



Minority Rights: The Watershed Between Ethnic Cleansing and Multicultural Coexistence

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Purpose of the Course:

Over the last decades, minority rights have become one of the most controversial notions on the domain of human rights. The term is loaded with political aspirations, and it has become a symbol of rhetorically projected positions of the adversaries in the debate. Regardless of academic/ideological/political standpoints, one can hardly deny the gravity of the problem: many contemporary polities are heterogeneous, that is, they are decisively marked by the parallel existence of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups. Many of these polities are thus "naturally," i.e., pre-politically, divided into majorities and minorities. Given the intensity of group affiliation, and given that the identification with the primary group tends toward translation into the world of politics, such communities are often marked by deep inter-group conflicts. Moreover, the dividing line between majority and minority groups is perceived as unchangeable. In such a context, the problem of human rights acquires special connotations. Finding morally defensible, legally efficient and politically feasible answers to the problems of minority rights is one of the most important issues facing contemporary democracies. Events during the last several years, particularly the events in the former Yugoslavia, have given rise to a frightful option — that of ethnic cleansing. This only confirms the importance of establishing the right measure of minority rights, because this is what divides multicultural co-existence from ethnic cleansing.

Course Description:

The objective of this two-week course is to explore this complex theme by combining different, yet closely related conceptual standpoints of several scientific subfields:

- legal and political philosophy,
- constitutional law,
- international law,
- sociology and political science.

The main topics of the course are:

Present Options in Ethnically Diverse States, Individual versus Collective Rights, Workshop on Minority Rights in Vojvodina (five class hours)

Individual versus Collective Rights (ten class hours)

The Position of Minority Rights Within the Realm of Human Rights (five class hours)

The International and European Framework of Minority Rights (ten class hours)

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Course Description (continued):

Various Forms of Minority Autonomies in Europe (ten class hours)

Case Study: The Workshop on Minority Rights in Vojvodina (ten class hours)

Institutional Co-Organizers or Co-Sponsors:

Minority Rights Group (British Institute of Human Rights, London)

Course Dates:

July 1-12, 1996

Application Deadline:

April 1, 1996