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Constructing Border Ethnic Identities along the Frontier of Central and Eastern Europe - A Research Note

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Abstract : *This paper is based on the results of the cross-cultural comparative ENRI-EAST project, and aims to explore the various aspects of people's national and ethnic affiliations and the social psychological characteristics of national and diaspora identity among ethnic minorities living along the Eastern border of the EU. The goal of our approach is to reconstruct the image of the national identity, which is created through everyday observations, attitudes and value judgments in the individual's mind, as well as the image, which is organized into a coherent identity as some sort of collective stock of knowledge at societal level. Also, we can learn what kind of broader political consequences, value dilemmas, or perhaps tensions may accompany the mechanism of how ethnic diasporas and migrant groups create their own national identity in the context of their home and host nation. Our analyses include four ethnic dyads in the border region of Europe : Lithuanians in Russia, and Russians in Lithuania, Ukrainians in Poland and Poles in Ukraine, Belarusians in Poland and Poles in Byelorussia, Slovaks in Hungary and Hungarians in Slovakia.*

Key words: diaspora, identity, ENRI-EAST
Cuvinte cheie: diaspora, identitate, ENRI-EAST

Preface

The following analysis is based on an empirical sociological survey aimed at exploring the various aspects of people's diaspora affiliations and the social psychological characteristics of ethnic and national identity on the borderland of Europe. The stock of knowledge of ethnic and national identity can be approached from various historical, political and cultural aspects. Ethnic identity can also be examined within the political and intellectual process where this knowledge is shaped and altered, and where the different actors transform, re-write and re-shape the fabric of knowledge. This

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knowledge is also manifested in representations like ethnic and national symbols, objects, texts and events (Gerő, 2006). Finally, and of utmost importance for this analysis, we can make an attempt to reveal the components of identity and identification mechanisms which manifest in everyday life and to analyze how they change over time. Therefore the subject of this investigation is not the ethnic minority as a historically conceived community, or an intellectual narrative, or a cultural tradition, but as a community of members, of ordinary people. The goal of our approach is to reconstruct the image of the ethnic minority, which is created through everyday observations, attitudes and value judgments in the individual's mind, as well as the image that is organized into a coherent identity as some sort of collective stock of knowledge at societal level.

The exploration of the everyday social-psychological features of national consciousness and ethnic identity implies a model which was developed by György Csepeli based on his surveys in the 1980s and 1990s (Csepeli, 2000), a version of which also appears in analyses conducted by Henk Dekker (2003). Essentially, these models describe nation-related identity as a stock of knowledge based on cognitive and affective components, which is built and organized as a coherent structure from a hierarchy of closely linked parts. Cognitive and affective mechanisms may represent a variety of themes from natural environment through constructing a historical past to the big questions of culture, politics, economy or even morals.

This study will follow the Dekker-Csepeli model's structure as best as possible. Accordingly, we will first introduce the various types of ethnic identities in given diaspora. We will introduce and discuss some cognitive building blocks that are part of the construction of identity. Next we consider integration-assimilation strategies characteristic of the diaspora and attempt to describe the category system behind these strategies, based on which members of diaspora construct their national identities. In the final section we demonstrate how certain diasporas are similar and how they are different when they establish their own ethnic identities.

Frame of the analysis

Empirical social science often debates whom to consider a member of given groups (ethnic, religious, etc.). Those who declare themselves as belonging or those who are labelled as belonging by outsiders might be considered members. Such debates do not affect the international study conducted in eight countries[1] in 2010. The research design considered only the self-identification of the respondents as an indicator of group membership, and ignored the judgment of outside actors. The study, however, covered many levels of analysis, as having respondents from minorities in eight countries made possible the creation of dyads. For example, we could compare Slovaks living in Hungary to Hungarians living in Slovakia and thus compare how given countries „treat" an ethnic group whose mother country is a place of residence for a minority "torn" from the majority society. Further, we can examine how given countries are perceived by minorities living there. For example, do Poles and Byelorussians living in Ukraine have the same experience living there? We can go further and ask which country serves as a more liveable home for given minorities. For example, is the situation of the Polish minority better in Ukraine or in Byelorussia? Incorporating other international studies we examine the situation of given minorities, comparing their attitudes with those of their host countries' majorities, case by case.

The logic of this analysis means that one country – namely Latvia – will not be a part of any further examination, given that no Latvian ethnic minority lives in any of the other countries of the study. Further, some ethnic minority groups are "lost" to us

given that the other partner in the dyad is not part of our study. It is for this reason that we neglect, for example, Poles in Lithuania (we did not collect data on Lithuanians in Poland) or Hungarians in Ukraine or Byelorussians in Lithuania.

Table 1. *Analytical framework: four dyads with eight ethnic minority groups*[2]

1.	RUSSIANS IN LITHUANIA	LITHUANIANS IN RUSSIA
2.	POLES IN UKRAINE	UKRAINIANS IN POLAND
3.	BYELORUSSIANS IN POLAND	POLES IN BYELORUSSIA
4.	SLOVAKS IN HUNGARY	HUNGARIANS IN SLOVAKIA

Personal self-identification

To belong to a nation, or to develop national identity, it is necessary that the individual have some kind of relationship with his/her (national-ethnic) group. Clearly, everyone tries to construct group belonging based on feelings and values that are deemed positive. The act of birth in a legal sense makes obvious group belonging, but from a psychological point of view it is a necessary condition for "filling" and strengthening identity with emotional and cognitive content. For diaspora, however, the situation is not so simple. In Eastern Europe national borders have been repeatedly modified. Thus, it is a fact that birth in the territory of one country does not guarantee that one will remain a citizen of that state, even if the individual does not change residence in his/her lifetime. This paradox actually strengthens the role of emotional and cognitive elements in the development of ethnic identity. We did not study the question of which factors define whether the individual continues, terminates or resumes the multi-stranded history through which he/she marks him/herself as the member of a diaspora group. We are certain that the history of diaspora – and within them personal histories of the individual members – are related to the contradictory assimilation and dissimilation stresses in the national homogenization process inherent in the development of the nation state.

Acknowledging the above we now return to the basic question posed in the introduction, namely whether members of given minority groups mark themselves as belonging to the host or the mother country. Does the diaspora in the country of residence provide the basis of identity, or do such individuals use ancestry to distinguish themselves from the majority?

Table 2. *Ethnic status, based on self-identification according to minority group, percent*

	Mother country	Diaspora	Host country, but originating in mother country	Host country	Total
Russians in LITHUANIA	**22.6**	61.7	*14.5*	1.2	100
Lithuanians in RUSSIA	*7.6*	49.5	**38.6**	4.3	100
Poles in UKRAINE	11.8	**68.4**	19.8	----	100
Ukrainians in POLAND	15.5	65.9	17.3	1.3	100
Byelorussians in POLAND	*2.5*	*36.6*	**59.3**	1.5	100
Poles in BYELORUSSIA	**21.5**	60.5	18.0	------	100
Slovaks in HUNGARY	----	65.8	21.9	**12.2**	100
Hungarians in SLOVAKIA	16.4	**69.0**	13.4	1.3	100
Together[3]	12.3	59.7	25.3	2.7	100

During self-identification the respondents chose mainly the ethnic minority, or belonging to the diaspora. Particularly Hungarians in Slovakia and Poles in Ukraine (almost 70% for both groups) chose belonging to the diaspora as the basis for their identity. The second most common option was belonging to the majority society, although the minority group as the group of origin was marked as well. This is how Byelorussians in Ukraine see themselves (60%), as do many Lithuanians in Russia (close to 40%). It is rarer for the members of ethnic minorities to declare themselves as members of their mother countries. Compared to the other groups Russians in Lithuania and Poles in Byelorussia have a relatively high proportion (above 20%) of members who declare themselves as belonging to the mother country. Complete melting into the population of the host country is rather rare. Only Slovaks living in Hungary showed a proportion in this alternative of over ten percent. The alternatives offered for defining ethnic identity – starting from strict adherence to the original ethnic group to complete inclusion in the majority society – can be seen as the stations of the assimilation process. In this sense the Slovaks in Hungary and the Byelorussians in Poland can be considered the most assimilated minorities, while Russian, Lithuanian and Hungarians are minorities that preserve their difference.

Spontaneous identification

Behind personal (ethnic) identity lies a cognitive and affective set of knowledge that is constructed of elements that build on one another and that are tightly related. The primary level is that of spontaneous emotive identification, which for the individual creates the feeling of closeness to the diaspora, the nation of origin or the ethnic group that constitutes the majority of the host country as defined by its members. It is upon this emotional basis that various attitudes, urges, values and ideologies are placed and by which national identity is organized.

When an international study aims to deal with societies with divergent historical pasts, differing levels of economic development, and various types of ethnic pluralism, it must deal with the fact that translated words and terms mean different things in different countries. When we tried to answer the seemingly simple question of the degree to which respondents feel closeness to the mother country, the host country or the diaspora, it is worth considering that „closeness" means one thing in communities in which extroverted behaviour is deemed normal and something else in groups where reserved and distant emotional expression is the norm. Thus, when we wanted to find out which ethnic minority group is most closely tied to its mother country, diaspora or host country, we decided to control the distorting effect described above.[4] Table 2 illustrates feelings of closeness free of distortions caused by such cultural differences. It is generally true for most ethnic minorities that they feel no connection to East-Central Europe, and Europe is a distant concept for them as well. The mother country is distant as well, with short distances from the mother country shown only in the Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Hungarian groups. Another possible source of the preservation of ethnic identity is the connection to diaspora in the minority situation. This kind of feeling of closeness is visible in all groups, mostly among Russians and Hungarians, and least of all among Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. Residence, the microclimate of which can reduce tension that is inherent in the minority experience, is the strongest bind for Poles, whether they live in Ukraine or Byelorussia. Inclusion into the majority society and connection to the host country is most characteristic of Slovaks, Poles in Byelorussia and Russians. The varying

strengths of binds in a sense provide a profile of the given ethnic groups. The members of the dyads often judge their embeddedness in opposing ways.

Table 1. *Feeling of relative closeness*[5] *according to minority groups, averages*

	Mother country	Diaspora	Residence	Host country	East-Central Europe	Europe
Russians in LITHUANIA	-.2366	**.4512**	.5358	**.5211**	-.7070	-.5887
Lithuanians in RUSSIA	**-.0497**	.1276	.3352	.2467	-.3931	-.3342
Poles in UKRAINE	-.6177	.2516	**.6061**	.4187	-.4072	-.2954
Ukrainians in POLAND	**-.0189**	.1620	.2773	.2738	-.3792	-.3162
Byelorussians in POLAND	.1813	.1694	.4525	.1731	-.5456	-.5889
Poles in BYELORUSSIA	-.8505	.2750	**.5957**	**.5583**	-.5137	-.0865
Slovaks in HUNGARY	-.2620	.2705	.5313	**.5683**	-.6924	-.6725
Hungarians in SLOVAKIA	**-.0638**	**.4416**	.3172	.0706	-.5736	-.2702
Together	-.2412	.2692	.4564	.3552	-.5236	-.3888

Russians living in Lithuania almost uniformly feel close to Lithuania, their places of residence and their own minority group. They hardly feel closeness to the mother country or Europe, nor is East-Central Europe a factor in their identity. This indicates embeddedness in the country of residence, which is coloured by a strong connection to their own ethnic group and a segregationist attitude.

Lithuanians living in Russia feel close foremost to their places of residence. For them the mother country, the country of residence and their own minority group are important yet more distant binding points. European identity does not characterize them. Lithuanians appear less embedded in their country of residence, in comparison with the other group in the dyad.

Ukrainians living in Poland and their dyad partner, Poles living in Ukraine, have a similar bind-map. They lack European identity and are only loosely connected to their mother country. They only deem their residences, country of residence and own ethic group as close, although, as seen in Table 2, there are differences in the extent of closeness.

The members of the Polish-Byelorussian dyad display both similarities and differences. Both groups are characterized by a strong bond with residence and country of residence, and they feel strong affinity with their own ethnic groups. They differ, however, in strength of bond with their mother country. Though neither group has a strong attachment to their mother country, Poles in Byelorussia feel closer to their mother country than do Byelorussians who, of all the offered points of binding, feel furthest from Byelorussia.

In the case of Poland we have the opportunity to compare two minorities that live in the country. The Byelorussian minority group feels closer to Poland than Ukrainians do, and they are less attached to their mother country than Ukrainians to Ukraine. If we examine the responses of Poles living in Ukraine and Byelorussia, it appears that Poles in Byelorussia are an integrated community while Poles in Ukraine feel distant from that host country.

Accordingly, for Poles in Ukraine the mother country is closer than it is for Poles in Byelorussia. Feelings of closeness and distance affect one another for the minority groups living in the three countries.

Finally, we may consider the members of the Hungarian-Slovak dyad as being the inverse of one another in a certain aspect. Hungarians feel closest to their own ethnic group and are attached to their residences, but they do not feel close to Slovakia or Hungary. This "homelessness" is not weakened by European identity, given that there is little attachment to East-Central Europe and Europe. Slovaks in Hungary are strongly attached to their country of residence, Hungary, and their integration is indicated by the importance of residence in their group. Slovakia is not a mark of identity to them, nor do they have a strong attachment to East-Central Europe. On the other hand, they feel closer to Europe than their partner in the dyad, Hungarians in Slovakia. Thus, this dyad shows us the outlines of a group that is attached to its country of residence and integrated, and another that seems "homeless".

Assimilation versus preservation of identity

The nature of the relationship between the ethnic groups in the minority situation and the majority society are an influence on the assimilation attempts of the minority groups. The minority can choose to melt into majority society or try to maintain its minority identity. The majority of respondents stated that the preservation of identity is their strategy of choice. (The importance of maintaining identity was stressed by an average of 60 percent of the respondents across groups). The goal of balancing accommodation to the majority society and the preservation of ethnic identity was chosen by close to a quarter of the respondents. Only the final quarter claimed it was desirable to choose separation and the strict preservation of ethnic identity. Naturally there were differences among the various minority groups.

The desire to preserve identity was remarkably strong among Hungarians in Slovakia and among Poles, whether they be in Ukraine or Byelorussia. Lithuanians in Russian were unequivocally supportive of assimilation. The rest of the minority groups fell somewhere in between, but the maintenance of ethnic identity was an important and possible path for them as well, even though they did not reject accommodating the majority society.

We would be justified to ask what feeds the feeling and knowledge among ethnic minorities that allow them to delineate the borders of their groups and to differentiate themselves from members of other groups which in a political sense are members of the same national society. There is another aspect to such knowledge: does the diaspora draw its borders in such a way that it is still possible to feel membership in the mother country?

We know the historical answer. Group borders drawn based on political citizenship are not the same as those drawn based on feeling common history, common cultural realities and common ethnic ancestry. National identity works within an alternate framework compared to membership based on political nationality (citizenship).

The group of questions used to measure national identification employed elements in all countries that were related to political citizenship (which is a necessary element of political nation building), territorial belonging, and respect for the country's institutions, as well as elements that are part of the nation concept's accessories in a cultural sense, like mother tongue, blood ties, cultural sameness and self-identification. We assume that members of the national majority accept political national identity to a higher degree, whereas members of the national minority are more attracted to the idea of national membership based on culture. At the same time we anticipate that the political national identity concept of the national majority fits well with a cultural approach as it is a more or less

perfect match with the stressing of the importance of the dominant cultural community. Consequently, the majority not only expects the ethnic minority to be part of the host country in terms of citizenship, place of birth and place of residence, but in terms of language use, religion and traditions as well. This can be based on national intolerance or on assimilation expectations. At the same time the national minority's culturally based self-identity can be a forbearer of segregation and/or distrust of the majority, which can lead to the impossibility of communication between the majority and the minority and the poisoning of interethnic relations. But it can also be an expression of insistence on the mother country and cultural roots, which can be reflective of a pluralist nation concept that fits well with the feeling membership in both the host country and the mother country.

When the members of a diaspora express the criteria they deem important for accepting people as members of given nations, they differentiate according to whether they are discussing membership in the host or mother country. In Figures 1 and 2 we show the importance various diasporas ascribe to political and cultural nation concepts in order to view someone as a member of the host nation, and what they think it takes to be a member of the mother nation. Where possible the figures stress how they view the host or majority society. [6]

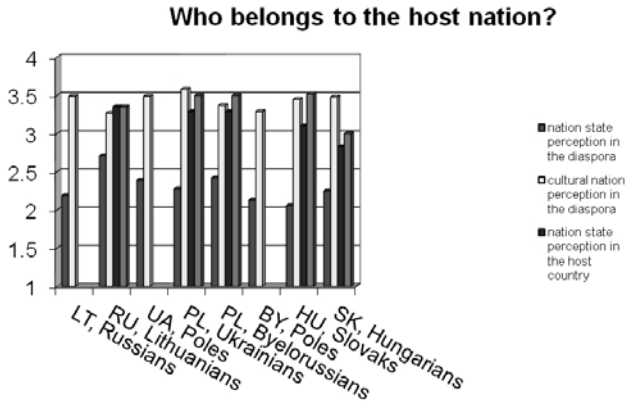

Figure 1. *Criteria for membership in the host nation among diaspora members and the majority society of the host nation*

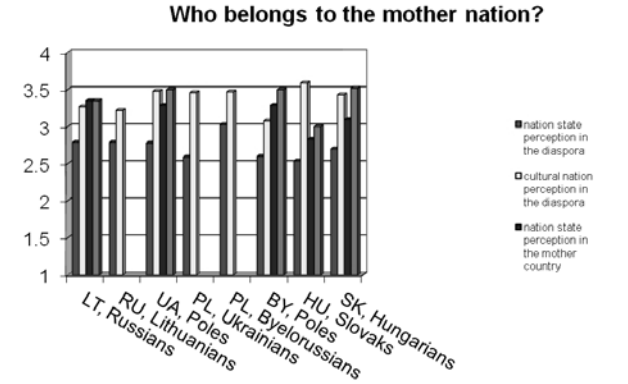

Figure 2. *Criteria for membership in the mother nation among diaspora members and the majority society of the host nation*

Generally – whether we are discussing criteria for membership in the host or mother country – the members of the diaspora deem the cultural markers of national membership definition more important. The relative devaluation of aspects of political nation – which is particularly strong when applied to the host nation – indicates that the members of the diaspora feel that just because someone is born in a "foreign country", lives there and is a citizen there does not automatically make the person a part of the nation. When members of the diaspora evaluate the political dimension of belonging to the mother country they accept that the ones who live there and have citizenship there are the ones who mostly belong there. The subsequent tension from the feeling of belonging nowhere can at best weaken the emphasis on cultural aspects. For example, Poles in Ukraine are not automatically Ukrainian by being members of the political community. Further conditions for that membership are the use of the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian ancestry and mostly self-identification as a Ukrainian. This means that the members of the diaspora feel free to define their own identity all while only unenthusiastically feeling part of the host country's national community. At the same time the members of the Polish diaspora in our example may also feel that "real" Poles are those who belong to the Polish nation in a political sense. But in order to be able to emphasize cultural markers a space is opened through which language, culture and self-identity allow them to feel part of the mother nation (as well). This necessary dual affiliation is characteristic of every diaspora we studied.

The findings of our study on the ethnic identity of diaspora indicate that while working on national homogenization programs under nation-state development it is the majority society that defines the parameters of success. For the minority group the path of assimilation can be an advantage leading to higher social positions. At the same time higher social status assumes a higher level of education, which in itself assumes a more tolerant and open attitude toward multiculturalism. These two oppositely directed forces define the situation of the diaspora in terms of the survival of their ethnic identity or conversely their melting into the majority society.

The model of personal ethnic identification

We assume that the „cornerstone" of personal ethnic identity is the start that the individual receives in the parental home. (This start is indicated by the ethnic identity of the child, i.e., the respondent, and the choice of a mother tongue school.) Upon this is built all that which occurs over a lifetime. The stations of life utilized in the questionnaire are limited to the composition of the circle of friends, the ethnic identity of the spouse, language use in the home, and consumption of newspapers, television and internet materials from the mother country (i.e., the consumption of mother tongue culture). This is all affected and given emotional content by the binds that the member of the minority feels with the other members of the same group and those from the mother country, the trust in one's own group, and the pride felt in belonging to one's own group. These three factors affect how one will define one's own ethnic identity: whether one feels part of the mother country or the diaspora or the host country, or whether one feels he/she has unique ethnic roots or is simply a citizen of the host country. We illustrate the elements that make up ethnic identity using a path model.

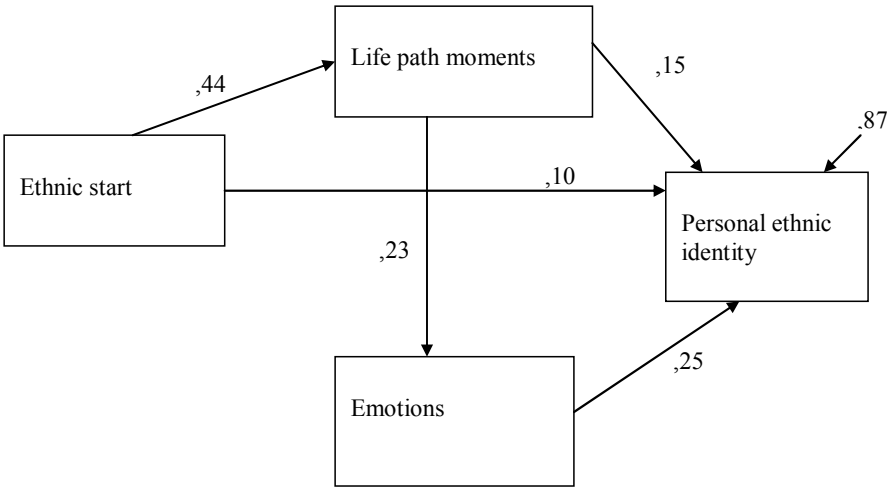

Figure 3. *Building blocks of personal ethnic identity.*

A person belonging to an ethnic minority is not likely to give up his/her original group-identity if he/she grew up in a family where both parents belong to the minority group (or the mother country) and one attended school in the native language. This ethnic start leads to choices made in adulthood that support the preservation of the original identity, e.g., choosing friends from among members of the diaspora (and perhaps the mother country) and not limiting speaking the mother tongue to the family sphere by consuming media in the mother tongue. These all result in an emotional identification with minority existence, strong ties to the diaspora and even the mother country, pride in origins, and trust toward co-members of the minority. Thus there is a high probability that he/she will claim to belong to the mother country.

In our model we can see that the parental home has an effect on personal ethnic identity even when the respondent diverges from the parental pattern in adulthood, and even when minority existence no longer has emotional content. There is a direct path from the ethnic start to personal identity. We can also see that the parental pattern is ineffective when the individual moves away from his/her own ethnic group in adulthood, where emotional attachment that is necessary for the preservation of ethnic identity dries up (there is no direct path from the ethnic start to the emotive aspect). We can view the path model above as being capable of describing the possible scripting of minority identity.

The building blocks of ethnic identity in the minority groups

Above we showed how origin, life path and the emotional content of belonging to a minority group affect minority identity, or how the relationships among these factors lead to various types. Now we will construct a model that shows which minority groups resemble one another in terms of ethnic identity characterizing the group and parental patterns, as well as the objective and affective moments of the life path. We will use the cluster analysis method. Minority groups in the same type have similar ethnic identities, parental starts, characteristics of life paths and emotional identification with members of their own group.

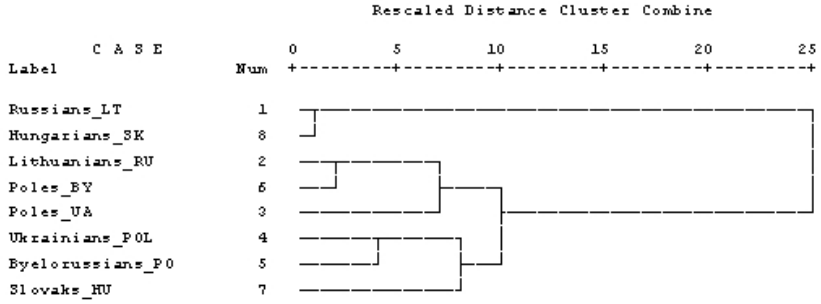

Figure 4. *Types of relationships between building blocks of ethnic identity and identity.*

It is important to mention this again because the two minority groups that most resemble one another are Russians and Hungarians. At first glance this similarity is difficult to explain. Why would we even compare Russians in Lithuania with Hungarians in Slovakia? However, if we keep in mind that our statements are based on data from a questionnaire in which the memories and interpretations of the respondents form a picture of the country of birth, and that we have retrospective information about the moments along the life path, then it is not beyond question that we will find an explanation for this unlikely similarity. Both the Russians and Hungarians have a historical memory in which they recall a time when their ethnic group, or a good portion of it, was part of the economic, political and perhaps even cultural elite. When considering the population of their current host countries, they have a tendency to feel superior in comparison. The period of the situation of advantage passed, and may even have reversed. Despite the fact that the historical processes were much more complicated and indirect than in our brief description, the emotions arising from the judgment of the situations are quite similar. It is these emotions that certainly colour all emotional binds to the country of origin, life paths and membership in the ethnic group in a similar fashion. This similar historical "career" explains the similarity between the Russian and Hungarian minorities.

The second type is made up of Lithuanians in Russia and Poles in Ukraine and Byelorussia. As minorities, they live in countries that were all Soviet republics, and in this sense their experiences as minorities were similar. The collapse of the Soviet empire did not bring about a significant divergence in their social and political environments, as successor states. The previous homogeneity of the host countries and their later similarity created conditions in which the affected ethnic minorities moved along parallel paths.

The third type is composed of the two groups living in Poland, namely Ukrainians and Byelorussians. It is possible that the paths leading to their minority existence in Poland are not the same, but it is not a stretch to say that the uniform minority policy of the host country made the development of the ethnic identity of the two groups similar.

The fourth "group" is made up of Slovaks in Hungary only. Their fate diverges significantly from that of the other minorities. The majority of them settled in Hungary in the 17th century. They have been living in the country for generations. Their assimilation is more advanced than that of any of the other diaspora in the study. This unique situation is the cause of their separation in typology.

Notes

1. The countries in the study are: Byelorussia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine.
2. The sample size of the ethnic groups in the given countries was 400 to 800. In the interest of later interpreting differences between groups, such that the complex indicators developed would have equal weight in all the groups, we "changed" the sample size of all the ethnic groups. We did this through simple weighting.
3 The eight ethnic groups taken together cannot be interpreted as a group, thus the row titled „Together" is somewhat devoid of meaning. We included it because it can help us to form an impression of what a characteristic „average" ethnic group would look like. It may be easier to understand differences among groups by paying attention to a kind of „total".
4. In the case of spontaneous emotional affiliation we accomplished this by comparing the average feeling of closeness with those of the given points of binding. The negative values in the table mean that closeness was lower than the characteristic average for the given ethnic group, while positive values mean that closeness is higher than the average.
5 The table contains average closeness for the given ethnic group and differences in distance.
6. The ISSP 2003 survey covered four countries (Hungary, Poland, Russia and Slovakia) and contained identity questions from which we could draw conclusions about the nation concepts of the majority society.

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Primit la redacție: martie, 2011