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Managing Ethnicity: The OSCE and Transnational Networks in Romania

October 26, 2004

Abstract

It would be an exaggeration to say that Eastern Europe was ever awash with violent ethnic conflict. Nonetheless, communism's demise did contribute to about a dozen ethnic conflicts, and by the early 1990s numerous crisis points emerged. Yugoslavia was undeniably the worst case scenario, but ethnic tensions had reached a dangerous level in several other states, including Romania, Latvia, and Estonia. As these problems unfolded, some scholars predicted that the West would simply leave Eastern Europe and its problems to itself. Fortunately, this did not happen, and throughout the 1990s, European regional organizations, in particular, made the prevention and management of ethnic conflict a priority. Given both the continued need to prevent ethnic-based conflicts and the dearth of research on ethnic cooperation, it is worthwhile recalling how the West responded to this new security threat. Which organizations led these efforts? What strategies were used? Most importantly, what were the effects of these initiatives?

My research contends that ethnic disputes in Eastern Europe were shaped fundamentally by a transnational network of public and private organizations that worked in complementary, reinforcing ways to manage ethnic conflicts. It would be simplistic and empirically incorrect to assert that international factors alone explain the changes associated with ethnic relations in Eastern Europe, and this is not the argument that I make. Instead, I contend that while domestic politics within Eastern European countries were casually important to the timing of accommodating policies and the international community's influence had to coincide with the preferences of domestic elites, transnational involvement was, nonetheless, crucial. The involvement of regional organizations, governments, and NGOs was important for putting -- and keeping - ethnic conflict management and minority rights on domestic agendas.