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Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence Research Report

2019

My research focuses on the relationship between minority group accommodations and the integrity of state consolidation. Focusing on the cases of Spain and Macedonia, I traveled to the two countries in June 2019 to conduct interviews in Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, Santiago de Compostela, and Skopje with the goal of collecting contextual data to test a proposed model of how group accommodations might affect state consolidation. With less than a month given to complete over twenty interviews in 5 cities between the two countries, the 1500 euros awarded to me by the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence helped immensely in alleviating the costs of this time-intensive trip, and I am thankful to the both the Centre and the selection committee for their support.

The interviews with prominent academics, politicians, journalists and ministerial advisors revealed just how complex the layers are to the structural relationships within these societies at varying levels: within-group, between-group, as well as the relationship between the group and the state. Because of the limited space for this report, I will briefly comment on two larger, overarching findings in both countries: the comparative application of state welfare to groups and the placement of identity.

With regard to the first point, in all the regions of the study, the principle of the welfare state was mentioned by every subject, unsolicited. All subjects emphasized the importance of the welfare system (specifically education and healthcare), but there was variance on its perceived application to their specific group. In short, every group “in the minority” (to be addressed next) believed that agreed-upon provisions between the group and the state are not only unfulfilled, but, in some cases, purposefully sabotaged, and used as leverage by the state against the group. To add an additional layer of tension, groups that demand a remedy for any perceived relative deprivation are seen as belligerent by the remaining groups within the state – who ironically believe themselves to be the deprived group within the country. This clearly puts strain not only on the relationship between groups themselves, but also between the group and the government, and subsequently, as institutions become “illegitimate”, between the group and the state.

Another interesting finding was the variance between groups on how they self-identify, as well as how the state and its institutions identify groups. For example, in Galicia, academics fully acknowledged that there is a distinct Galician language and identity, often superseding the Spanish identity, as well as a recognition of a strong degree of kinship with Portugal as opposed to the remaining groups in Spain. Yet during the interviews in Santiago de Compostela, there was a great deal of pushback when I would refer to

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the economically poorer, culturally distinct Galicians as a minority group. Most of the Galician subjects interpreted this as being “less than” in equality to the remaining populations in Spain rather than “less than” in numbers for their distinct membership. Many reasserted themselves as equal to, for example, the Basque, though also expressing relative deprivation for their group in comparison to the Basque or other groups within the country. This is in stark contrast with the paradigms of the Basque or Catalans, especially the latter whose subjects fully embraced the label “minority group”, as they not only acknowledge their qualitative fulfillment of the label, but also sentiments of relative deprivation to the “majority” because of their “minority” position.

Perhaps the most interesting vantage came from interview subjects in Madrid, who, like Galicians, generally hesitated using “minority group” as a label, mostly because of legal doors and obligations this would open - especially if the word “nation” was used as the identifying term. However, when some subjects in Madrid lamented about the two historically “problematic” groups (Basque and Catalans), referring to them as “they”, I asked them to identify “they” in non-nominative terms (i.e., nation or ethnic group). Responses varied, with some refusing to answer the question, acknowledging the legal consequences of doing so. As one subject said, knowing that my other case was Macedonia: one only had to look at Macedonia to see the Pandora’s legal box that awaits once a group has internationally recognized legal rights. This was a profound moment if only because Spain is a member of the European Union, an organization that claims to protect human rights by placing minimum standards of expectations on its member states in areas such as these, however inconsistent their enforcement. Further, this comment brings us to a crucial trifecta in both Spain and Macedonia for overall state consolidation in the period of post-democratic transition: what was the structural positioning of “minority groups” in the country vis a vis political agreements made during democratic transition; have those agreements been successfully implemented; and have any attempts to modify elements of an agreement resulted in social or political strain? Any distance in responses between group members (“minority” and “majority”), then, fosters space for social, political and institutional trust to erode, and an environment for state consolidation to fray and possibly unravel.