

REGIONS, MINORITIES AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

A CASE STUDY ON MUSLIMS IN WESTERN THRACE, GREECE

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Abstract:

This report explores the regional changes and the redefined government policy towards the minority in Western Thrace, Greece, which were largely undertaken in the context of EU integration, as well as their consequences for ethnic politics, cultural mobilization and inter-communal relations. The original research hypotheses were that regional and minority rights changes in the context of European integration a) promote political and economic integration of minorities in development frames, as well as inter-communal cooperation, and b) reinforce a relative decline of nationalist politics, with the interests and identity of minorities and majorities increasingly emphasizing social-economic integration, civic participation and equal citizenship, as opposed to ethnic solidarity. Our findings suggest that minority and majority partly shift their interests in the direction of pursuing regional economic integration and inter-communal cooperation, while national and ethnic politics in Thrace have grown more moderate since the 1990s. At the same time, regional economic, institutional changes and the political participation of Christians and Muslims are constrained by ongoing separation along ethnic-national lines. While the context of EU integration appears to bolster minority quest for integration and to diminish its fears of assimilation and reversion to a discriminatory policy, it does not in any way render less salient identification with the ethnic community. The latter manifests itself in widespread demands for cultural self-determination in religious affairs and for recognition as a ‘Turkish minority’.

Keywords:

ethnic politics, minorities, European integration, regions, nationalism

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