
Some Doubts about 'Ethnocultural Justice'

ALEXANDER OSSIPOV

Many of Kymlicka's ideas on 'ethnocultural justice' and its application in post-Communist countries are welcome, while several components can and must be criticized. I will concentrate on the latter, even though critiquing articles that are written in the genre of social prescription is not an easy task. Arguments, whether pro or con, seem disputable and weak. Conclusions are tenuous because the practical experiences needed for substantiation are scarce and only marginally comparable. Apart from the problem of determining what is negative and positive, it is not clear how to evaluate the overall balance of positive and negative outcomes when criteria are ambiguous and subjective. But even when the nature of the discussion is largely unquantifiable, unclear, or arbitrary, one can still debate the article's underlying assumptions, deconstruct its language and, speculatively, or by using analogies, try to anticipate risks and unexpected outcomes.

The easiest way to proceed would be to demonstrate that many of Kymlicka's suggestions do not apply to the realities of the former Soviet Union, and Russia in particular. To my mind, however, the issue must be put in a broader social and geographic context, as concerns about the applicability of Kymlicka's approach could be valid outside the post-Communist countries. In my view, there are several fundamental problems: some of Kymlicka's basic assumptions are arbitrary and disputable, the internal logic seems contradictory, potential gains are overestimated, and some potentially undesirable effects are not taken into consideration.

*Assumptions and Terminology: Is an Ethnic Group
a Social Actor?*

Kymlicka offers some perfect examples of the type of language that is used in the discourse on ethnocultural justice: 'the question of the rights of ethnocultural groups'; 'which language groups will survive'; 'the issue of minority rights'; 'minorities . . . seek to participate . . .'; ' . . . create and sustain their own modern institutions'; 'any national group engaged in a project of nation-building must respect the right of other nations . . .'; and 'national minorities would have liked to form their own states'. Criticizing some of the language of the (ethno)nationalist discourse should not be equated with a criticism of liberal pluralism, although there are some common elements and parallels that do raise concerns.

Over the last forty or more years, debates on discrimination, protection of minorities, nationalism and ethnicity have occupied not only the academic community. International organizations and politicians have also been working in the area, with anti-discriminatory laws or legislation for the protection of minorities. Despite all the differences among schools, disciplines, and countries, a common language—often described as nationalistic—has emerged and spread so widely that it has even appeared in the documents of some international organizations.

With some reservations, this language reflects a perception of a group—such as 'nation', ethnic community, people, or minority—as a cultural and social entity, a developing system or 'social organism', and a social actor possessing interests, free will, and an ability to make decisions and choices. As such, an ethnic group possesses rights in a legal sense and, in a more radical sense, universal values that need special protection for its 'survival'.

These types of views on ethnic groups, social actors, and rights are usually presented as axiomatic. They are postulated, not proved, are not clearly articulated, and, regretfully, rarely become a subject of reflection.

Why is an ethnic group perceived as an entity when it has vague and movable boundaries and embraces various linguistic and cultural preferences? Why is an ethnic group—in a symbolic or statistical sense¹—considered to be a social and even quasi-legal subject? Why is it that a number of activists, who put themselves forward as representatives, are perceived as the 'embodiment' of the group, rather than a voluntary association or political movement? Why should an outside observer automatically accept the language of self-

representation, characteristic of ethnonationalist movements? Why should one assume that such movements rest on some natural, or basic, interests or needs of the group? Why does one not say that the term 'group interests' has been invented and developed by the persons and organizations that claim representative status?

In a democratic society, many organizations of various types claim to represent some group interests through electoral campaigning and lobbying activity.² If they are successful at the polls, nobody would challenge their 'democratic accountability'.³ If a voluntary association or ethnically-based party is comprised of almost all of the people who belong to a certain ethnic group, this is one thing. If, however, a government prescribes and declares that it will deal only with a single 'lawful representative' of an ethnic group, this would be a quite different matter. Is there anything liberal in the latter approach? Surely it is strange to equate a representative organization with the entire group to be represented, assess it in terms of its capacity to mobilize, and insist that it be a type of political subsystem and collective actor.

Why should ethnically-based organizations or movements benefit from a special status in comparison with purely civil and political ones? Why must minority associations or ethnic parties be treated differently from other non-governmental organizations that play the same social role? I can find only two reasons for this discriminatory approach that favours ethnic associations. The first is the traditional stereotype of perceiving an ethnic group as a 'collective individual'.⁴ The second concerns the political correctness of ethnic leaders and activists who usually protest against treating ethnic groups in any way other than as quasi-nations with specific group rights. Both of these reasons seem completely irrelevant. One should simply eliminate atavistic stereotypes; and the opinions of nationalist activists, which may be appropriate in terms of political bargaining, should not enter into academic debates.

Can a society be interpreted as a combination of ethnic communities? If a community is to be defined as an ethnic group, bound by its internal structure, common ideology (solidarity), and membership, then there were no communities in the former Soviet Union, and I suppose not in many other countries. If, on the other hand, a community is a non-governmental voluntary association, then each ethnic group in Russia—that is, people with the same nationality, as it appears in their passports—consists of dozens of communities.

Russia, for instance, can hardly be described in terms of an ethnically-segmented or divided society. Persons of various ethnic

backgrounds attend schools with the same curricula, work together at the same enterprises, and watch the same television programmes. Cultural institutions, associations, and media for ethnic minorities attract relatively little interest from their intended audience. In spite of the many nationalist parties that profess to speak on behalf of an ethnic majority or minorities, their candidates regularly lose in national and regional elections. Inhabitants of the republics within Russia vote at the national level for federal parties, and in regional elections for authoritarian republican leaders who combine moderate local nationalism with regionalist rhetoric. Voters across Russia demonstrate the same model of behaviour regardless of their ethnic affiliation. Voting patterns along more ethnic lines are isolated cases, arise out of violent confrontations, such as the Ingush–Ossetian conflict, and can hardly be considered a result of a fair and free choice.

Hence, in Russian society, it is a considered opinion that minorities are integrated into the mainstream. At the same time, though, people belonging to minorities retain an identity in terms of their ethnicity, and have many modes of behaviour to express that identity. They do not simply choose between autonomy and integrating into the majority. Granted, Russian society is not ethnically blind or ethnically tolerant; the nationalist discourse affects many spheres of social life. This does not mean, however, that ethnic relations are characterized by one majority 'community' and a number of minority 'collective individuals'.

Does Minority Protection Require Group Rights?

In his argumentation, Kymlicka opts for the language of group rights. One can argue against this approach. The possible institutional arrangements do not necessarily require this kind of justification. Moreover, many ideas should be seen in terms of individual solutions and not normative principles or requirements: they may work properly in one circumstance but not in another.

If a government supports *institutions* that promote minority cultures and languages, this does not mean that *persons* belonging to a minority group enjoy special status, are being treated preferentially, or have more possibilities to exercise their rights. First of all, access to schools where a minority language is being taught is not restricted to minority members. Those who attend these schools can not be equated with a minority group. Second, resources from public funds and state budgets are regularly distributed disproportionately

in favour of some categories of the population, such as special allowances and benefits for the unemployed and disabled, and regional development programmes. In many places, cultural institutions such as theatres and museums, as well as municipal transport, are not self-sufficient and therefore have to be financed from public funds. Not everybody uses city buses or underground transit, and few people attend museums. Nevertheless, nobody talks about affirmative action, special rights or group rights of those who benefit from such facilities.

Any public support to institutions that address specific needs of persons belonging to minorities can be justified in terms of individual rights. In general, existing legislation already does this, especially within the contexts of welfare or social partnership. In any event, it is still not obvious that everything in this area can or should be reflected in terms of rights. There are other grounds on which to base actions that protect minorities.

In general, the word 'right' is not suitable in this context. It would be better, and more practical, to speak in terms of governmental obligations under international standards and national legislation. The government of a country where 100 languages are spoken can hardly be expected, even if it had the resources and goodwill, to open, within a short time, schools where those 100 languages would be taught. To describe this situation as a violation of somebody's rights or as inequitable treatment would be strange.

Members of a society who belong to minorities do have legitimate interests, such as the use of their language in public institutions and instruction in their mother tongue. If members of the majority can teach their children in their mother tongue, persons belonging to minorities should be able to do the same. These interests must be met by the state. A real problem, however, is determining the degree to which such minority interests can feasibly be developed. Providing minority language instruction at the level of the primary school is not a problem. But what about higher education? Who would take responsibility for the employment prospects of its graduates? In such matters, universal prescriptions cannot and do not exist. The actual approaches have to be specific to the circumstances. Strongly-worded universal declarations of group rights in the cultural area, which actually define obligations of the state, are unlikely to offer suitable solutions. They would be more likely to lead to the artificial creation of groups of persons who did not previously consider their rights to be violated. This process would risk bringing nothing more than increased tensions and intolerance.

It is not obvious that group or special rights offer an effective instrument for governments to protect minorities. As a practitioner, I do not believe in the miraculous force of a piece of paper. A law or treaty is nothing more than a well-meaning wish unless the government and society respect it. Relying on the goodwill of government and the cultural majority is cold comfort, but we really have nothing else. Moreover, the whole idea of the rule of law is based on voluntary self-restriction and goodwill. If the political culture is not compatible with the ideas of the rule of law, there is little prospect for either the protection of human rights or non-violent conflict resolution. Cyprus, Iraq, Sudan, Serbia, and some post-Soviet states such as Georgia, illustrate this.

Governments have good reasons for not suppressing minorities and for undertaking positive measures in their favour. A responsible government is always seeking ways to avoid social unrest and destabilization. Affirmative action in the United States is not guaranteed by autonomous institutions dominated by non-Whites. Minorities are always dependent on majorities and disadvantaged groups are reliant on the institutions controlled by the dominant classes. That is inevitable; acceptable alternatives just do not exist.

If a government plays fair and implements deep reforms, including territorial autonomy for minorities, it does not need a universal normative requirement along the lines of group rights. Even if there were such a normative requirement, a government that rigidly opposes the idea of an ethnically-based territorial division of the state would simply ignore it. And on the flip side, a minority nationalist movement claiming territorial autonomy or secession would do so regardless of existing international standards.

In the final analysis, there are more moderate, less provocative alternatives to the language of group rights used in some international instruments. Two good examples are the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Alternative language is also provided in the recommendations of some international organizations such as The Hague and Oslo Recommendations of the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

What is Just and Unjust in Ethnic Relations?

Kymlicka actually equates the so-called structural inequality among people belonging to different ethnic groups with deliberate exclusion

and discrimination, and finds both outcomes unjust. He also finds the differentiation in the social standing of the mainstream or societal culture and language, on the one hand, and minority cultures and languages, on the other, unjust. Is this vision of the boundary between just and unjust consistent and realistic?

Deliberate discrimination must be condemned from the legal, religious, and (theoretical) liberal standpoints. In a modern society, people belonging to the cultural mainstream generally possess more advantages in social terms than people belonging to minorities, even if there are no deliberate practices of minority deprivation or exclusion. Is this situation of social inequality unique? No. As a rule, the rural population in modern countries is structurally disadvantaged, that is, they have fewer social opportunities in comparison with urban dwellers. The same might be said in comparisons of blue collar workers with white collars, inhabitants of mountainous areas with those living in fertile plains, females with males, or persons who inherit a fortune with those who inherit nothing. Few people seriously interpret social outcomes of this kind in terms of discrimination or violation of rights. A modern state may not be ethnically and culturally neutral, but it is also not neutral in terms of gender, age, class, or geography. Many social actors work toward reducing social inequality but, as far as I know, few support the granting of special rights to disadvantaged persons without recognizing others.

Is it possible to equate social and ethnic categories? A negative answer presumes that ethnic groups constitute or must constitute something different and isolated from the mainstream, like quasi-nations. In other words, the norm must be a segmented society. But this is neither a starting point for social engineering nor, from the liberal viewpoint, a goal of such engineering.

Mainstream and marginal languages and cultures cannot occupy the same ground and have the same functions within a given society. Thus, the promotion of a minority culture has some objective limits. For example, while the government of the Czech Republic may contribute much to the education of the Roma minority, and may even grant official status to the Roma language within some municipalities, the Roma language will never compete with Czech in the entire society. Similarly, the Armenian language will never have the same functions of instruction and communication as Russian does in the southern part of Russia—Rostov, Krasnodar, Stavropol—even though many Armenians live there.

If this kind of inequality is unjust, then justice must mean the elevation of marginal languages and cultures into the mainstream. In most cases, though, this could be achieved only by severe

administrative pressure and the implementation of harsh restrictions and prescriptions. Such active governmental interference and the potential limitation on individual autonomy have little in common with liberalism. If restrictions were placed on the 'dominant' majority for some abstract ideological purposes, would this be just?

Regrettably, few theorists assess the official ethnic policies of societies in transition. How would liberal theory evaluate the bans and restrictions on certain languages, and their speakers, that have been implemented in some autonomous regions or newly independent states as a way to protect or ensure the survival of 'native languages'? Latvia and Ukraine are fighting against Russian, even to the point of interfering in the private domain, and Slovakia restricts the use of Hungarian and Czech, as does Quebec with English. Can these restrictions be justified within liberal theory? My opinion on this matter is definitely negative.

Double Standards: Ethnic Statehood vs. Ethnic Autonomy

Liberals criticize the idea of the nation-state in so far as it exclusively 'belongs' to a certain ethnic or cultural community. Some of them, however, approve of territorial autonomy for minorities, or 'ethnic federalism'. But this is really the same model and similar ideology to that of the nation-state: a certain territory and power structures for the titular ethnic group and at least a symbolic exclusion of others.⁵ Saying that a certain ethnic group has territorial autonomy or statehood automatically means that inhabitants of the same territory who belong to different ethnic groups live outside their own statehood. In practice, such restrictions and prescriptions based on this assumption might be even more rigid than in a nation-state—for example Quebec, Åland Islands, or constituent regions of Belgium. If a liberal theorist rejects the exclusion of groups at the nationwide level—that is, the idea that a state belongs to a certain ethno-nation—the same conclusion should hold at the subnational level. Otherwise, we have a double standard.

In Kymlicka's argumentation, it appears that exclusion at the national level in favour of ethnonation A could be tolerated if minority group B were allowed to have its own autonomy that was probably territorially based and perhaps even exclusive. This could be tolerated and justified if a group C within B's autonomy were allowed to occupy its own room—probably a municipality—and this in turn could be tolerated if the same rights were granted to D, for

example an ex-territorial corporation. In this case, the double standard would not necessarily apply, although the model would not be easy to implement without neglecting the rights and interests of individuals.

Nevertheless, why is such an approach needed when it is simply possible to do without it? Territories with a significant minority population could acquire special status and establish a specific linguistic regime, the objectives of which would be to help individuals belonging to minorities participate more effectively in politics and administration, and to improve their social and cultural life. If a certain group constitutes a majority whose language is strong enough to be the main means of communication, the others could be relatively disadvantaged, but this is not the same as symbolic and procedural exclusion.

Double Standards: Hosts and Guests

Kymlicka's classification of ethnic groups in the West is based in part on the division between 'national minorities' (traditionally settled groups, or hosts) and immigrants (guests). In some cases, distinguishing between these two categories is clear and reasonable, but the distinction can also appear arbitrary, particularly when we analyse Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. For instance, according to the 1989 USSR Census, 81.5 per cent of the population of the Russian Federation were ethnic Russians. Of the remaining 18.5 per cent, made up of many ethnic groups, only 6.7 per cent lived within 'their' ethnic states or autonomies. Most of the remaining population of national minorities were persons belonging to the 'internal diaspora', that is, ethnic groups such as Tatars, Bashkirs, and Chuvash who had their own 'titular state' within Russia but who lived outside of it. In addition, there are many Russians who live in the autonomous republics within Russia, as well as in the former union republics. Are these people considered to be immigrants, even though they never crossed an internationally recognized border? How many years or generations must a family reside in a certain place before losing the status of immigrant? Are immigrants only those people who shift from one independent country to another one? Moreover, are the many Jews, Germans, Koreans, Poles, and Turks who have lived in Russia for centuries considered to be immigrants? In legal terms, and according to common sense, they are not. In the context of the nationalist discourse, however, they are, because they live

outside of their 'ethnic homeland'. But what exactly is an ethnic homeland?

In Russia, some national minorities are referred to as indigenous populations or constituent nations. Their languages and cultures, however, remain marginal. They constitute a numerical minority within the territories they inhabit and live and work side-by-side with people of other ethnic affiliations. In many cases, these groups do not constitute a distinct society, and instead integrate into the cultural mainstream, which is usually Russian. How does one refer to these people?

Many ethnic groups in Russia, as in many other countries, consist of persons of diverse origin. For example, among the Armenians who live in Krasnodar province in southern Russia, one can find descendants of immigrants from the Ottoman Empire and Crimea dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Soviet-period migrants from Armenia, Georgia, and Central Asia, and refugees from conflicts in Abkhazia and Azerbaijan in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A similar situation holds for the Tatars, who reside in Samara province—83 per cent Russian—which is located in the Middle Volga region and borders Tatarstan. Some of the Tatars have lived there for centuries, some are nineteenth-century or Soviet-period migrants, while others are forced migrants from Central Asia, arriving during the last decade. This list can be extended. Who within such groups are immigrants and who are minorities? How can they be separated? Even the use of the term 'migrants' in the post-Soviet context is disputable. For instance, Russians in the former Soviet Union did not move from their state; rather, the state 'moved' from them.

In any event, why must persons belonging to these types of groups be treated in different ways, while the actual differences between them are conditional and elusive? If one presumes the equal dignity, rights, and needs of all individuals, why should the claims of one culturally distinct group be considered less legitimate than similar claims of another? Why are some categories considered more equal than others? One could say that an immigrant chooses integration into an alien society, but such an assertion can hardly be made with regard to the second or third generations. Moreover, what is the practical meaning of this kind of division? Should regional authorities in Krasnodar and Samara prohibit pupils whose grandparents are not local natives from attending publicly funded schools that offer instruction in, respectively, the Armenian and Tatar languages?

In accordance with contemporary international legal norms, minority protection can be divided, in general terms, into three elements:

symbolic recognition, ‘protective’ rights—meaning freedom from discrimination, and from any prohibition or restriction on the maintenance and expression of cultural identity—and positive measures, such as funding minority cultural institutions. A number of international covenants, as well as the national legislation of almost all countries, contain anti-discriminatory provisions. For example, all citizens are equal before the law and authorities, and non-nationals must not be discriminated against on the grounds of origin, ethnicity, or race. Any division in official discourse into ‘more equal’, or ‘more respectful’, or ‘more valuable’ ethnic groups is incompatible with the objectives of anti-discriminatory legislation.

Authorities may set priorities for the financing of institutions that serve minority cultures, taking into consideration public opinion, the size of a group, and available resources. These preferences can be and must be justified by practical, not ideological, reasons. Can a responsible and liberally-oriented government challenge an ethnic group on the pretext that it is not indigenous enough? Would it be reasonable to have a negative attitude towards them and increase tension by creating socially and culturally deprived categories?

A clear division between ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’, and treating the latter as a potential threat to the development, identity, or even survival of the former are cornerstones of ethnonationalism. This type of attitude is widely spread, but there is nothing liberal about it. Why, therefore, should a liberal theorist follow these views or support them directly or indirectly? Politicians might arbitrarily make the distinction for political purposes, but it is not clear why theoreticians must follow the same logic. The power structures and political movements acting on behalf of native groups in many cases appear to have more resources and capability to impose their vision of the situation than the pressure groups acting on behalf of migrants. In any event, political pressure is an argument of a different type, and one should not confuse principle and fact. *Ad hoc* decisions may go beyond some standard requirements, but they should not automatically alter the principle itself.

The Risks

In assessing the potential outcomes of Kymlicka’s model of ‘ethno-cultural justice’, the symbolic reality that encompasses the issue of ethnic relations must not be neglected. The notions of hosts and guests, people living in or outside a state of their own, and the special

rights of minorities, are much more than words. The language of group rights defines a symbolic space, predetermining the perception of the reality, agenda, and mode of behaviour of many people, including those who participate in decision-making. Even if such symbols do not find their way into policy prescriptions, they still have an impact. The language of this approach towards ethnic groups has some inherent risks in so far as certain outcomes can contradict initially declared goals.

The first risk lies in the constant indoctrination of the public consciousness with the idea that a society is a sum of 'collective individuals' possessing a set of rights and interests. This leads to social relations being recast as inter-ethnic—that is, intergroup—relations. The second risk stems from the influence of external agents on the creation and strengthening of intergroup boundaries and divisions. Such boundaries are always being established by ethnic leaders and activists, in many cases in competition with one another. When governments, the academic community, international organizations, and foreign experts become involved in this process, the divisive effect is more far-reaching. It is, therefore, far from clear that drawing and strengthening inter-ethnic boundaries matches the objective of liberal theoreticians of an open and internally integrated society.

All arguments in favour of preferential treatment for minorities can be used to justify the protection of an ethnic majority, as it can also be described as a non-dominant community whose culture is at risk of alien influences and requires defensive measures. Russia offers a good example. At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the arguments for protecting 'minority peoples' and 'minorities' prevailed in public debates. Subsequently, the same arguments and underlying motives have been widely used for justifying the protection of Russians within and outside Russia, in so far as they are a disadvantaged people in an unfavourable position.

Territorial autonomy, or any other type of special status for an ethnic group, is usually justified by the need to protect a certain group from external cultural and linguistic influences. Discrimination is justified as a necessary protective measure on behalf of weak groups. Group rights for autonomous political institutions, a form of 'the peoples' right to self-determination', promotes the idea of unilateral actions in the name of some collective entity, in any circumstance regardless of the context. But this is based on the logic of revolution. Political segmentation of a culturally heterogeneous society along the lines of group rights denies the legitimacy of almost any state. This leads to situations where, for example, Hungarians in Serbia or

Armenians in Georgia are regarded not as vulnerable groups, but as agents of external powers.

If the notion of group rights through territorial autonomy, or any other model of segmentation, were internationally declared, it would deepen the existing internal conflict rather than lead to conciliation. When a subversive movement operates in accordance with some international standards, it understands that it will have support for a more radical and uncompromising position. Declaring a winner in advance and providing a 'liberation' movement with additional symbolic capital is not a good strategy in terms of law, human rights, and international security.

If countries were subjected to external coercion in their internal affairs on the basis of some strongly-worded 'universal' requirements, it would be a direct route to the destruction of the existing international system, which is based on state sovereignty. Violation of the principle of state sovereignty, including any form of support to 'liberation' movements, is unlikely to be compatible with international regulations. The case of Kosovo is an obvious example. Although a model under which the international community—that is, the US and NATO—decides which ethnic group is entitled to territorial autonomy and which to secession is feasible in technical terms, it is unlikely to be viable. Countries whose state sovereignty is threatened would cease their co-operation with international institutions, resulting in the fragmentation of the international community.

Concluding Remarks

I completely agree that the area of ethnic relations should not be neglected by liberal theory. Such issues as minority protection, the prevention and elimination of discrimination, conflict resolution, multiculturalism, and immigration policies contain a set of controversies and puzzles worthy of the deepest attention. As many of these issues are of crucial practical importance, attempts to put forward new normative guidelines or models based on liberal principles are very useful and welcome.

Nevertheless, my opinion regarding Kymlicka's initiative is that it appears unsuccessful, for the following reasons. Although Kymlicka addresses some of the problems that are created or aggravated by ethnonationalist doctrines or policies, his proposals for a solution are themselves based on the same or similar logic and language. The author also misuses generalizations and adheres to some disputable

interpretations. Not everything, particularly in the area of 'ethnic relations', happens by virtue of some normative requirements; many things should be considered a matter of fact and not of principle. In some spheres, such as ethnic relations, universal or stereotypical prescriptions and solutions appear to be invalid too often. To my mind, such attempts would be fruitful only under certain preconditions, some of which I have tried to formulate in this paper.

In addition, one should not advocate a transition from position A to position B when the outcome of the transition is doubtful or its cost is knowingly higher than the benefits of position B. Is it useful to call the marginal position of minority languages and cultures an injustice when inequality is a permanent feature of each society and granting status to another minority language is impossible? One might criticize the popular model of multiculturalism—that is, the mainstream culture in the public domain and marginal cultures in the private sphere—but the model is honest and realistic. What is wrong with solving concrete problems, such as making the life of people belonging to minority cultures more socially, culturally, and psychologically comfortable, instead of misleading people?

When confronted with several solutions, one should opt for that one which is most flexible and does not potentially exclude other options. Imagine two completely different strategies. One selects some 'non-state nations' from a variety of culturally distinct groups and grants them a privileged status that raises their languages and cultures to the societal level. The other provides persons belonging to minorities more comfortable living conditions within a common society. If the first strategy is put forward as a normative requirement, it would lead to confrontation, making any positive output doubtful. The second strategy, however, does not exclude the development of a marginal language into a societal one under suitable conditions and with the consensus of the parties involved.

NOTES

1. An ethnic group is seen in statistical terms by governments, which institutionalize the groups through such mechanisms as censuses and registers.
2. An anthropologist might say that such organizations simultaneously construct these interests.
3. Democratic choice by the grassroots is not completely free and fair. It depends on the institutional framework within which elections are held and the ways in which the agenda was set.

4. This term was first used by Anthony Smith. See his *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1983, 2nd edn) 64.
5. According to the 1989 USSR Census, the so-called 'titular nationalities' of the autonomous republics in Russia had, on average, a 42% share of those republics' population. (There are 21 such republics in the Russian Federation.) Russians constituted another 42% and the other ethnic groups accounted for 16%. Is it possible for a liberal theorist, not to mention a pragmatic politician, to talk about the autonomous regions as the 'property' of their titular nations? None of the local languages—the only probable exception being Tatar—is developed enough to substitute in the short term for Russian without violence, administrative coercion, and harsh restrictions.