

**PLAYING PING - PONG WITH MINORITY POLICIES  
AND INTEGRATION: THE CASES FROM ESTONIA,  
LATVIA AND SLOVAKIA**

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**Abstract:** The minority policy and integration of ethnic and national minorities belong to the central concepts of domestic policy-making in nation states. The article deals with the different approaches to minority policy and integration from the perspective of the Baltic States and Slovakia. We argue about the political conditionality prior to the access to the EU in 2004 and subsequent developments in the perspective of position and protection of national minorities living in respective countries. We reveal the potential threats of minority integration and cohesive society building process, especially with regard to the historical grievance, different elites' attitudes and minority actors themselves.

**Key words:** minority, integration, Baltic States, Slovakia, challenges, political conditionality

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Virtually, the entire 20th century was the region of Central and Eastern Europe a testing laboratory for more or less voluntary socio - political regimes which could hardly be called democratic. Perhaps, with the exception of the first republics and the process of creation of modern nation states due to the aftermath of the First World War, the events taking place during this period are generally considered negative and tragic view of the civil society and national minorities. Only the last decennium of the last century enabled the countries of

Central and Eastern Europe to return to the "western" type of democracy. The collapse of the Soviet-type regimes and the subsequent resurgence of social and political revitalization indicated a direction for further development. One of the common features of the post-socialist republics was an attempt to start the integration process in transnational communities, especially the European Union and NATO. With these processes is closely related issue of the protection and integration of ethnic minorities living in the territory of sovereign states. In principle, we can declare that the national policy and the relationship of the majority population towards minorities have become one of the key issues in the implementation process of democratization and consolidation of the post-communist countries (Dančák, Fiala 2000, p. 9). Naturally, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are applying different approaches and methods of allocation of citizenship or status of the ethnic minorities. These differences are, in principle, visible especially in terms of regional entities. While in the region of the Visegrad Group are dominant themes still closely linked to the consequences of the collapse of the Austro - Hungarian monarchy, in the region of the Baltic states it can be classified mainly as an attempt to deny a long Sovietization and Russification of the Baltic Sea region, and finally third - secular dimension of the common state of southern Slavs in the Balkans conditions. In terms of the orientation of the region of Central Europe, we must also take into account the social part pertracted phenomenon status and integration of the Roma minority.

Research on the social and political dimensions of integration of national minorities in post - socialist Europe is largely intensified during the restoration of national states and the associated agenda of minority status and legislative relations between core nation and minority groups. But the collapse of the Soviet-type regimes, however, introduced a new phenomenon, namely, how and to what extent it is possible to institutionalize the status of minorities since they found themselves in a position of secondary importance to the titular population. In this sense we reflect mainly allochthonous sizeable Russian-speaking minority in Estonia and Latvia and Hungarian nationals in Slovakia.

## **2. THE MINORITY POLICY AND MINORITY INTEGRATION IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA**

The minority policy of the former Soviet Union member states is a complex set of relationships between state legislation incorporating international system of protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, the organization of minority communities, political representation of minority interests, civil - legal aspects and issues of national and ethnic identity. Another related factor of minority policy and minority integration is the influence of international organizations, adaptation of standards and rules of political conditionality in Europeanisation discourse and the actual will of political actors and ethnic minorities to accept non-discriminatory and common rules of the game. An important role in this process, therefore, play formal and informal institutions that help socialize and facilitate impact of national and international laws and belong to the so-called mediators of minority integration.

Baltic Republics, despite the diversity of approaches to the identification of minority or political and social integration, share common elements of development for the past 20 years. In terms of social development after the restoration of independence we can observe three developmental stages. Among the first phase we can include the process of creating a new constitutional and social framework, whose priority was involved in carrying out fundamental economic reforms, which allow avoiding a deep economic crisis and social recession after the collapse of the Soviet regime. The Baltic States have adopted radical economic reforms to reduce and virtually eliminate the consequences of the collapse of the centrally planned economy and help create a suitable environment for the development of a market economy and capitalism. Many studies dealing with developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe show that economic reform and market economy recovery took in terms of time much less than the reform of social character (Lauristin 2011).

Second joint development period of the three Baltic States represents the start of accession negotiations with the EU and after the adoption of fundamental democratic and economic reforms. Invitation for accession to the European Union was

received already in 1999. The prospect of EU accession in the first wave of eastern enlargement and the possibility of joining the North Atlantic Treaty created a solid foundation for a political consensus for the implementation of the necessary political and economic reforms and commitments. Paradoxically, this consensus associated with radical and rapid change in the state organization, economic transformation, modernization and westernization marked departure from the political agenda and implementation issues arising at the level of social development and human - rights dimension. The liberalization of the economy quickly ushered the society into two layers - winners and losers, as the market mechanism caused significant differences in the social (in)equality and increased civic apathy and lack of trust in political institutions and the political process.

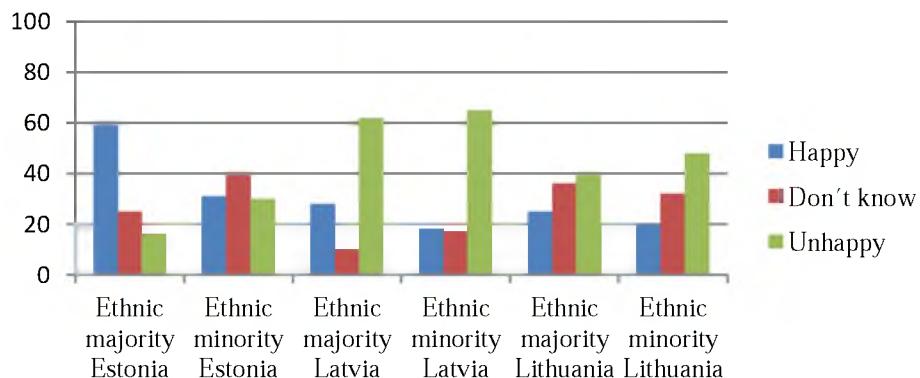
The third phase of a common political and social development of the Baltic countries can be observed in accession to the EU in May 2004. This period is characterized by several stages. First, the Baltic countries have experienced significant economic growth in the context of economic reform and political commitment in the EU accession negotiations, which we describe as the end of the transitional period of transition and transition economies. On the other hand, the process of European integration has brought many new dimensions of social and political development, which in practice these states stood at the crossroads of several strategic and fundamental decisions, which ultimately brought significant growth in GDP, and this period can be identified as successful in terms of increasing social welfare without need aggressive intervention in economic restructuring. This unexpected period of prosperity brought about a number of aspects that helped obscure or temporarily eliminate the consequences of ethnic disparities, and civil - legal position and dimension of integrating the Russian-speaking minority.

Accelerating the transition process and the establishment of regional economic leaders, however, for two decades have caused a conflict of values, interests and long-term social situation in the development of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian societies. This conflict can be interpreted in relation to ethical and ethnic variables, as most of the population perceives the resulting social inequality as a

natural side effect of the reforms of the market mechanism (Lauristin 2011). Virtually, all three countries linked by a common indicator that during striking economic growth in the 90s and the beginning of the 21st century have not made sufficient measures to eliminate emerging social inequality between different groups in society. One of the starting points for finding answers to the problems identified is the ethnic composition of the Baltic societies. The Nordic model of social protection and social security system presupposes one important factor, namely the ethnic homogeneity of relatively small communities. Joint and strong cultural ties in society make it easier to implement the principles of solidarity and social justice, where the state is a common home for people from the society. In terms of diversified ethnic structure, particularly in Estonia and Latvia, the quantity of internal social problems is bound by the complicated definition of citizenship and belonging to the state-political ethnicity.

Figure 1 illustrates the ethnic heterogeneity of the Baltic States is an important driver of assessment and attitudes in terms of human - legal development and social change perceptions and values. Various positions are therefore particularly evident with regard to the evaluation of post - Soviet period and the democratization process in nation states. Members of core nation or holders of domestic citizenship are basically satisfied with domestic politics and society and at the same time, minorities rather negatively evaluated social and political developments over the past two decades. The case of Estonia, however, somewhat negates this argument, since positive attitudes towards social and political developments expressed as members of the dominant ethnic group and ethnic minorities. It is interesting to note that positive perceptions of development from the perspective of Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia is even higher than in the population of ethnic Latvians and Lithuanians.

**Figure 1: Attitudes of ethnic majority and minority in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the social and political changes over the past 20 years**



Source: TNS Emor, Baltic Survey 2011, Estonian Human Development Report 2011 (representative sample 1000 respondents in each country aged 15-74)

Research conducted by Estonian Cooperation Assembly in April 2011 in all three countries interpreted that lack of integration of minorities into society does not constitute a key issue for respondents. Other social dimensions, such as unemployment, corruption, health care, are more pressing problems and issues associated with social integration are less severe than those associated with economic status (Estonian Human Development Report 2011: 19-20). In general, however, we can declare that the respondents belonging to the various ethnic minorities represent a higher degree of social and political discontent in comparison with members of state-building ethnicity.

## 2.1 Language as a determinant of social integration

Language policy and the use of the national language in the conditions of the Baltic States is a multidimensional discourse for 20 years of social and political development. One of the basic attributes that were introduced as early as in the 90s, the focus was on the importance and role of the state language as part of creating law and standardization processes in transition. The dimension of the state language and political discourse was transferred to the concerns about the loss of

state and national identity, and therefore political elites vigorously implemented legislation that protects the principal use of the state language. Language thus to some extent created a separate entity and its position gained primarily in terms of socio-economic situation of the users of the state language and language policies that have shaped this position in the company. It is therefore clear that the level of use of language and the legislative framework of language policy are determined by the political and socio - economic conditions.

Citizens of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania after the restoration of independence gained relatively good position in terms of knowledge of the mother tongue, which also became official EU languages. In terms of the population of the Baltic States is therefore knowledge of the state language as their mother tongue convenient base case, in particular because of the guarantee of social capital. Currently, the Russian-speaking population tends to learn national languages not as a foreign one, but as a second language after Russian. This position brings significant implications for socio - economic status of the Russian-speaking population. While knowledge of a foreign language does not require its use at the national level, the use of the national language as a second language is always confronted with the ideals of the mother tongue and therefore always leads to linguistic imperfections (Vihalemm, Siiner, Masso 2011, 116). Similarly, knowledge of a foreign language implies learning about the external environment, therefore, knowledge of a second language for Russian-speaking minority is a prerequisite for obtaining a higher social status and facilitate access to the labor market and educational system in the community and the society in which they live for a long time. In this learning process we often react to form a new social identity, causing a conflict with the traditionally defined identity, traditions and customs (Kramsch 2002). Adapting the Russian-speaking part to the new conditions of these reasons is one of the most crucial challenges of domestic and national language policy.

In the European context, the Baltic States are considered unique from the point of view that the potential for integration and language policy is in principle based on the ethnic composition and past Russification policies. Estonia and

Latvia from most EU countries differ to the extent that their ethno - demographic composition practically limits the scope for the operation of the state language, particularly in terms of the share of Russian-speaking minorities. Approximately one-fifth of the population in these countries is not allowed to participate in a common social and civic space due to lack of knowledge of the official language. These reasons contribute to the existence of diverse social subspheres in education, mass media, services, business and local councils, which are actively using the knowledge of the Russian language. In principle, however, the uniqueness of the Baltic societies also lies in the fact that the bulk of the domestic population actively speaks the minority languages, namely Russian.

Language policies as one of the determinants of national minority policies are often pertracted and studied phenomenon in Estonia and Latvia. The authors examine the reasons for particular form of language policy and identify problems of integrating the Russian-speaking minority related to cultural - ethnic differentiation between core nation and minorities. In this interaction the role played by national linguistic policies in these countries took the form of integrated and control aimed legislative frameworks. Densified interpretation of language policies is therefore part of the frequently changing laws on the use of the state language and minority languages. In both countries, the national language laws are a set of amendments or statutes, regulations and strategic documents that define the use and status of language teaching in the country. Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian language became official languages in recent years of the Soviet era, helping to demonstrate the power status of the new national elites (Rannut 2008). The newly adopted language laws almost immediately delegalized official use of the Russian language and liabilities resulting from the new regulations were gradually implemented in 1990 in Lithuania, Latvia 1992 and 1995 in Estonia (Vihalemm, Sinner 2011). We therefore declare that the introduction of the system of official state language and control its exclusive use in official contacts were made at the beginning of the 90s of the last century.

**Table 1:** Demography of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania based on ethnic structure and use of different languages

	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Latvia</b>	<b>Lithuania</b>
<i>Total population</i>	1 286 479	2 074 605	3 525 761
<i>Share of population with different mother tongue than official</i>	399 263 (31%)	905 477 (43,6%)	634 637 (18%)
<i>Share of population with different ethnicity than the core nation</i>	387 634 (30%)	785 235 (38%)	564 122 (16%)
<i>Major ethnic minorities (&gt;1%)</i>	Russian (25%) Ukrainian (1,7%) Belarussian (1%)	Russian (26,8%) Belarussian (3,2%) Ukrainian (2,2%) Polish (2,1%) Lithuanian (1,1%)	Polish (6,1%) Russian (4,9%) Belarussian (1,1%)

Sources: Central Statistical Office of Latvia: Population and Housing Census 2011(<http://data.csb.gov.lv>), Statistical Office of Estonia: Population and Housing Census 2011 ([http://www.stat.ee/sdb-update?db\\_update\\_id=13687](http://www.stat.ee/sdb-update?db_update_id=13687)), Statistical office of Lithuania 2012 (<http://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/rodikliai5>)

## **2.2 Current dimensions and challenges of social integration**

The need for devising new strategic plan for the integration should be of priority based on the problems and challenges facing the Baltic States and multiethnic society. The current political and socio-economic dimensions of these societies have confirmed the need to establish specific, but particularly flexible approaches in integration towards respect for the individual and not the collective needs of society. In

addition to the observed partial aspects as the problems of obtaining citizenship, the question of the use of the national language and uniform system of education, field of integration could lead to the social dimension, which is manifested by increased levels and the possibility of political and civic participation of all groups in society and highlighting common values, that would eliminate the elements of social exclusion.

The request should be directed to all relevant supporting measures and subsequently implemented in the public sector, including the education system, labor market policies, government institutions; the interaction would ensure equal opportunities and the principle of competitiveness for everyone within the society. Political and social integration may in principle be successful as a result of free will and dynamics of relations between Estonians and residents of other nationalities, which should also be supported by the state authorities, political parties, local councils and civil society organizations.

Subjects to state integration policies are therefore residents with original immigration status, respectively the Russian-speaking population, further state institutions in the process of creating the legislation and naturalization process, not least the entire community, i.e. civil society and other organizations that participate in public life. The very process of social and political integration is more staged process. First, depending on the active approach and requirements of the individual degree of tolerance of the community as well as a set of measures and available services that promote and facilitate the integration process. The results of a successful integration process should be visible and measurable in terms of increased tolerance within the diversified company, the level of life of the Russian diaspora, including language skills, active participation in society, the role of the labor market and civic identity. The fulfillment of these conditions in practice leads to the creation of an inclusive society.

If, however, the reverse situation occurs when there is not a successful integration of immigrants within the society, there may be a potential threat to social stability in the country. Increased levels of social passivity, feeling of exclusion and the threat of cultural and linguistic identity can

contribute to political manipulation and induction of national and ethnic conflicts. If those in Baltic States whose mother tongue is different from the state language will increase the level of knowledge of the state language of the country and become for them an integral part of everyday life, they are becoming active ingredient public space and discourse. For these reasons, members of the Russian-speaking diaspora and Soviet migrants and their descendants created active partners in a dialogue on all social issues relevant to the level of domestic policy.

### **2.3 Cohesive society**

Socio-ethnic stratification among the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and Latvia, which is less educated, and less adaptable to difficult social status to the significant rate occurs among active population. First, these are young people whose mother tongue is Russian and Russian-speaking part of the population aged 45 years and over (Mauristing 2011). Research shows that these target groups are significantly less active in the labor market, continuous system of education, participation in NGOs, and cultural life. Likewise, they have the lowest level of contact with the majority population, which often leads to a feeling of exclusion and marginalization. This status also contributes to regional disparities and uneven demographic distribution of national minorities.

A common framework of minority or integration policies in the Baltic States is a continuous horizontal joint strategic planning model. The first integration programs in the 90s and at the beginning of the new millennium received broad wave of criticism, first, by independent observers and also from the perspective of minorities.

Perhaps most accurately reflects elements of integration policies 52 - year old Russian living with his family in Riga, respondent in a research by Michel Commercio in 2010. The respondent expressed frustration in connection with efforts of the Latvian Government to assimilate minorities in the integration program: *"Yes, I heard about the state integration program and I think it is closer to assimilation. Often, in Latvia we say one thing, but we do otherwise. Why do I need to have everything in Latvian in 2004 or 2011? There is no reason to push us. In fact, people accept that without knowledge of the*

*state language we can not live. It's a great incentive for the study of the Latvian language. However, according to the program, all leads towards assimilation rather than integration. Most Russians were born in that territory, have grown and lived here forever - excuse me, but what assimilation is needed? My children were born here and speak Latvian; what kind of integration is necessary, if you were born here? " (Comercio 2010).*

Former integration programs in the Baltic Republics explicitly addressed topics in minority policy and the needs of the majority society. In connection with the introduction of new integration programs we can identify a number of measures and common factors of national governments to target groups:

1. *Measures aimed at the integration of minorities, residents with immigration status.* These measures will reflect the individual needs of the target group, for the reason of immigration, age, prior learning. Specifically, however, is the following approaches:
  - Enhancing knowledge of the state language
  - Increase active participation in the labor market and within civil society
  - Support Naturalization process or obtaining citizenship
  - Improving knowledge of non-citizens about society, history and culture
  - Strengthening national and civic identity
2. *Measures to strengthen the cohesion of society and are focused on the whole of society:*
  - Raise awareness of the importance of human rights and freedoms and respect for values such as tolerance, open society, citizenship.
  - Create a cohesive society that respects cultural diversity in terms of the Baltic countries

With regard to the terms of these measures, resp. formulation of the objectives of integration programs in Latvia and Estonia has some nationalist and assimilation defined framework.

The main objective of national integration program of Latvia 2012 - 2018 is "*a strong and united nation of Latvia - national and democratic society that guarantees the preservation and strengthening of its unifying basis - Latvian language, culture and national identity, European democratic values and unique cultural space - the creation of Latvia as a national and democratic state.*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia 2012).

The general indicators for measuring the success of achieving the objectives of integration policies include the level of social cohesion and tolerance for diversity and quality of life of immigrants, including the level of knowledge of the state language, political and civic participation, and education and in the labor market. However, if national governments explicitly define the objectives of integration policies that create a strong and unified nation, we can argue about policy of assimilation of minorities into mainstream society.

The basic principles of the integration program formulated by the Ministry of Culture of Latvia do not correspond to democratic values, which should include multicultural heritage as well as the rights of national minorities to develop their own identity and culture. The Latvian government has therefore introduced a program that instead of continuous integration is directed towards assimilation of ethnic minorities with no possibility of accepting their cultural space along the ethno-cultural traditions of the majority. The program and its definitions, it follows that aimed to suppress the cultural and intellectual values of all ethnic groups living in Latvia (Baltic Review 2011).

Similarly, the nature of the integration model in Estonia assumes social harmonization (cohesion) based on knowledge of the Estonian language and the acquisition of Estonian citizenship. On the other hand, the Estonian policy specifies the preservation of ethnic diversity on the basis of the recognition of cultural rights of national minorities. In principle, however, we can conclude that the requirement of knowledge and use of the Estonian language in public life is elemental tool of integration. Although the national program

defines three integration - linguistic, political and socio-economic - the primary focus is on the language dimension. In the period 2000-2002 were devoted to this area three-quarters of the total budget to support integration (Šegždavičiutė 2005). Although some authors deny the level of knowledge of the state language as evidence of successful integration (Pettai-Hallik 2002), the research itself helped to cluster population groups mainly based on knowledge and study of the Estonian language. Estonian model of a multicultural society is characterized in particular according to the principles of cultural pluralism and at the same time, protection and development of the Estonian cultural domain. Precisely for this reason, the members of the Russian-speaking diaspora claimed it as an assimilation experiment (Šegždavičiutė 2005). Vello Pettai confirms that period of more or less successful integration of Russian-speaking diaspora in Estonia has the character of nation-project, which is mainly oriented to support the Estonian language (Pettai 2000). Vadim Poleshchuk argues in favor of this theory, since the present model of integration in Estonia is based on a merger of non-Estonians with already existing Estonian society and its values, which in practice leads to a moderate form of assimilation (Poleshchuk 2009).

### **3. THE MINORITY POLICY AND MINORITY INTEGRATION IN SLOVAKIA**

Modern minority policy in Slovakia has its basis in the former Federal Republic. The constitutional document Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms was adopted as Law no. 23/1991 Coll. and serves as a document specifying the rights and freedoms of citizens living within Czechoslovakia. The law is based on a number of international instruments, in particular the Universal Declaration of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the documents of the Helsinki CSCE process. The Czechoslovak politics in the years 1989-1992 was based on the so-called civic principle, which practically meant the recognition of citizenship to all residents of the Federation.

Similarly, differentiation on the basis of ethnicity was aligning private affairs of citizens. Czechoslovakia as compared with the Baltic States, did not define their cultural autonomy of ethnic minorities. This does not mean that Czechoslovakia did not grant the rights of ethnic minorities; On the contrary, the civic principle recognized equal rights to all residents, regardless of nationality. This factor played a controversy in the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since the document guarantees the status and rights of minorities regardless of ethnic principle, de facto did not reflect the sizeable Hungarian minority living mainly in the southern regions of Slovakia. The wording of the law became controversial, which states that the state of Czechoslovakia is a state of Czechs and Slovaks, while protecting human, civil and political rights of all citizens of Czechoslovakia, and therefore it is not a protection of individual groups or exemptions (Vermeersch: 2004, p. 12). In relation to the large Roma minority federal government issued a resolution entitled Principles of Government Policy of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic to the Roma minority. In principle, there was no change in post-November minority policy, in principle we can talk about consensual politics balancing socioeconomic disparities among citizens. Similarly, in the case of Roma we can not talk about the politics of assimilation, but especially about the promotion of the development of Roma identity.

In the case of the independent Slovak Republic, we can talk about the most visible representation of ethnic minorities among all V4. According to figures expressed in percentage of the population census in Slovakia since 1991 confirm the existence of multiple minority populations, especially the Hungarian and Roma ethnicity (Table 2). At present, therefore, the Hungarian minority represents about 8.5% of the total population of Slovakia, which in absolute terms corresponds to 458,467 people of Hungarian nationality. On closer inspection, the ethnic composition of the Slovak population, we find that the Roma minority, unlike most numerous Hungarian minority, recorded an upward trend, and thus at present constituted about 2% of the total population. Slovakia is a country that is made up of traditional ethnic groups, this means that their presence is a result of the ethnic composition

of the government departments, which included the territory of present-day Slovakia in the past and minorities in the territory were organized for decades or centuries. These certainly include the Czech, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, German, Polish, Croatian, Serbian, Russian, Jewish and Bulgarian minority.

**Table 2:** *Population of Slovakia based on nationality (2011, 2001, 1991)*

Slovakia						
Permanent residence	2011		2001		1991	
	abs.	v %	abs.	v %	abs.	v %
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 397</b>	<b>100,</b>	5 379	100,0	5 274	100,0
<b>Nationality</b>						
Slovak	<b>4 352</b>	<b>80,7</b>	4 614	85,8	4 519	85,7
Hungarian	<b>458 467</b>	<b>8,5</b>	520 528	9,7	567	10,8
Roma	<b>105 738</b>	<b>2,0</b>	89 920	1,7	75 802	1,4
Czech	<b>30 367</b>	<b>0,6</b>	44 620	0,8	52 884	1,0
Ruthenian	<b>33 482</b>	<b>0,6</b>	24 201	0,4	17 197	0,3
Ukrainian	<b>7 430</b>	<b>0,1</b>	10 814	0,2	13 281	0,3
German	<b>4 690</b>	<b>0,1</b>	5 405	0,1	5 414	0,1
Polish	<b>3 084</b>	<b>0,1</b>	2 602	0,0	2 659	0,1
Croatian	<b>1 022</b>	<b>0,0</b>	890	0,0	x	x
Serbian	<b>698</b>	<b>0,0</b>	434	0,0	x	x
Russian	<b>1 997</b>	<b>0,0</b>	1 590	0,0	1 389	0,0
Jewish	<b>631</b>	<b>0,0</b>	218	0,0	134	0,0
Moravian	<b>3 286</b>	<b>0,1</b>	2 348	0,0	6 037	0,1
Bulgarian	<b>1 051</b>	<b>0,0</b>	1 179	0,0	1 400	0,0
Others	<b>9 825</b>	<b>0,2</b>	5 350	0,1	2 732	0,1
Not	<b>382 493</b>	<b>7,0</b>	54 502	1,0	8 782	0,2

x – record not possible

Source: Statistical Office of Slovakia 2012

Perhaps the most important framework for the protection of national minorities in the Slovak Republic was the adoption of the Constitution in 1992. Although the mere preamble defines the national character and the only state-forming nation considers Slovak (Slovak Constitution, Law no. 460/1992 Coll.), which evoked opposition to the adoption of

the Constitution, in particular representatives of the Hungarian opposition parties; Slovak Republic took over the European framework for the protection of human rights and freedoms. It followed that international agreements and treaties relating to human rights and freedoms take precedence over domestic legislation, if they provide a broader framework of rights (Labuda: 2008, p. 128). According to Art. 12 of the Constitution, all people in Slovakia are free and equal in dignity and rights. Fundamental rights and freedoms are undeniable, inalienable, and unchallengeable. Fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed in the Slovak Republic to everyone regardless of sex, race, color, language, faith and religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, nationality or ethnic origin, property, birth or other position. No one shall be for the following reasons harmed, preferred or discriminated against. This article specifies even freedom of choice about their nationality and prohibits any influence on this decision and any assimilation pressures (Constitution of the Slovak Republic Act no. 460/1992 Coll., Art. 12).

The Constitution provides for the Slovak language as the only official language in this context, the use of other languages in official communications by law. It should be noted that this particular clause has become perhaps the most problematic in relation to the status of the Hungarian language. Even the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms adopted by the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly in January 1991 prohibited all forms of discrimination and strengthen the demand for the right to education in their mother tongue. These aspects are also reflected in the original version of the Slovak Constitution of 1992. As a result of populist – nationalist oriented government policies and Vladimir Meciar and concern about civil and territorial irredentism in Slovak politics began to appear discriminatory amendment particularly in language law. Despite wide guarantee from the constitutional text was not possible to provide equal use of minority languages in official communications. In the first half of the 90s were adopted two important standards, namely the use of names and surnames in the minority language (Act no. 154/1994 Coll.) Bilingual signs in towns and municipalities where the minority

population exceeds 20% of the population were established (Law no. 191 / 1994 Coll.).

In 1995 came the original amendment of the Law on the Use of Language from 1990 into a much more rigorous form that defined the Slovak language takes precedence over other languages and as such follows the obligation for the state to create the academic, scientific and information systems such conditions that each citizens can acquire and use the state language orally and in writing (Act no. 270/1995 Coll.). The reaction of the radical wing from Hungarian opposition parties led by Miklós Duray likened law to cultural fascism "*murderous attacks against the Magyar language and culture in Slovakia are cultural fascism, organized destruction of what took place in Nazi death camps.*" And further: "*Our ultimate goal is political and economic autonomy and total territorial autonomy.*" Or a warning to ethnic Hungarians to not marry with Slovak, because the "*tainted Hungarian race*" (Krivošíková: 2006).

The Act undermined already strained relations between the ruling coalition and representatives of minorities, as has been criticized as a violation of the obligations of the Slovak Republic in terms of meeting the Copenhagen criteria in the accession negotiations on EU membership. In 1998 there is a shutdown of the power influence of Vladimir Meciar and center-right parties with SDL and SMK implemented model language law that meets the requirements of the European institutions and strengthens the position of minority languages in public life. The new Slovak government was aware that strained relations between minorities and the majority population does not benefit society and European integration itself as one of the priorities of the government in the late 90s. Therefore, the Governmental Council for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups was created, a government advisory body composed of members of the Government and representatives of various minorities for various associations, societies and associations, such as Hungarian Social and Cultural Association in Slovakia (CSEMADOK), Cultural Association of Roma citizens in Kosice, Cultural Association of Jewish Citizens of Slovakia, etc. Subsequently Law on the Use of

Minority Languages of 1999 (Act no. 184/1999 Coll.) was adopted. It has confirmed the efforts of the new government on legal guarantees for the use of minority languages, especially Hungarian minority but also Roma, Rusyns, Ukrainians, Croats and Germans in local assemblies and municipalities where the minority population represents more than 20% of the total population. Implementation of the Law revealed real shortcomings in the public service, as each staff offices did not speak the languages of minorities and thus the practical application of the Act can not be ensured in this respect.

Slovak Republic adopted a new law on equal treatment in certain areas and protection against discrimination and amending certain laws, also known as the Anti-Discrimination Act 2004 (Act no. 365/2004 Coll.). This is the law in accordance with the directives of the European Commission, which regulates the application of the principle of equal treatment and provides means of legal protection in case of violation of this principle. Respect for the principle of equal treatment consists of prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex, religion or belief, race, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, color, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The Act, inter alia allowed Slovak National Centre for Human Rights established in 1993 under the UN project to implement and support the modern system of human rights protection in the Slovak Republic to represent the people in which there is discrimination on the above grounds. National legislation extended learning opportunities in 2002 for teachers whose teaching takes place in minority languages. Similarly, in the spirit of the implementation of constitutional guarantees for citizens and their right to education in their mother tongue and implementation of the EU pre-accession criteria were established by J. Selye University in Komarno, the first of its kind, with Hungarian language opened its doors to students in January 2004. The Government in this period strongly supported the issuance of newspapers and magazines in minority languages and various other cultural activities.

A significant step backwards in the relations not only between citizens of Slovak nationality and minorities in Slovakia, but also in bilateral relations between Hungary and the Slovak government coalition was formed after the parliamentary elections in 2006. The coalition of Smer-SD, SNS and LS-HZDS failed to overcome historical reconciliation two neighboring countries, which then led to a series of bilateral conflicts on both sides of the Danube. The most notable case was reflected in 2006 – the case of Hedviga Malinova, one year later a paramilitary organization in Hungary, the Hungarian Guard was founded, in the same year, the National Council of the Slovak Republic declares the inviolability of the Benes Decrees, controversial was the Slovak police intervention against the football fans in Dunajska Streda. National Council in 2009 approved a number of laws concerning minorities - An amendment to the Education Act, which governs the use of geographical names in textbooks for ethnic minorities; further amendment to the State Language Act, which re-establishes penalties and fines in violation of the law. The culmination of strained relations between the two countries escalated during the visit of Hungarian President László Sólyom who has been banned to entry into the Slovak Republic, who wanted to unveil statue of King Stephen of Hungary in Komarno.

Government of Iveta Radičová after the parliamentary elections in 2010 significantly revised version of the language law, in practical terms, the goal is to reduce the amount of fines for breaking the law. The government's center - right parties also revised Law on the Use of National and Ethnic Minorities and the current 20 per cent threshold allowing the use of minority languages in the village and in dealings drops to 15 percent, but this figure must be confirmed in two consecutive censuses, what actually moves the validity of that decision to 2021. The reduction to 15 percent, however, affects the villages and towns that are already on the list of multilingual based on Government Regulation and where minority makes up at least 20 percent. It can fall out of the list only if after three consecutive censuses decreases the number of their minority population below 15 percent, an earliest in 2031.

The current development of minority policy and bilateral relations between the Slovak Republic and Hungary are largely a reflection of nationally oriented populist governments in both countries. Furthermore, some not very positive modifications of the Language Act or the Act on the Use of Minority Languages also raised negative attitudes and an emerging policy of transnationalism of current Hungarian government causes severe bilateral conflicts. Equally important is the role of the social inclusion of Roma into mainstream society. Therefore, the current government has adopted a Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Roma integration in 2020. The aim of this strategy is the need to respond to the challenges of social inclusion of Roma communities. Increasing extreme poverty and systematic social fall of most local Roma communities since 1989 highlights the need for change of approach of public policies in this area. This strategy is based on the need to shift from passive welfare state and municipal authorities to activating aid (Slovak Republic Strategy for the Integration of Roma 2020: 2011, p. 9). The issue of integration of Roma communities in Slovakia went beyond national policy and making it one of the key issues of social policy and social inclusion.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Political conditionality of the EU in the process of European integration, the normative requirements institutionalized democratic and Western democratic ideas by incorporating the requirement of social and political integration at the level of minority discourse. Conditionality, at the time of accession of new Member States action quite often alluded to systematic obstacles in the implementation of political and social rules of the game. The requirement of non-discrimination and positivist approach to the protection of minority rights in the accession countries had a strong foothold in the European legal reference. We can confirm that current approaches of EU member states to dimension the formulation of policies on minorities are significantly different from each other complicated constitutional and statutory definition of minority protection and civic participation, constitutional legislative unitarism to fully challenge the very existence of minorities in the nationalising state.

Interaction of domestic and external factors of minority rights and integration of minorities requires political and social will to generate sustainable policy and development of minority discourse. For example, the Estonian society can verify this claim, since the majority and minority society and minority organizations are largely segregated population groups. By contrast, Latvia Russian-speaking diaspora achieves significant revitalization in terms of political and cultural, which can be a source of pulses of the Latvian government to the assimilation of minorities.

Gwendolyn Sasse, for example, in her study on the impact of political conditionality to the new EU Member States notes that although Latvia continued to fulfill their international obligations to final signature of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but remains skeptical about the practical implementation of these formal commitments (Sasse 2008). Taking into account the fact that the first political integration program was started up in Latvia in 2001 and based on research currently identify significant differences in the values and attitudes of ethnic Latvians and minorities, we can confirm that the formal implementation of international legal obligations into national laws may not be compatible with the actual behavioral state of social integration.

Common issue of minority discourse in the Baltic Sea is an obstacle of the collective memory, breaking the national-cultural identity of Russification and conditions of Estonia and Latvia imperfect transformation of national minorities to holders of domestic citizenship.

Visegrad countries successfully completed the European integration process in 2004, which is clearly expressed in obligations in relation to minorities living in their territories. The mere national policy integration of minorities into mainstream society by the available surveys constitutes a major problem even ten years after joining the EU. Even traditional minority discourse and historical context in the Slovak Republic and Hungary are generally limited to media coverage of the disputed terms of political representation of both countries. According to the argument of Zuzana Poláčková from the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Poláčková

2008, pp. 54-65) in recent years political developments in Central Europe crystallized specific and particularly dangerous stereotypes of status and integration of ethnic minorities. Research on citizenship and political participation of the Hungarian minority in the independent Slovak Republic in respect to the sociological and historical contexts and recently also for membership in a multinational organization notes that "*the situation (after accession to the EU) in terms of the possibilities of cultural development of minorities virtually unchanged even improved*" (Macháček 2011, p. 74). If we use these research findings it can be quantified for all the countries of Central Europe, concludes that the political sphere has indeed changed, according to citizens to better than worse compared to the situation of the Baltic States experience.

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