

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE NORWEGIAN STATE IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF MINORITIES

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ABSTRACT:

SINCE ITS FORMATION AS A STATE, THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF NORWAY HAS BEEN ITS HOMOGENEITY. NORWAY HAS ALWAYS BEEN ECONOMICALLY STABLE, THEREFORE THE FINANCIAL CRISIS DID NOT AFFECT THE COUNTRY THAT MUCH. MOREOVER, NOT BEING A MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION HELPED NORWAY ESCAPE THE PROBLEMS THAT CAUSED THE DISRUPTION OF THE ECONOMIC COURSE AT CONTINENTAL AND GLOBAL LEVEL. THIS STABILITY ALONG WITH THE BENEFITS, SECURITY AND WELFARE HAVE MADE NORWAY A POPULAR DESTINATION FOR IMMIGRANTS, WHO DECIDED TO FIND OPPORTUNITIES AND START A NEW LIFE, IGNORING THE UNFAVORABLE LOCATION AND CLIMATE. WITH THIS RAPID GROWTH OF THE MINORITY POPULATION, THE STATE FACED NEW ISSUES SUCH AS INTEGRATION, CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND IMMIGRATION, THAT HAVE BECOME CENTRAL TOPICS OF DISCUSSION. NORWAY HAD TO FIND SOLUTIONS AND SHAPE POLICIES IN ORDER TO PREVENT DISCRIMINATION AND GUARANTEE EQUAL RIGHTS, FREEDOMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS DIVERSE POPULATION.

THE PRESENT STUDY INTENDS TO ANALYZE THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE NORWEGIAN STATE IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF MINORITIES, TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THEIR RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS, AS WELL AS THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-DISCRIMINATION, HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY.

KEYWORDS: MINORITIES, INTEGRATION, CULTURAL DIVERSITY, NON-DISCRIMINATION, IMMIGRATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that Norway has always been a stable and homogenous state, based on economic, political, social and cultural development, following the principle of nationalism. It was a society with a small number of people, inoculated with the idea of unity and the feeling of an entity. Moreover, being under foreign occupation for a long period of time, it developed a sense of fear and rejection towards a possible new invasion.

Before the First World War an important part of the Norwegians decided to emigrate. Later on, this trend has changed and Norway has started to receive immigrants. However,

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when this phenomenon started to spread, the government restricted immigration, the only ways to enter the country were as a family reunion or as refugees.² Norway is not an EU member state, however it signed the Schengen agreement on free movement, and thus, the number of immigrants has increased considerably with the EU enlargement in 2004. Currently most immigrants are Poles (60,000) Swedes (34,000) and Muslims (180,000).³

THE NORWEGIAN STATE AND ITS MINORITIES

Between 1995 and 2011, the number of immigrants in Norway tripled to 600,000 in a population of 5 million.⁴ Thus, the state had to face new challenges, such as the integration of immigrants and a coherent policy to regulate this process, a difficult thing to achieve for a society which has always been consistent. However, the Norwegian state sought to create a framework to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens without any discrimination. To achieve solidarity and cohesion among its inhabitants, several measures were required:

- Strengthening unity and citizenship: government should ensure equal treatment for all members of society
- Promoting diversity in a Norwegian framework of values: national identity that is not based on ethnic identity must be credible to all citizens; cultural and religious diversity should support and not undermine the fundamental values associated with the Norwegian society
- Representing diversity: the state must ensure minority representation in important positions in politics, bureaucracy, media, academia, healthcare, education etc. Also, immigrants should be encouraged to participate actively in public life through volunteering, sport activities or employment
- Prevention of discrimination: ethnic segregation trends in the labor market must be prevented, and anti-discrimination legislation should be implemented.⁵

In the case of Norway, national minorities include Kvens, Jews, Romani and Roma, who have become minorities after the migration phenomenon. Regarding ethnic minorities, they are few, the only representative being the Sami minority recognized also as indigenous people. There are about 15,000 Kvens, 1,500-2,000 Jews, 2,000-3,000 Romani and 400 Roma. The number of the Sami is uncertain, but is believed to be around 50,000.⁶

The Sami people is the only indigenous people of Norway, and at the same time, an ethnic minority. It lives on the territory of four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, the largest number being in Norway. The Sami speak their own language with many dialects, have traditions and specific values. Currently, the Sami language is recognized as an official language alongside Norwegian, with the Sami minority benefitting from a number of rights and freedoms, but things were not always like this.

Since the 16th century, there was a strong rivalry between Denmark-Norway, Sweden and Russia for the territory occupied by the Sami. In 1848, the Norwegian Parliament decided to introduce the Norwegianization process, urging the government to consider an integration system for the Sami.

² Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway* (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013), 4.

³ Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*, 4-5.

⁴ Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*, 1.

⁵ Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*, 1.

⁶ Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*, 3.

The Norwegianization period began in 1851, with the introduction of the fund for the promotion of the Norwegian language in the Sami region.⁷ By 1880, we can speak of a transition period, in which the Sami language was still used in education. However, the tendency to restrict the Sami language was obvious. In 1880, the hard Norwegianization period began. This was confirmed by the Law of 1889 on primary education, which stated that the language of instruction is Norwegian.⁸

Also, this policy was extended to other areas such as: communication, media, agriculture, etc. An example would be the famous Land Act (1902)⁹, which stipulates that the only persons eligible to receive land are the Norwegian citizens, and only those who speak, read and write in Norwegian. The Sami language was forbidden in schools, and children were taught and supervised by teachers who only spoke Norwegian.

In the late 1930s, the minority policy has become more permissive regarding the Sami. The Sami language was introduced in schools, initially as a second language.¹⁰

However, only in the '50s, the policy towards the Sami has been revised. Two committees were created, one for cultural issues and other for legal issues. Thus, in 1987, the Sami Act was passed and in 1992 the Law on the Sami language entered into force, ensuring the equal status with the Norwegian language.

The Norwegian Government established a framework for the Sami to preserve and develop their language, culture, customs and values, reflected in art. 110 of the Norwegian Constitution (1988) and the provisions of the Sami Act (1987): "It is the responsibility of the state to create the conditions for the Sami people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life."¹¹

The Sami Act provides special rights for the Sami, such as:

- the Sami population has a parliament called the Sami Parliament, elected by and among the Sami;
- the Sami people have the right to choose the activity field of the Parliament;
- the Sami and Norwegian languages have equal status in Norway;
- the Sami people have special rights on reindeer herding.¹²

Norway has also committed itself to protect the rights of the Sami with the ratification of various international agreements, especially art. 27 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that "in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language"¹³ and the ILO Convention no. 169 on indigenous peoples, which states that indigenous peoples should have the right to determine their own economic, social and cultural development, to preserve their identity, to benefit from confessional freedom and to have access to their land and resources.

⁷ Oystein Steinlien, *The Sami Law: A Change of Norwegian Government Policy toward the Sami Minority?*, Tromsø University, 2.

⁸ Steinlien, *The Sami Law: A Change of Norwegian Government Policy toward the Sami Minority?*, 3.

⁹ Steinlien, *The Sami Law: A Change of Norwegian Government Policy toward the Sami Minority?*, 3.

¹⁰ Jon Todal, "Minorities with a Minority: Language and the School in the Sami Areas of Norway", in *Indigenous Community- Based Education*, Stephen May, (UK: Short Run Press, 1999), 128.

¹¹ "Constitution of Norway, Article 110 a", available at: <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/The-Constitution/The-Constitution/>, accessed June 14, 2014.

¹² "The Sami Act", available at: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/doc/laws/acts/the-sami-act-.html?id=449701>, accessed June 14, 2014.

¹³ "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 27", available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>, accessed June 15, 2014.

Moreover, the Sami people benefit from the support of a Sami Parliament dealing with the Sami social, cultural and economic issues.

However, the fight for rights was not easy. The event that intensified the Sami ethnic struggle was the conflict regarding the construction of a hydroelectric plant on the Sami traditional territory, known as the Alta Controversy. The Norwegian authorities decided to build a hydroelectric plant in the Finnmark region. The local community saw this as a threat, destroying important parts of their territory. Consequently, they organized a protest movement. The reindeer herders sued the Norwegian state in order to stop the project, have blocked the access and organized numerous demonstrations and protests, leading to a hunger strike in front of the Parliament.¹⁴ The Sami chained themselves at the construction site, but the protesters were removed by force. They also used explosives to sabotage the construction, but the hydroelectric plant was built. However, the Sami intelligent step was the translation of the problem at a global level by establishing a link with the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.¹⁵ Because of the international publicity given to this case, the Norwegian State had to recognize the Sami rights to preserve their traditional territory and their cultural, linguistic and religious heritage.

Another significant minority of Norway is represented by the Kvens, descendants of Finnish immigrants. Their immigration to Norway took place in two periods: 1720-1820, when the Finns moved in the basins and fjords of Finnmark and Tromsø and 1820-1890, when they occupied the coastal areas of Finnmark due to the development of the fishing industry.¹⁶

Initially, the immigrants were welcomed by the Norwegian state, only to be later included together with the Sami people in the Norwegianization process, being considered a risk to national security. The Kvens benefited from the development of the Sami consciousness, their struggle for recognition and fight against assimilation, organizing themselves in order to obtain the status of national minority and the protection of language and culture.

Another significant minority are the Jews, who were banned by the Constitution of 1814.¹⁷ Later on, the ban was lifted and the Jews were integrated in the Norwegian society as citizens until the Second World War, when during the Nazi occupation the majority were deported. Currently, the Jews in Norway are integrated in the society, working in different areas and enjoying rights and freedoms. Also, the Norwegian state decided to grant compensations for the Jews persecuted during the war. However, some Norwegian Muslims lead anti-Semitic practices, as evidenced by the attack on the synagogue of Oslo, in 2006.¹⁸

The Romani, a minority group different from the Roma, are descendants of interracial marriages between Roma and the poor. They speak their own language, Romani, a Norwegian mixed with Romanes (the language of the Roma), work as artisans and were quite numerous until 1930 when they began to be persecuted by the Norwegian state.¹⁹ In order to educate and civilize them, they were taken to camps, using even the though method

¹⁴ Robert Paine, *Dam a River, Damn a People? Saami (Lapp) Livelihood and the Alta/Kautokeino Hydro-Electric Project and the Norwegian Parliament*, (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1982), 20.

¹⁵ David Turton, Julia Gonzalez, *Cultural Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Europe*, (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1999), 44.

¹⁶ Einar Niemi, *Den finske kolonisasjon av Nordkalotten- forløp og årsaker*, 1978, 49-70.

¹⁷ Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*, 3.

¹⁸ "Oslo Synagogue Shooting",

http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/6343/men_charged_with_terrorism_after_oslo_synagogue_shooting, accessed June 16, 2014.

¹⁹ Turton, Gonzalez, *Cultural Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Europe*, 45.

of forced sterilization to eradicate the race. Currently, the Romani consider themselves Norwegians, but are seeking to obtain compensations for past mistreatment.²⁰

The Roma, one of the most controversial minorities of Europe, is a relatively new minority in Norway. The main problem of this group is the high degree of illiteracy and poverty, many of them living from social assistance. The Norwegian state tries to avoid discrimination, to ensure equal opportunities for all members of the society, to find a place for the Roma in the Norwegian system, by initiating a program for Roma inclusion through education, employment and health care, but this is a difficult thing to do since the Roma is a minority that usually opposes integration.

However, the recent debates are oriented towards another group that has caused so many controversies, namely the Muslims, especially after the 9/11 events in the USA and those of 22 July 2011, when the extremist Anders Breivik killed 77 people and injured many others in a terrorist attack for the protection and cleansing of Norway from Islamism.²¹ Moreover, even the leader of the party that had Breivik as a member, the Progress Party, said in 2007 that "not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims."²²

The minority issues faced by the Norwegian state due to this rapid growth of the population have become a central concern for the Norwegian policy system, ensuring equality and diversity at the same time being a challenge. One step was the employment of minorities, causing reactions and complaints from the Norwegian population, threatened by unemployment and lower wages, leading to discrimination issues. Often, the media intensifies this resentment among Norwegians, the majority of crimes being associated with the immigrants.

CONCLUSIONS

As we can observe from the above-mentioned examples, Norway has successful models, but also failed integration projects. Currently, the main focus are the Muslims, but this might change. The growing number of the Roma could cause new problems, challenges and controversies in a country based on homogeneity. The Roma is a minority that usually refuses and resists integration, which is obvious in the past Norwegian policies that have failed. In other words, old Norway founded on the principle of unity and homogeneity must learn to adapt to the conditions and realities of new Norway, based on increasing diversity.

²⁰ Turton, Gonzalez, *Cultural Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Europe*, 45-46.

²¹ "Norway massacre: A timeline of the attacks that horrified a nation" <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/9495025/Norway-massacre-A-timeline-of-the-attacks-that-horrified-a-nation.html>, accessed June 16, 2014.

²² Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*, 11.

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