

NATIONALISM UKRAINE HUMILIATES MINORITIES

Restoring the language rights of minorities by Ukraine, will bring peace closer, according to Gabor Landman.

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For those who want to apply for the European Union and NATO, respecting the rights of linguistic minorities is crucial. This also applies to Ukraine. The horrors of the war in Yugoslavia proved the need for EU and NATO enlargement. It ensures pacification through law and prosperity. Former Soviet satellite states, which belonged to the Eastern bloc and wanted to join the Union and the union, had to meet hard requirements, such as the protection of minorities. These rights are enshrined in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (established in Strasbourg in 1996) and the European Charter for Regional Languages. Romania, where the first deaths of ethnic violence occurred before Yugoslavia in Marosvásárhely (*in Romanian Targu Mures*), was one of the first countries to ratify the treaties.

Ukraine also committed itself to these treaties, which amount to a ban on discrimination. As a speaker of such a minority language, you have the right to freely use the language in which you grew up and were educated. In your private life, healthcare, trade, culture and justice. Under the influence of nationalism, Ukraine wants to seek rapprochement with Europe precisely by opposing its Russian-speaking Soviet past. On April 25, 2019, it passed a language law that was supposed to promote the status of the Ukrainian language and identity. This undermined the very delicate balance between the rights of speakers of the majority language and those of minorities, the many Russian speakers, but also the smaller Polish, Romanian and Greek communities.



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It jeopardizes European integration. Countries wishing to join the EU must not undermine the core conditions for peace and stability. This is precisely where the problem lies. Ukraine adopted the language law immediately after ratifying the association agreement with the EU. It violates the spirit and letter of European language rights. Compare the current situation in Ukraine with that of Belgium where suddenly any public use of French and German minority language would be banned. The Ukrainian language law touches on basic human rights such as freedom of the press. Russian-language newspapers that do not also appear in a Ukrainian version are prohibited. In trade, a customer may only be addressed in Ukrainian. Despite protests from Hungary, Romania and Poland, criticism from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and an inter-state complaint from Russia to the European Convention on Human Rights, Ukraine has refused any substantive dialogue with its minorities.

The testimonies of ethnic Romanians from Ukraine about dismantling their language rights and education at a meeting of the Council of Europe late last year were shocking. The paradox of Ukrainian nationalism is that it seeks to create a unitary state by imposing a language and an identity on the population of a country that is historically very diverse and inclusive. Because of its multilingual and multicultural character, Ukraine has a very European identity. The language law is counterproductive: you do not get national unity by humiliating people because of their identity, but by accepting diversity. Support from allies also comes under pressure by treating small linguistic minorities as collateral damage because of the conflict with Russia. The EU, which stands for peace and justice, should be serious about respecting language rights and basic human rights. Not out of a vague kind of idealism, but out of strategic interest. By restoring language rights, Ukraine can take a direct sting out of the conflict with Russia and thus make a credible contribution to a diplomatic solution, and show its commitment to European values.



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