

George W. Bush than most of Western Europe, and rejects the vision of some countries, like France, that advocate a world with multiple power centers. “We really are not involved in creating a united Europe as a cer-

tain counterbalance to the U.S.,” declared Czech President Vaclav Klaus during President Bush’s visit to Prague in June. And personal factors draw the Baltic States closer to Washington: The Estonian and Lithuanian

presidents lived in the United States for much of their lives, and Latvia’s ex-president lived in Canada.

New Europe’s pro-American sympathies became even clearer in 2006 when the European Parliament investigated

## Ethnicity Still Matters in EU-10

*Some minorities want greater autonomy*

**D**espite the new unity between governments in Old and New Europe, ethnic minorities largely remain outsiders, clashing with authorities over language, education and political representation.

Since casting off the Soviet communist yoke, nationalist feelings are on the rise in New Europe, as countries bask in their newfound independence. At the same time, many have also become increasingly fearful of — and even hostile to — demands for greater autonomy from ethnic communities inside their boundaries.

For instance, most of Europe’s 8 million Roma — commonly known as gypsies — live in Central and Eastern Europe. Thought to have migrated from India a thousand years ago, they speak their own language and usually live in Roma enclaves. Their darkest hour came during the Holocaust — called the “porrajmos” (“the devouring”) by the Roma — when the Nazis and their allies murdered between 500,000 and 1 million gypsies.<sup>1</sup> More recently, it has emerged that up to 2,000 Roma women in the Czech Republic were sterilized without their consent during childbirth between the 1970s and 2004. An investigating commission recommended each victim be compensated about \$10,000, but the Czech government has not yet agreed.<sup>2</sup>

Today the Roma are Europe’s most marginalized ethnic minority. Prejudices against them run deep. People often associate them with petty crime, making integration into the wider community extremely difficult.

“It’s a vicious circle,” says Hana Rihovsky, a Czech-German who lobbies on behalf of European railways. “People do not expect them to be honest so they won’t give them a job. You hear stories — like about Roma burning down houses the government gave them — and don’t know whether to believe them or not.” For example, Czech Deputy Prime Minister Jiri Cunek said in April that to get state subsidies Czechs would have to “get a good suntan [an allusion to the Roma’s darker skin tone], start trouble and light fires on town squares.” Though Roma demonstrators took to the streets demanding his resignation for inciting racial hatred, Cunek has managed to keep his job.<sup>3</sup>

The EU has been pressuring governments to provide Roma with better healthcare, housing and family planning and to improve the linguistic skills of Roma children so they can have better access to higher education, vocational training and jobs.

New Europe’s second-largest minority are the ethnic Hungarians, of whom 1.4 million live in Romania’s Transylvania

province and 520,000 in Slovakia. They have ended up as minority communities because Hungary — which was on the losing side in World War I — lost much of its territory and population when Europe’s borders were redrawn in 1920. Hungarians in Romania are fighting for the right to political representation, to use their own language and to run their own schools. For example, a bitter dispute is raging in Romania’s largest university — Babes-Bolyai in the city of Cluj-Napoca — as ethnic Hungarians try to split the institution in two along ethnic lines.

Both the Roma and ethnic Hungarians have some strong supporters in the European Parliament. Günther Dauwen, director of the European Free Alliance Party (EFA), advocates on behalf of what he calls Europe’s “stateless nations, regions and disadvantaged minorities.” He accuses the Romanian authorities of making parties representing Hungarians illegal by forcing them to have members from across Romania even though they are concentrated in one region.

But Romania’s chargé d’affaires in the United States, Daniela Gitman, insists Hungarians are well-treated. “We have an important political and social tradition for tolerance and diversity, of promoting minorities and respecting their rights,” she says.

Less well known are Romania’s 70,000 ethnic Germans. Once numbering about 700,000, they have dwindled dramatically in recent decades as many returned to Germany to claim citizenship. They began leaving in the 1970s, Gitman says, attracted by Germany’s higher living standards and its government, which paid off Romania’s communist-era leader Nicolae Ceausescu to secure their exit.

In tiny Latvia, Moscow has been demanding better treatment for the 500,000 Russian-speakers who arrived during the Soviet era and comprise nearly a third of the population. When Latvia won independence in 1991, the government revoked their citizenship. Some Latvians also accuse the Russians of marginalizing themselves by refusing to learn Latvian.

“There are a lot of intermarriages, but the Russians in Latvia are exposed to very different media influences, with their own newspapers, radio and television stations,” says Dace Akule, a researcher for a Latvian think tank. “They do not want to go back to Russia. It was wrong to deprive them of citizenship.”<sup>4</sup>

In Estonia, the Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians account for more than a quarter of the 1.3 million inhabitants. Eva Maria

Liimets, deputy chief of mission at the Estonian Embassy in Washington, says the Russian minority supports the EU because it supports the rights of minorities.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the EU is increasingly acting as a counterweight to nationalist tendencies.

In Bulgaria, 750,000 ethnic Turks have their own political party, which scored 20 percent in the country's European Parliament elections in May, much to the annoyance of far right nationalist groups like the Ataka party, which won 14 percent. Other minorities around the region include the Gagauz, a Turkic people in Romania and Bulgaria; the Vlachs, who speak a Romanian-type language and live in Bulgaria and Romania; and the Pomaks, ethnic Bulgarians who became Muslims during Ottoman rule.

The Macedonians in Bulgaria show just how contentious ethnic issues can be. The Bulgarian government says there are only 5,000 Macedonians living in Bulgaria, but in reality there are between 100,000 and 200,000, according to Metodija Koloski, a member of the Washington-based United Macedonian Diaspora advocacy group. The government also refuses to recognize the Macedonian language and prevents Macedonians from forming a political party or their own Orthodox Church, he contends. Unlike ethnic Hungarians, however, the Macedonians have no one defending them. The government of neighboring Macedonia does not want to alienate Bulgaria and Greece, according to Koloski, because it needs their support to join the EU and NATO.

In November 2006, when the European Parliament was voting on whether to accept Bulgaria into the EU, the EFA proposed demanding that Bulgaria allow ethnic Macedonians to register a political party. Bulgaria had banned the Macedonians' Umo Ilinden Pirin party because it did not have enough members.

"The amendment was rejected 303-141, but considering the fierce lobby from the Bulgarian government, 141 votes was quite a lot," says the EFA's Dauwen, noting that in 2006 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Bulgaria had violated the Macedonians' right of freedom of association and that Sofia has been dragging its heels in implementing the judgment.<sup>6</sup>

But Bulgarian Ambassador to the United States Elena Poptodorova, who was born in Bulgaria's Macedonian region, insists "these people are not Macedonians. To recognize their language would be like saying Austrian is a different language from German." She feels the campaign is an effort by Macedonians to distance themselves from Bulgaria in order to establish their own identity.

claims that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had illegally abducted, transported, detained — and possibly condoned torturing — terror suspects in secret Central and Eastern European locations after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. EU-

10 politicians of all political stripes were hostile to the inquiry; Polish members of the Parliament tried to sabotage it.

"The European Parliament does not have any power on these issues," Polish Sen. Franciszek Adamczyk said scathingly of the inquiry. "They speak

without thinking." Besides, he shrugged, even if the Polish government knew about the secret sites, "they would not tell us because they are secret."

The Council of Europe, a human rights organization in Strasbourg, recently condemned Poland and Romania for



AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda

Europe's most marginalized ethnic minority are the Roma — commonly known as gypsies — most of whom live in Central and Eastern Europe.

Pavol Demes, a Slovak who is director of Central and Eastern Europe for the German Marshall Fund USA, points out that while tensions exist for ethnic minorities in New Europe, "the same is true in the U.K. with the Scots or in Spain with the Basques." But ethnic strife does not have "the capacity to destabilize the area."

For Hungarian journalist Laszlo Hofer, the solution is more economic than political. "If this region was stronger and wealthier, the minority question would be less painful," he says.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Jost, "Democracy in Eastern Europe," *CQ Researcher*, Oct. 8, 1999, pp. 865-888.

<sup>2</sup> See Rosie Johnston, "Will the State Compensate Women Sterilized Against Their Will?" Radio Prague, July 24, 2007, [www.romove.radio.cz/en/article/21568](http://www.romove.radio.cz/en/article/21568).

<sup>3</sup> See Daniela Lazarova, "Roma Demonstration Increases Pressure on PM," Radio Prague, April 12, 2007, [www.romove.radio.cz/en/article/21432](http://www.romove.radio.cz/en/article/21432).

<sup>4</sup> Presentation at the School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C., April 12-13, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Discussion at Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, Washington D.C., March 21, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Dauwen, *op cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Hofer, *op. cit.*