

Report of the TEIN Forum Austria – Slovenia

Old and New Minorities – The Relevance of Identities for Border Regions in Today’s European Union

TEIN4citizens organized a two-day forum on the topic of **Old and New Minorities and The Relevance of Identities for Border Regions in Today’s European Union**. At the Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia the representatives of civil society organisations, academics, citizens, government and students discussed what are new minorities and the relevance of identities for border regions in European Union today. The aim of the forum in Ljubljana was to tackle the question of what are the old and new minorities and to broaden this questions on what European identity means in border regions within the today's EU. The main ideas, suggestions, and propositions were presented at the end of the forum in the form of a public presentation to all participants.

The discusses on **new minorities** began with the welcome speeches by the dean of the Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, Janez Stare, PhD and followed by the welcome speeches Iztok Rakar, PhD, assistant manager of the TEIN project at the Faculty of Public Administration. He stressed that participates should have in mind that borders, minorities, migration are linked to human rights and that Slovenia's point of view on minorities and concerns about border control drastically changed because of the migrations in the past five years. In addition, people should be aware of hate speech that has increased due to the migrations in the past five years. This raises the main question of how to respect human rights and reduce the level of hate speech, despite the fears of the majority. After that, Eithne Knappitsch, PhD explained the main priorities and goals of the TEIN4citizens Forum Austria – Slovenia: Old and New Minorities – The Relevance of Identities for Border Regions in Today’s European Union. The forum entailed short lectures given by the professors related to new minorities, followed by students’ group discussions on the identity and boarders of the EU.

Minister for Education, Science, and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia Jernej Pikalo, PhD gave a thoughtful presentation on how Slovenia is dealing with the integration policies, what are the key challenges, opportunities, and limits of the integration policies in Slovenia. The mister stressed human rights as part of the EU and Slovenia law has a crucial role in how integration policies are integrated in Slovenia. The minister explained that in the past Slovenia mostly dealt with the Italian, Roma, and Hungarian ethnic minorities, however the environment has changed in the past two decades. Therefore, it is crucial for Slovenia and the European Union to identify new minorities such as refuges minorities, age minorities, technological minorities.

The new minorities go beyond territorial, national and ethnical borders and are now more related to global civil society. Thus, the main question for local representatives of civil society organizations, academics, citizens and representatives from government, public bodies and also for the EU law and European institutions is who are now minorities in this new globalized society. Slovenia as a country is still learning how to deal with these new minorities and how to tackle the question of one fourth of the population in Slovenia that has Yugoslav descendants and want to have status of minority and its rights also.

During the last decade, the European Union has been exposed to one the biggest migration crisis since World War II and thus it was crucial that the forum on new minorities also address the migration crisis. Primož Pevcin, PhD from the Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana presented the governance problem in the context of the EU and during the migration crisis where the Western Balkan route and Slovenia as a small state on the outer Schengen zone border. The aim of this presentation was to show how multi-level governance of the Western Balkans migrations route, which was particularly active for one year in the period from 2015 to 2016 was unsuccessful during the crisis, with the mostly top-down direction of decision-making, and particularly the subnational level being poorly involved into the process. More specifically, on the national level, there was an extreme burden to human and other resources of governmental apparatus, extending border controls, introducing technical barriers to direct influx and layering and decoupling new legislation with a purpose to prevent national security. On subnational was excluded from policymaking and there was a lack of dialogue and confrontation with the national level. This left a limited possibility for the involvement of the national and subnational levels in decision-making processes in strategical issues. Consequently, it made it difficult for proper multi-level governance and flexibility at the local level. In addition, he stressed that the results of the evaluation of multi-level governance during the migration crisis indicated that unsuccessful multi-level governance opened new dilemmas for EU members: first is the role of state size and institutional capacities, second is related to national interest versus EU rules and the third to passive EU institutions during the crisis.

Marika Gruber, MSc from Corinthian University of Applied Sciences, School of Management had a presentation about the Mission statement of integration and integration policies in Carinthia. The presenter explained that minorities and majorities emerge due to the cultural, economic, political differences and that the differences between minorities and majorities are unstable and can change in a longer period. In addition, minorities emerge usually the same way as nations. She explained that in the 60s only about 10.000 foreigners were in Carinthia and that the number of foreigners in Carinthia increased in the 70s, 90s due to the refugees from the war in ex-Yugoslavia, in 2000s due to the EU integration and in years 2015 and 2016

due to the refugee crisis in the Middle East. Now there is about 10% of the population are foreigners in Carinthia and the minorities are from Germany (20%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (13%), Croatia (5,5%), and the rest are from Slovenia. The presenter explained that in 2014 and 2015 Carinthia developed an integration plan for the minorities and it included public and participative process with civil society, FH Kärnten scientifically accompanied the development of the action plan, and eight working groups that were dealing mostly with health systems issues and labour market. Altogether, there were more than 2000 persons involved in the new Carinthia developed an integration plan.

Then Nadine Hell, MSc from the Carinthian Government Office of the National Office Refugee and Integration presented the integration policies in Carinthia their challenges, opportunities and limitations. The first challenge of the Carinthian Government Office of the National Office Refugee and Integration was that there was no real budget for integration, only after 2013 the integration policy started to be part of the political agenda in Carinthia Government. This, it is crucial that the integration policy was recognized by the government on the national level. The main goal of the integration plan was to integrate refugees from the very beginning and learning the German language. The presenter explained that the main results from the Carinthian integration plans are the following: online platform that allows local integration activities (i.e. integration on tour), providing German integration classes, psychological supervision for asylum seekers, dental health workshop, integration award and project funding for refugees. Currently, the Carinthian Government Office of the National Office Refugee and Integration is dealing with challenges like changing immigration law, not enough budget from the Carinthia government, increasing far-right policies, the issue of the woman and labour market, religious dogmas and gender equality issues.

After the keynotes presentations, the students in culturally diverse groups (half students were Slovene and half Austrian) had a group discussion on the relevance of identities for border regions in the European Union. The group discussions were moderated by professors and staff from Carinthian University of Applied Sciences, School of Management and Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana. The goal was providing answers to the questions about the EU identity, EU borders, and the future of Europe.

The first students discussed **what does the EU mean to them personally, as either an EU citizen or Non-EU citizen**. They stressed that the EU means: peace project, cultural diversity, open borders, equal opportunities, travel in EU, work opportunities, study abroad opportunities, good healthcare system, the same rights, Schengen, certain policies unified (to a certain degree) and global thing. Moreover, the students stress that the EU represents values like cooperation, peace, unity and security.

The students with the help of the moderators tackle the question about EU identity: “**Is there an EU identity? If so, describe it. If not, why not?**”. They noted that they feel as a part of the EU and that they see that certain institutions try to teach EU identity. However, they stressed that first and foremost they have a national identity because of rich history among countries and national legacy. Moreover, they explained that their EU identity depends on who they are interacting e.g. with friends, peers or foreigners and that usually EU identity steps in the foreground when they travel abroad the USA, Asia or Australia.

Then the moderators asked the students **what are their associations with borders, particularly EU borders**. The students explained that they link EU borders with easy to cross boarding in EU countries, travel opportunities in the EU, and they feel of privilege because they lived within Schengen borders. It is interesting that the students while being asked about EU borders also raised the question of the defence as a national responsibility in regards to the borders and refugees.

The students then provide their **visions of the future of Europe** regarding the questions of old or new minorities and the specific relevance of identities at border regions of the EU, which visions do citizens of border regions have for the future of Europe, what they wish for and what they need. They explained that at the local levels they would wish more flexibility in general, especially more administrative flexibility and stressed the need for cross-border education. At the European level, they wish faster decision-making on bigger problems like migration crisis in EU and unity of laws and standards. The students stressed that the future EU needs a common language and they all agreed that English could be the EU common language. Thus, the EU representatives need to provide opportunities for all EU citizens to learn English.

At the end of the discussion, the students had to provide **propositions and recommendations for a future Europe** concerning the question of old or new minorities and the specific relevance of identities at border regions of the EU and what would citizens propose to political representatives, institutions, organizations, etc. They noted that at the local level the local representatives should promote more EU identity and international experiences. Moreover, the local representatives should provide more systematically learning opportunities about the EU for students and should work more on the integration of all European countries, centralization of decision-making in cross-national crises, make better combination of resources, and promote a common EU language.