

BOOK REVIEW

NATIONAL MINORITIES AND THE EUROPEAN NATION-STATES SYSTEM

*Name of the Author: Jennifer Jackson Preece,
Publishing Company: Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon
Street, Oxford OX” 6DP. 208 pages
Publishing Year: 1999
ISBN: 9780198294375*

*İdris DEMİR**

In the field of social sciences there are some concepts which occupy a vitally important-major, not minor-seat in the policy formulation considerations of almost all states not only for a short decade, but for a long period of time. “Minority issues” fall into this category. In the field of social sciences scholars and reviewers sometimes tend to underestimate the importance and the effect of older studies in the search of forming new products. It seems that “National Minorities and the European Nation States System” should be regarded in this perspective.

The book, “National Minorities and the European Nation-States System” focuses on the resulting struggle between national minority rights and sovereign state rights—both as a practical dilemma confronting European international organizations and as a normative problem for international relations theory. The author puts it in a phrase as:

“This book will interrogate the following question which are central to an international society analysis of the problem of national minorities.

(1) Why are national minorities and considerations regarding their status—which, as sub state groups, would initially appear to be subjects of domestic rather than international politics—recurring features of European treaties, conferences and organizations from 1919 onwards?

* Asist. Prof. Dr., Ahi Evran University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations, Kırşehir

(2) How and, more importantly, why has the formulation of national minority rights changed over time?

(3) And, finally, what do these changes suggest about the theory and practice of Europe's nation-state system?"(p.13)

The book consists of an acknowledgment, an abbreviation list, and three main parts namely national minorities in conceptual perspective, national minorities in historical perspective and national minorities in contemporary perspective, a bibliography and an index.

The first part of the book gives the definition of minority and explains how national minorities' problem came into agenda in Europe. In addition it points out that "to be a minority is a matter of fact not of will." The first part also examines the international responses to the problem of National minorities by informing the reader about national minorities in the world.

The second part seeks to identify and summarize most historically significant trends in international minority protection by examining treaties and other elements of international law and diplomacy.

Part three sets global standards for National minority rights provision. Furthermore Jackson Preece gives European standards while arguing that "the minority rights regime that was taking shape in Europe during the early 1990s was unique as composed to earlier periods." She also informs us about the national minority rights enforcement mechanisms.

Jackson Preece, in the first part, surveys the various meanings assigned to "minority" by both international institutions and academic commentators. She initially provides the reader how League of Nations viewed minorities, as "the part of the permanent population of a state, which linked by historical tradition to a determined portion of the territory and having a culture of its own, cannot be confused with the majority of the other subjects because of the difference of race, language, or religion", went on arguing that -in contrast to the League of Nation's geographically confined minorities system- "the United Nations viewed minorities as a part of its global human rights mandate and so felt the necessity to those the term minority into a form that could have universal applicability."

The book mentions about Stoel's definition of minority and Caportorti's definition of minority by making a distinction between "national minorities" and immigrant minorities"(pp.20-21) It also mentions about the views of I.Claude (p.23), Laponce (p.24), Macartney (p.25), Modeen (p.25-26), and Thornberry (pp.26-27). Finally, it identifies the core definition of minority as "a particular kind of community, especially a national or similar community which differs from the predominant group of the state". (p.27)

The first part also concentrates on the recognition of certain rights of national minorities in addition to equal citizenship that would enable them to preserve and promote their ethno national identities in existing states. It focuses on some rights such

as “freedom to speak a national minority language, the right to be educated in this language, the right to form national minority associations, and so forth.” More than this, national minorities themselves may be recognized to possess certain rights as “collectivities.”

In the following part, *National Minorities in Historical Perspective*, Jennifer Jackson Preece examines the political formulation of minorities and how they were viewed in the historical perspective; in the Congress of Westphalia, in the Congress of Vienna, in the Congress of Berlin, in the League of Nation’s system of minority guarantees, and in the Cold War human rights regime. She concludes the second part by the formulation of National minority rights of the Cold War- which is the main trend in dealing with national minority rights- In Europe as “national minority questions during this period were generally either redefined in terms of individual human rights or overlooked all together.”

In the last part, *National Minority Rights in Contemporary Perspective*, the author provides us with her analysis of the emerging post-Cold War minority rights regime. She argues that “the global minimum standard on state conduct specifically directed at national minorities was outlined in article 27 of the International Government on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)” Article 27 stipulated that “in those states in which ethnic religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”

Jennifer Jackson in the last part also informs us about the European standards on minority rights during 1990s in two respects when compared to earlier periods “first, minority questions were once more legitimate subjects of international society. Secondly minority rights were no longer components of a balance of power system where in the great powers of western Europe imposed conditions upon the smaller and weaker states of Central and Eastern Europe that they were themselves unwilling to assume”. In her distinction between Western and Central and Eastern Europe States she went on arguing that “their goal was to encourage democratization and respect for human and national minority rights within Central and East European states by providing both timely expert advice and external mediation to help resolve national minority/majority conflicts at the earliest possible stage and before they began to present any threat to international society.”

In sum, the problem of national minorities is viewed from the perspective of international relations. Minority questions are profoundly national issues, which only get onto the international agenda in exceptional circumstances, only when they begin to threaten order and stability in the states system. By making the analysis stated in the book we can conclude that: national minority rights have always been subservient to national interest and security within states, and to international peace and stability within the society of states. In other words “state sovereignty- the organizing principle within and between states- is the trump card in the minority rights game.”

In my view, Jennifer Jackson Preece with her clear vision clarified the complexity of this issue in a detailed way. This book is one of the most comprehensive researches on minority rights issue. Minority rights issue is one of the most debatable concepts among member states of the European Union. Therefore, the book “National Minorities and the European Nation States System”, which exemplifies the norms about national minorities in Europe, should not only be read by the readers who are interested in this specific topic, but also should be used as a textbook by students of international relations and sociology in general.

Furthermore, it should be indicated that the book occupies a particular importance for Turkish scholars, students, academics, policy makers and politicians. It should not be forgotten that Turkey, as a candidate country of the European Union, has been trying to accommodate policies and principles in accordance with and in relation to the basic principles and activities of the Union. There are some issues that give a strong hand to Turkey throughout the negotiation process. Issues on energy and agriculture should be regarded in this perspective. However, there are some other issues that require special treatment during the negotiation phase in order not to harm the progressive development of the whole process. Issues on human rights and minorities should be taken into consideration within this category. Being aware of the concept of the national minorities and the way how European nation state system treats the issue under consideration, with no doubt, would provide accurate tools of analysis for Turkish policy makers in accommodating relevant policies and strategies. This, in turn, would contribute heavily to the uninterrupted continuation of the membership process.

Although the definition of the concept of minority shows some differences among the approaches and the constitutions of Turkey and core members of the Union, it is for sure that the awareness of the definition, the way of the treatment of the public and the issue of the accommodation of the relevant policies would be invaluable for Turkish policy makers in pursuing the healthy and progressive development of the negotiation process as a whole. Therefore, “National Minorities and the European Nation States System”, appears out to be a must reading for those who are responsible from the balanced continuation of Turkey’s membership process to the European Union.