With her book “The Impact of EU Law on Minority Rights,” Tawhida Ahmed fills a gap in minority research. Minorities—the classic ones as recognized under international law—have traditionally not been on the agenda of the European Union. Yet, several million citizens of the EU belong to minorities. Not only is the motto of the European Union ‘united in diversity’, but also, since the Maastricht Treaty the European Union has transformed itself into a political actor with a set of moral values. The core value of the respect for human rights encompasses minorities and thus, is timely and adequate to engage in the mapping of the current legal situation of minorities in the European Union.

The author claims to not evaluate whether the EU should protect minorities. Yet, an implicit recognition of a positive answer is evident as Tawhida Ahmed argues for a more positive evaluation of the EU as a protector of minorities; not necessarily through treaty law but through alternative avenues of protection and promotion of minority rights.

Ahmed introduces criteria that can serve as benchmarks in relation to other actors. These criteria are standards from the Council of Europe and the United Nations. Although it is a wise choice not only to look toward the Council of Europe, but also to include the United Nations, one must take a step back and consider the consequences of this choice of criteria.

The European Union increasingly sees itself as an international political actor reaching considerably further than the economic confines of its early years as the European Community. The EU explicitly states that its actions on the international scene will seek to advance (among other things) in the wider world “the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms”.1 It is thus only natural that it will be measured against international standards. At the same time, the European Union is still an organization sui generis in which the

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1 Art. 21 (1) TEU.

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The adoption of a piece of legislation has very different legal consequences compared with the adoption of a General Assembly resolution such as, for example, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The substantive part of the book starts out with a clarification of the terms ‘minorities’ and ‘minority rights’. This is highly useful because it establishes both a clearer understanding of the actual terms and introduces the international sources on minorities and minority rights. Regarding the term ‘minority’, the author addresses the numerous issues related to the term and provides a good overview of the related approaches. In relation to rights accorded to minorities, the author makes a useful distinction between general human rights and more specific minority rights. It becomes clear that a twofold relationship exists between human rights and minority rights. On the one hand, there are some human rights which minorities find especially relevant. On the other hand, there are human rights which are really targeted at groups, such as minorities. Non-discrimination and the right to freedom of assembly belong to the former category of rights that have a special importance for minorities whereas the right to participation and self-determination belong to the latter category; they are narrow rights aimed at groups such as minorities.

Chapters three through five offer the actual legal review. First, the reader is introduced to the who, what, and how. It is established who the relevant actors at the EU level are, which acts are relevant for minorities and how the interpretation of the acts by the relevant actors is done. Again, Ahmed covers the terrain thoroughly when bringing together the levels of primary and secondary law of the European Union with the international requirements regarding minority rights; namely, ‘respect for and protection and fulfilment’ of those rights. In addition, Ahmed distinguishes between hard and soft law. One whole chapter is devoted to the sources of EU provisions, principles and norms that are of relevance in the interpretation of the actual competence provisions.

The chapter on the competence provisions is one of the most useful for scholars delving into EU law in the context of minorities. Ahmed offers an account of provisions that can have a special relevance to minorities. Here, we find a number of provisions of the internal market. This field is usually not surveyed in the context of minority rights and it is quite interesting to see how rules of the internal market can have a minority dimension. The author makes a convincing argument for each of the rights she includes in the chapter. Apart from provisions of the internal market, provisions on non-discrimination and political rights—the more common contexts of minority rights—are included. The author continues with provisions from amongst the fields of education, culture, the environment and regional development. Ahmed delves deep into the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and secondary law to show us their importance and relevance for minorities. It is striking how many areas of European Union law should be of interest to minorities.

The second part of the book deals with two case studies. Ahmed focuses on cultural rights and linguistic rights. Each case study starts with defining the terms