthermore, national governments significantly influence and define the sending parties or organizations of minority representatives based on national political considerations, as well as on the nature of relations between the two states and between the given minority and the home state. Even if parties reach agreement about the participating minority representatives in the work of given committees, the decisions or approval of the home state are decisive, and reaching an agreement that is beneficial for both states is also mainly based on the actual political relationship between the two countries. The constructivist approach that focuses on norms and institutions in this context may be completed by paying attention to the dynamics of identity politics in this triadic nexus.

III. Results/conclusions of research

The research examined the issue of the effective political participation and representation of national minorities through a practical framework of implementation in Central Europe: namely, the work of intergovernmental committees on national minorities between Hungary and its six neighboring countries. As has been emphasized during the examination, the focus of the thesis was on the analysis of the effective political participation and representation of national minority representatives participating in the six bilateral committees based on interviews conducted with them latter. Interviewees shared not only their experiences and views regarding the above-highlighted issues, but also about other topics closely connected to the effectiveness of minority participation and representation, and to their relations with the home state and kin-state concerning the operation of committees as well. The vast majority of interviewees had participated in the work of the given committee for many years, although, for the sake of process traceability, minority representatives participating in the last plenary meetings were interviewed, as mentioned. Interviews proved to be sufficient and useful methods of obtaining practical information and knowledge about the experiences of minority representatives regarding the effectiveness of their participation in the committees and other issue. Furthermore, the interviewees made some significant recommendations concerning the potential development of the operation of committees that are worth consideration.

Bilateral committees enable and secure a unique opportunity for the representatives of national minorities to be involved in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

The establishing treaties thereof, in almost every case, highlight that representatives of national minorities should be involved in the work of these bodies on both sides. At the beginning of the 1990s, when the majority of establishing documents were signed by the examined states, this was a crucial development compared to those of the previous decades. However, it should also be emphasized that the decisions of bilateral committees and the protocols signed in a few CE countries were/are non-binding, and are thus considered only as recommendations for the respective governments. Furthermore, the involvement of minority representatives into the work of committees in itself does not mean they are able to effectively influence decisions in these bodies – which situation may be considered a peculiar drawback, since such committees were established to promote the interests and objectives of the mentioned groups.

The *initial hypothesis* of the research emphasized that the examined joint committees secure only limited opportunities for the political participation and representation of national minorities, in the sense that in the joint committees only a limited circle of the respective national minority is represented. These representatives, or more properly, the sending parties and organizations are, in most cases (except for in the Hungarian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Serbian relations, where the relevant treaties identify the representative body of the minorities) arbitrarily chosen by the respective governments and by the co-chairmen of committees.

Based on the documentation of committee meetings, the protocols, and the interviews prepared with minority representatives, the first hypothesis proved to be partially correct. Regarding the presence of minority representatives taking part in the work of the examined committees on the Hungarian side – except for the Hungarian-Slovenian and Hungarian-Croatian relation – two minority representatives participate from the same kind of sending institutions, therefore the mode of representation follows the same pattern. On the side of neighboring countries the situation differs, because the Hungarian national minority is represented in almost all relations by the president or a member of the biggest Hungarian party, thus one Hungarian minority representative participates in every committee. The only exception is the Hungarian-Slovak relation, in which an officially appointed Hungarian minority representative is presently not involved – the Hungarian minority is represented by presidents or members of some minority organizations on a temporary basis. The circle, persons, and sending parties of organizations of minority representatives were defined by the Parties during the initial phase of cooperation, and these practices have not changed

throughout the years. The only innovation in the committees concerning the involvement of minority representatives was implemented by Hungary in the form of the establishment of the position of parliamentary spokespersons for national minorities in 2014, who from that time have taken part in the committees. Regarding the above process and the examination conducted during the research, it can be concluded that the circle of minority representatives was arbitrarily chosen by the respective governments during the initial era of cooperation. The establishing treaties, except for in the Hungarian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Serbian relation, did not define the circle of minority representatives that should participate in committees. Therefore, on the side of Hungary it is almost self-explanatory that the two (in certain cases three) minority representatives participate in the work of committees. In the neighboring countries, the situation has been more complex, because the presidents or members of the biggest Hungarian minority parties have been involved in the committees, the latter which in many cases (or in most periods) were parliamentary parties as well. Thus, for the governments of neighboring states it was unequivocal that the Hungarian minority would be represented by the mentioned parties in the committees, while in certain other cases (Ukraine, Romania), it was reluctantly noted that minority representatives should participate in these bodies. However, it should also be emphasized that the participation of Hungarian minority representatives in the work of committees on the side of neighboring countries was influenced by Hungary to a large degree. As already noted, the Hungarian government cooperates with or considers an ally only a single Hungarian party in every neighboring country, and in the committees, on the side of given neighboring countries, the partners of Hungary (the members of the supported Hungarian minority parties) have participated. However, this raises the issue of representativeness, as well as questions the practical realization of the representation of rights because in neighboring countries other Hungarian minority parties and organizations exist that also represent the interests of a significant proportion of the Hungarian minority. Accordingly, their participation in the committees should also be considered. For example, in the Hungarian-Ukrainian Joint Committee the Hungarian national minority has always been represented by the president or members of the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (KMKSZ). However, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Ukraine (Ukrajnai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, UMDSZ) – another Hungarian party that was established after Ukraine gained independence in the 1990s – has also enjoyed the significant support of Hungarians living in Ukraine. In spite of this, the party has not been involved in the work of the committee because KMKSZ has always been considered the main partner and ally of Hungary. The situation of minority representation on Slovakia is also very similar to

the above. This implies that the representativeness of minority participants and organizations in committees – concerning whether they represent the community as a whole – may be questioned. Based on the research, the minority representatives of a particular party or organization have the obligation to represent the whole minority community; however, in many cases this is not possible because, generally speaking, minority representation can only be achieved through the involvement of a wider range of minority parties and other organizations, NGOs from the given community.

It should also be stressed that Parties, in the absence of regulation connected to the number of representatives of, and in most cases also the identity of the sending organizations of minority representatives, have (have had) the opportunity to increase or decrease the number of minority representatives at all times, as well as to alter or put an end to the participation of the sending parties and organizations represented in committees (however, throughout the years, the circle of minority representatives has not been altered by the Parties compared to the original setup). Moreover, when a country aims to involve other minority members, or basically any other individuals, into the work of the committee on its side, a preliminary negotiation with the other Party is not required. Accordingly, Parties, or more specifically, co-chairmen and governments, have a wide range of comprehensive or even arbitrary powers in this respect. The fact that minority representatives are basically arbitrarily chosen in all probability implies that the participants, sending parties, and organizations are in most cases able to represent only a limited fraction of a national minority in general.

The *second hypothesis* – that the effectiveness of bilateral committees essentially depends on the political relations between states and not on the bodies as legal institutions – is considered valid. Based on the protocols of committee meetings, on the analysis of the character of political relations between states, and on the interviews that were undertaken with minority representatives, it can be observed that it is mainly the nature of political relations between countries that influences the frequency of committee meetings, as well as the success of the work of committees. In those instances or in periods when relations between the two states are conflictual and unfriendly, the work of committees is liable to cease, as occurred in the case of Hungarian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Romanian relation. Furthermore, it has also occurred that, during periods of conflict, committee meetings were organized only after pauses in their work, and when protocols were signed the recommendations thus adopted were not implemented, or only after a long time. It was also stressed by a few minority representatives that in some cases committee meetings were not/are not organized even during those periods

when relations between states were passable, because they had been able to negotiate national minority issues in other forums. Although not stated in the initial hypotheses, the research showed, mainly on the basis of the interviews with minority representatives, that it is not only the nature of relations between two particular countries that defines the success of cooperation in the frame of bilateral committees (and regarding other areas of cooperation as well), but also the character of relations between the home state and the given national minority residing in that state (for instance, between Slovenia and the Hungarian national minority residing in the country). The participation and representation of national minorities in general decision-making processes, the opportunities that are secured for these communities, as well as the acceptance of their proposed objectives during committee meetings of bilateral committees also strongly depends on the relationship between the two actors – the home state and the residing national minority – that has evolved during decades of “living together.” Furthermore, this relationship is also strongly determined by the policies and approaches of the home state that are followed towards national minorities with regard to the protection of their rights and promotion of their interests.

The principle of reciprocity was also highlighted by the second hypothesis in the sense that between states it is to be considered the decisive factor when implementing certain objectives in connection with national minorities. In practice, this principle would imply that when state A deals with the national minorities of state B in a certain way – for instance, it protects and promotes their rights in the country – then state B will act the same way as well. However, this assumption regarding the bilateral committees between Hungary and its neighbors is only partially applicable. In principle, bilateral committees work in a reciprocal way, but kin-state activism differs to a great extent and it definitely affects their work. The main reason for this is that states relate to the national minorities residing in the country, as well as to their kin minority living in other states differently. For instance, for Hungary the protection of its kin minority outside the border has always been a political priority. Furthermore, Hungary also protects the rights of national minorities residing in the country through various means and the establishment of regulations that provide appropriate opportunities for national minorities to preserve their identity, including supporting these groups financially. However, in some neighboring countries, neither the issue of national nor kin minorities is a prioritized area or policy target. In these states, the interests and rights of national minorities, including the Hungarian national minority, are protected and taken into account to various degrees. In certain states, as was emphasized in the research, national minorities, including the Hungarian minority, face discrimination, although in other countries their rights are more properly

respected. Furthermore, the fate and situation of the kin minority of states residing in other countries does not attract the close attention of several kin-states, as mentioned above. Therefore, it can be summarized that the principle of reciprocity does not prevail between the examined states, since Hungary, irrespective of the approach towards and protection of rights of Hungarians residing in neighboring states by home states, promotes and protects the identity and rights of national minorities living in Hungary. This positive practice of Hungary is not correlated to the frequency, organization or success of committee meetings and accepted recommendations, nor with the character of political relations between the two particular states. It should be added as well that reciprocity does not apply in the sense that the size of the Hungarian national minority residing in neighboring countries significantly exceeds that of other national minorities residing in Hungary, therefore, the recommendations of committees should be formulated on the basis of this, although in practice this does not occur.

During the analysis, it was also observed that the practice of intergovernmental joint committees in Central Europe is grounded on or corresponds to an identifiable regional model of minority protection that represents the national minority communities. However, the establishment of bilateral treaties on good neighborliness and other treaties dealing with the protection of national minorities, and therefore the set-up of joint committees on national minorities, is not a Central European peculiarity. However, the Central European region stands out due to the relatively large number of national minority groups residing in these countries, as well as historical events accompanied by problems that involved many issues related to national minorities. In the region, the joint committees of Hungary and its six neighbors operate on the exact same principles, based on similar processes and practices, implying that these bodies may be considered a regional model of minority participation and representation. It should also be emphasized although joint committees secure the opportunity for national minorities to take part in their work – a crucial development and opportunity for minority participation – the effectiveness of committees varies because of several factors that have been highlighted in the research. The most determining feature is the nature of political relations between Parties and the approaches of states towards national minorities that have evolved over time, as mentioned above.

The future operation of joint committees is highly important, not only as regional models enabling national minority participation and representation, but also as bodies implementing their objectives in practice to protect the rights and identity of the latter more effectively in

the states concerned. However, it should also be noted, as was emphasized by the minority representatives, that states should make some changes to develop the future operation of committees and increase the effectiveness of minority participation and representation, as well as of the other general processes of the bodies. According to a large number of minority representatives, the most crucial area for improvement should be the regular, annual organization of committee meetings in all relations, as well as the initiation of renewed cooperation in the frame of two committees (Hungarian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Romanian) the work of whose committees has been lacking for almost 10 years. The other important area where the effectiveness of committee work should be increased is the practical realization of the objectives formulated and accepted in the signed protocols. The aims included in protocols should be implemented more effectively, otherwise this will question (and indeed already questions) the credibility of bilateral committees and the protocols themselves. Furthermore, in order to support the implementation process, all countries should accept the protocols as mandatory documents through government decisions or binding action plans, as well as appoint the governmental and other bodies responsible for the realization of committee objectives. In this way, the work of committees could be made more accountable.

IV. Selected references

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