



## EUROPE, DIVERSITY AND MINORITIES

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### Abstract

Appreciating diversity and protecting minorities is not a given and has become a topic of global relevance, primarily for legal, ethical and practical (security) reasons. International treaties were the means for protecting minority groups in the 19th and early 20th century, until the events of WWII made it clear that collective rights did not sufficiently and effectively protect individuals that did not belong to the majority. Hence the global shift towards granting the fundamental rights of the individual.

Given the great diversity of nations and people within Europe, the handling of diversity and minorities has been an important issue throughout the European integration process. The enlargement of the EU towards Eastern Europe has proven to be particularly challenging because repression and ethnic conflicts were more common in the ex-Soviet Union than in Western Europe. As the EU intends to be an inclusive, peaceful, pluralistic, and democratic society under the motto 'Unity in Diversity', the protection of minority rights has become one of the accession criteria. Whilst there is no harmonised EU legislation protecting minorities, the EU and most of the European countries are involved in the promotion and monitoring of human rights through numerous forms of international cooperation, initiatives (e.g. the creation of a European Minority Rights System) and the adoption of international treaties like the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Most importantly, the European zeitgeist, which regards diversity as being enriching, allows for a constructive dialogue that can be regarded as world leading and that is essential in a context of diversity as there are intrinsically no 'one-size-fits-all' solutions for granting the protection of national minorities

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