Recent Books on Human Rights and Groups

Book Reviews


This book gives an historic overview about the formation and evolution of Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin from their creation with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918 until the 2000s. It is an edited and annotated version of its Hungarian counterpart published in 2008 in conjunction with the Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In its 859 pages, it brings the recent results and long-standing dilemmas of ‘Hungarian minority studies’ to an international audience for information and scholarly debate. As spelled out in its Introduction, its major objective is to trace in a comparative framework the influence of historical events on minority communities in seven states of the region (Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia) where, in total, there are nearly 2.5 million Hungarians today. This volume is the first attempt to enter what was once a forbidden territory of historiography and reconstruct in an integrated manner the political and socio-economic history of minority Hungarian communities in the Danube region.

The book is organised around seven major parts. The first six chapters are structured chronologically to cover the principal historic periods of the Danube region over the last century. They include: Changes of sovereignty and the formation of new nation-states 1918–1921; Between the two World Wars 1921–1938; The World War II years 1939–1944; From the end of World War II to the Communist Takeover 1944–1948; In the Eastern European Single Party States 1948–1989; and, finally, From the Change of Regime to the Recent Past 1989–2005. Within each historic subsection, separate chapters discuss Hungary’s policies towards the various Hungarian communities in the broader context of international politics and the relevant regimes of international minority protection, such as the minority treaties of the League of Nations and its guarantee or the post-1989 minority protection regime. The political histories of the various Hungarian minorities are presented as individual case studies in the context of the relevant host-states. In each period, the political events are
richly embedded in socio-economic history casting light on demographic processes, linguistic changes as well as cultural, artistic and scientific activity. In addition, distinct studies analyse comparatively the effect of broader political and social processes, such as the successive waves of land-reform and collectivisation on minority persons and collectivities. Finally, the seventh, concluding chapter offers brief historic overviews of other Hungarian-speaking communities in and beyond Hungary’s neighbouring countries. These include Hungarian-speaking Jews in the Carpathian Basin and overseas, the Hungarian-speaking Roma in the Carpathian Basin, the Csángós of Moldavia and the Hungarian diaspora beyond the Carpathian Basin. Altogether, this kaleidoscopic view of minority existence unfolding in multiple locations over nine decades makes for a fascinating read.

From Policy to Science: The Evolution of ‘Hungarian Minority Studies’

The Introduction places this pioneering undertaking in an historic context by providing a short overview of related previous research (pp. 20–24). The assessment of the situation of Hungarian communities living outside Hungary goes back to the inter-war period when it was part and parcel of Hungary’s territorial revision policies. It was after the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920 when accounts of the grievances of the newly created Hungarian national minorities were first compiled and published. One of the main outlets for minority-related documents and research was the journal Magyar Kisebbség (1922–1942) which was published in Romania and had Romanian, German and French versions to reach out to international audiences and organisations (p. 21). On a European level, it was at the pressure of the Hungarian government and of the Hungarian delegation to the European Congress of Nationalities that the Baltic German Ewald Ammende, the founder of the Congress, published in 1931 a book comprising a set of formulaic situational reports produced by European minorities. The main inter-war public institution undertaking minority research was the Institute of Governance and Public Policy. Founded in Budapest in 1926, it gathered data and produced assessments in support of Hungary’s ambitions for territorial revision (p. 22). After 1940, when parts of the lost territories were returned to Hungary, this Institute was split into the Transylvanian Scientific Institute (based in Kolozsvár/Cluj), the Hungarian History Institute and the Teleki Pál Institute (both based in Budapest). The latter provided expertise for the post-war peace-preparations (p. 22). In the context of higher education, the Minority Institute of the University of Pécs (1936–1949) undertook research and established a documentation centre on Hungary’s nationalities, the Hungarian communities outside Hungary and European minorities in general. One of its explicit aims was to set minority research on a purely scientific ground by distancing it from politically driven