

European Identity among Ethnic Minorities.

The development of European identity and the interplay with other geographical-ethnic-political (GEP) identities in generational perspective

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Abstract

The book (cumulative *Habilitationsschrift*) is concerned with European identities among ethnic minorities who live along the Eastern border of the European Union (EU). By combining findings from quantitative and qualitative empirical research, it investigates which attitudes, images and perceptions of the EU members of ethnic minorities have and based on which considerations they construct or do not construct European identity. Ethnic minority groups from Eastern and Central Europe, as researched for this book, are particularly relevant for studying European identities because they constitute “sensitized groups” towards Europe. All quantitative and qualitative data used for this book were collected in the framework of the international collaborative research project “ENRI-East: European, National and Regional Identities” (2008 – 2011). The following twelve ethnic minority groups that live at the eastern borderland of the European Union were investigated with survey research and biographical interviews: Russians in Latvia and Lithuania, Hungarians in Slovakia and Ukraine, Poles in Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania, Belarusians in Poland and Lithuania, Slovaks in Hungary, Ukrainians in Poland, and Lithuanians in Russia (Kaliningrad region). The book applies a comparative perspective by analyzing different processes of identity construction between three age groups and twelve ethnic minority groups. It contributes essentially to theory development in the field of European identity and it argues that ethnic identities can be seen as a missing link for explaining relationships between different national, regional and supranational identities. The three main themes addressed are (1) the interplay of ethnic, national and European identities (GEP identities), (2) images of Europe, perceptions of the EU and attitudes towards the EU, and (3) construction of European identity based on instrumental, cultural, and civic considerations.

Regarding the *interplay of identities*, the results show that GEP identities are above all complementary (e.g. national identity supports European identity) but may become competitive in certain contexts (e.g. ethnic conflicts decrease national identification of ethnic minorities). The *comparative results on European identity* show that for most ethnic minority groups the young, first post-communist generation is most Europeanized. The book further discusses if this has to be considered a generational or a life-cycle-effect. Regarding the *emergence and content of European identity*, the results reveal that individuals construct European identity based on different types of considerations: instrumental, cultural and political ones. For the first time, for each category a set of factors which showed to be influential for the emergence of European identity are presented. This includes supportive (e.g. measures of the European Union in ethnic minority politics) as well as preventive (such as perceived social and economic losses and threats) factors. In addition to identity theory, this book is also relevant for social pedagogy due to the increasingly prevalent European orientation and cooperation in this field.