PREFACE

One of the most urgent task that the nascent democracies of East Europe face is to tackle the problem of ethnic minorities. In East Europe centuries of cohabitation has not succeeded in muting antagonisms emanating from the complex ethnic heterogeneity of the region. Indeed, as has been said the most important of all tasks which face democracy as soon as it becomes a political reality is that of tempering its own rigour by a generous and considerate treatment of minorities.

Emerging from their recent communist past all states of this region are experiencing an aggressive reemergence of nationalist sentiments and ethnic consciousness. The starkest example of this has been the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia. Minorities were at the heart of Yugoslav conflict in as much as it was fueled throughout by the refusal of all concerned to live as minorities within a state dominated by others. Aleksander Solzhenitsyn has aptly summed up communism's failure to address this problem in the course of three quarters of a century. 'To the sound of incessant proclamations trumpeting the socialist friendship of peoples (i)
the communist regime has managed to neglect, entangle and sully the relationship among these peoples to such a degree that one can no longer see the way back to peaceful coexistence of nationalities'.

Today among the former communist countries the Russians constitute the largest minority. 27 million Russians i.e. one-fifth of all Russians live outside the Russian Federation in Ukraine Balarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzistan, Tadjikistan and the three Baltic States.

The second largest minority in Europe and the largest in East Europe are the Hungarian numbering around 3.5 million representing one-fourth of the nation. Estimates of the number of Hungarians living in the states around Hungary vary between 1,000,000 and 3,500,000. The largest group of these Hungarians live in Romania 1,800,000 (some estimates suggest 3,000,000); followed by 600,000 in Slovakia other estimates suggest 800,000); Serbia 450,000 - Most of whom live in Vojvodina; Croatia 20 - 30,000, Ukraine 15,000 (maximum suggested figure is 50,000 which includes all Hungarians in former USSR); Austria 10-20,000; Slovenia 10,000.

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Apart from the Hungarians there are about two million or more Germans scattered in Russia, Romania, Poland and Hungary. The Albanians numbering more than 3 million in Albania proper have almost 1.8 million living in Kosovo province of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 0.4 in Macedonia, 0.3 in Montenegro. Albania herself, has the problem of an organised Greek minority supported by Greece. About a million Turks form on a minority, concentrated mainly in Bulgaria and also in Serbia and Romania. The exact number of Gypsies or Romas living in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia are not known but the figures must be in millions.

In general East Europe has a poor record of minority protection. The present study attempts to identify changes in majority-minority equation following the birth of democracy in East Europe with reference to the Hungarians in Romania, Slovakia and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. A fixed rule to govern all circumstances could only be applied with considerable difficulties to their diverse needs. The needs of a minority in one country might best be secured simply by effective equality before the law, others elsewhere or in the same country may need cultural autonomy, a

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third, victimized by longstanding discriminatory patters may need affirmative action. Being the strong player, however, the majority would do well to remember the maxim 'Treat a minority as you would want to be treated were you to find yourself in one'. The onset of democracy has to some extent made these states less repressive but the fact that all minorities of the region have a mother country continue to generate fear of secession and obstruct any meaningful concessions.

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(BHASWATI SARKAR)