



Samuel Salzborn. *Ethnisierung der Politik: Theorie und Geschichte des Volksgruppenrechts in Europa.* Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005. 356 S. (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-593-37879-4.



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Minority Protection and the Radical Right in Europe

Samuel Salzborn's provocative book is conceived as a mixture between a scholarly study and a political wake-up call. He starts with the observation that the European nation-state, a modern "bourgeois" system of political organization born of the French revolution, is under threat. The threat that mainly concerns him emanates from the European project's embrace of a "Europe of the regions." Regional movements include, of course, the violent groups in Corsica or the Basque regions of France and Spain, which, in Salzborn's reading, are among those that strive for ethnic purity. Behind any rhetoric of minority rights, therefore, Salzborn suspects a hidden agenda: to exclude those deemed alien and replace the civic equality of *citoyens* with inequalities in an ethnic state. Doing so, Salzborn argues, would allow *völkisch* ideas (which originated in right-wing political movements during the Second German Empire and the Weimar Republic) to triumph and permit a subversion of the European project by the radical right. The Austrian minority rights politics practiced by the FPÖ/ÖVP serve as an example for Salzborn of what may lie in store for Europe.

Put briefly, Salzborn seeks to show how minority rights can serve as a basis for "an implementation of a *völkisch* and anti-egalitarian" blueprint for society, which represents "a theoretical and historical counter-project to the French Revolution, the bourgeois-republican interpretation of citizenship ... and the postulate of equality" (p. 16): the triumph of *ethnos* over *demos* as the basis for a political society.

Most of the book's chapters are systematic. The first section provides an overview of definitions of ethnicity. It is followed by a bird's eye perspective on concepts of minorities, ethnicities and nationalities in Germany since the Peace of Augsburg (1555), with particular emphasis on the post-Versailles period. Its main point is the systematic exposition of the fundamental contradiction between "democratic liberalism" and "*völkisch* antiliberalism" (p. 59).

The section entitled "Theoretical Elements of Modern *Volksgruppenrecht*" is the core of the book's systematic argument. In a comprehensive reading of scientific papers, press articles, draft minority and minority language codes by various authors, Salzborn documents his case

that even a debate on ethnic groups couched in terms of group rights is likely—and possibly bound—to culminate in mass exclusion. Take, for example, the demand, often formulated by advocates of ethnic group rights, that in order to protect cultural distinctiveness, areas of minority ethnic group settlement must be protected against mass “majority” immigration. Presumably, such calls seek to preclude policies like the “Germanization” of Polish-speaking provinces in late nineteenth-century Prussia, “Italianization” in pre- and post-Second World War South Tyrol, or Chinese actions in Tibet. But the demand also implies limiting or rescinding the individual rights of non-group citizens: if they are more than a guarantee of state restraint, they limit or deny freedom of movement, freedom of expression and individual cultural autonomy to citizens classified as members of an ethnic group not native to that particular region. Salzborn also highlights that most definitions of “ethnic groups” are written with stable, largely immobile, settlements of peasants in mind rather than, say, migrant workers. Written into a European minority code and taken to its logical extreme, the protection of regional (say, Bavarian) populations could thus justify, for example, German restrictions on “alien” immigration from within the European Union.

The book’s last chapter turns to history. Here, the sweeping analytical perspective of the theoretical analysis gives way to fairly minute detail. Salzborn traces the development of three institutions, which, to him, exemplify the gradual reemergence of *völkisch* regional ethnic policy concepts. A brief attempt to coordinate “non-ethnic” regionalist movements throughout Western Europe in the late 1940s foundered quickly. It was only when more *völkisch*-oriented interests from Denmark came to the fore that an organization was formed. Renamed the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) in 1954, this group attracted more attention and some German government support. Its chief members and supporters were organizations representing (or claiming to represent) Danes in Germany, Germans in Denmark and Italy, German *Heimatvertriebene* and some residents of Brittany. Most other European regionalist movements refused to join the FUEN, apparently causing the leadership to fear that it might be perceived solely as a German movement. The FUEN was closely linked with another initiative: a research institute for self-determination and nationality politics, founded at Lüneburg by the Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen in 1956 and moved to Marburg ten years later. The third villain in Salzborn’s story is the Munich

International Institute for Ethnic Group Rights and Regionalism, funded by the Bavarian government and established in 1977 not least in order to provide Munich with greater influence on European legislative projects. From 1985, FUEN and the Munich institutes were cooperating in drafting proposals for European legislation on regionalism and ethnicity. Salzborn claims that all proposals emerging from these organizations shared a common purpose: to reduce national sovereignty and re-ethnicize European politics. In Salzborn’s view, their partial success resulted from the European transformation of 1989, which brought issues regarding the treatment of national and ethnic minorities back to the forefront of (Western) European political perceptions. Salzborn fails to mention, however, that after 1989 FUEN benefited greatly through the addition of partner-organizations in Eastern Europe (although government funding remains limited to South Tyrol, Karinthia, and Schleswig-Holstein, where the society’s headquarters are located). Salzborn argues that the framework agreement on the protection of national minorities signed in 1995 and the 1992 European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages represent a first breakthrough of the new politics of ethnicity.

Salzborn is at pains to show that these associations were personally and institutionally linked to the racial policies of the Third Reich and remain tied to Europe’s (or, more precisely, Germany’s, Austria’s, and Denmark’s) new right. Many of the founding members of the FUEN and the Marburg research institute had a background in interwar ethnic politics, and the Marburg building had housed an institute involved in the pre-war and wartime planning for a racially redesigned Europe under German dominance. What emerges less clearly in the account is the real extent of this continuity of content, or indeed whether the aims of the Bavarian government (which included greater European recognition of German *Länder*) were truly compatible with those of old-school race politics, or those of federal German ministries. Little attempt is made to quantify or contextualize right wing connections, which are often insinuated rather than proved—for instance, Salzborn, quotes an activist’s NSDAP membership number (incidentally in the high millions) in order to contend that this person must have held anti-democratic and racist beliefs in the Federal Republic (p. 206).

Because Salzborn’s account is in part a political *cri de coeur*, judgments on its validity are likely to depend on readers’ personal political preferences; the point of a review cannot be to pass judgment on this aspect of the book. Nevertheless, I found Salzborn’s text disap-

pointing for a number of different reasons. His uncritical acceptance of the “enlightened” European nation-state as a continuous font of rights and liberties is so profoundly ahistorical—and in complete contradiction to recent, more complex accounts of the rise of the modern nation-state—that it passes beyond the boundaries of political persuasions into the realm of the factually incorrect.[1] It is as simplistic as the message—displayed on the home page of the Munich International Institute—that the “ethnic expulsions, ‘cleansings’ and genocides of the 20th century are products of nation-state ideology of the 19th century.”[2] What is particularly surprising, given the frequent references to Adorno, is the absence of any reflection on the “dialectics of enlightenment”—let alone any discussion of the empirical question of what basis in historical experience exists for assuming a systematic and empirical contrast between a French, libertarian, and a German, ethnic, model of the nation-state.[3]

However, the book’s main problem is that it fails to deliver on its promise of analyzing “theory and history” of minority law “in Europe” (as promised in the title). Its focus on German (and some Austrian) groups ignores ethnic minority experiences particularly in Eastern Europe, but also France or Spain. As Salzbörn points out, post-1945 West Germany lacked substantial ethnic minorities likely to face state discrimination; protection of individual rights not only appeared adequate, but also met the concerns of the vast majority of the population.

Minority policy was, therefore, largely, a potential tool of foreign policy. Approaching the question through the eyes of Hungarians in Rumania or Serbia, or the Corsicans or Basques in France or Spain, will lead to very different results. Such comparisons would have required, of course, a much broader empirical analysis; but without such an analysis, a full explanation of the reasons, consequences and motives for the changes in European Union minority policy cannot be given.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt* (Munich: Beck, 2001); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation States 1760-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Salzbörn’s account could not incorporate Michael Mann’s *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) or *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[2]. See <http://www.intereg.org> (consulted February 7, 2006).

[3]. A summary of the arguments that encourage caution can be found in Patrick Weil, *Qu’est-ce qu’un français? Histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 2005; [1st ed., 2002]), pp. 281-315.

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