



Institute of Advanced Studies **Kőszeg**

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***“Diversity Management, Culture of
Memories and EU integration processes in
the Western Balkans”***

-working paper-

Preface

This paper is the result of several months of research that I conducted at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Kőszeg, Hungary, as a research fellow. Of course, some insights and research were carried out even before I officially began the project. Throughout my academic and professional career, I have frequently engaged with issues of collective memory and the culture of memory, which are interdisciplinary in nature and connected to history, anthropology, multiculturalism, and related social and humanistic disciplines.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the colleagues at IASK, with whom I had constructive discussions and exchanges of opinions and knowledge—not only on topics related to the subject matter—and for their selfless guidance toward certain bibliographic sources. Special thanks to the program director, Jody Jensen, who showed great understanding and allowed for timely interventions regarding certain methodological changes, as well as to the director of IASK, Ferenc Mislivetz, who possesses unlimited capacities for comprehensive academic and political understanding of the context in the Western Balkans and the efforts toward faster EU integration.

This text is currently in the form of a working draft, but I would be very pleased to further develop it into a monograph or another type of scholarly publication.

Dr. Rubin Zemon

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X. Introduction and Theoretical framework

Diversity management and a Culture of Memory are interconnected concepts. Diversity management focuses on creating inclusive environments that value and celebrate differences, while the culture of memory involves presenting and sharing that collective experiences, histories and perspectives of various groups, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the past and the present.

Diversity management refers to organizational strategies and practices aimed at fostering an inclusive work environment that respects and utilizes differences in gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, and other identity categories. It involves proactively managing diversity to create an inclusive climate where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected. Promotes equal opportunities, representation, integration and inclusion of various communities and groups.

Multiculturalism and interculturalism, along with inclusion, integration, ethnic and minority strategies, migration policies, legislation, and various models and practices, constitute the key components and dimensions of effective diversity management. These elements highlight the inherent complexity of diversity management—or more precisely, the regulation and governance of socially significant forms of diversity within complex and pluralistic contemporary societies.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize both the short-term and long-term significance of adequately regulating and managing social diversity for achieving peace, stability, and sustainable development in diverse social environments.

As with many complex concepts and social phenomena, there is no single, universally accepted definition of diversity management—that is, the regulation and administration of socially relevant differences and asymmetries. Instead, the scholarly literature, political frameworks, and public discourse offer multiple definitions that vary according to the specific perspectives, goals, and interests of the authors or institutions that employ them.

In this paper we will use the following definition of Mitja Žagar¹, as one of the most comprehensive and inclusive one:

“..... [W]e could describe diversity management as a set of strategies, policies, concepts and approaches, programmes, measures and activities that should ensure equality, equal possibilities, participation and inclusion in all spheres of social, economic and political life (both public and private life) for all individuals and communities within a society, especially

¹ Žagar, Mitja. 2006/7 – ©2008. Diversity Management and Integration: From Ideas to Concepts. European Yearbook of Minority Issues, (6), 2006/7: 307-327.

for immigrants, persons belonging to national and other minorities, marginalised individuals, minorities and other distinct communities. This should be done in a way that would enable the preservation, coexistence and development of their specific characteristics, cultures and identities, but also their interaction, cooperation, transformation and development of new cultures and identities. Consequently, measures, programmes and activities should be developed and carried out that, on the one hand, prevent social exclusion, negative stereotyping, discrimination, racism and xenophobia and similar negative phenomena, and, on the other hand, stimulate and promote tolerance and equal cooperation and inclusion, intercultural education and better knowledge of existing diversities, voluntary integration based on the recognition and respect of diversities and distinct identities, economic and social development, etc. Speaking specifically of integration measures, programmes and activities for immigrants, which was the initial focus of integration policies, should include assistance immediately upon their arrival in the host country, training and teaching of official languages and other languages, the provision of information relevant for immigrants, as well as training and educational programmes that can assist their integration and promote their belonging in the receiving society... ”

In a context of the diversity management we need to make a brief description of the multiculturalism theory. The term *multiculturalism* appears in academic and policy literature with three distinct meanings. First, it is used descriptively to denote a social reality—often referred to as *cultural pluralism*—that recognizes the coexistence of diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural groups within a society. Second, it functions as a normative concept for the organization of society, commonly framed as *the politics of difference*, *identity politics*, or *the politics of recognition*. Third, it serves as a catch-all term encompassing a range of governmental policies, such as language integration initiatives, the support of cultural festivals, community centers, and other mechanisms designed to foster cultural inclusion.

The descriptive use of multiculturalism is generally uncontroversial. Societies are, and always have been, composed of individuals and groups with differing religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, worldviews, and ways of life. However, acknowledging this diversity does not necessarily entail a commitment by states to the normative principles of multiculturalism. The normative approach emphasizes respect for cultural differences and advocates for inclusion in public life, countering exclusion and stigmatization. Multicultural theorists argue that state policies inevitably affect members of different cultural groups in distinct ways and, as such, require political philosophy to be re-evaluated through the lens of cultural justice.

Building upon Will Kymlicka’s theoretical contributions—and in collaboration with Magda Opalski—Tomislav Žigmanov defines multiculturalism as “*the totality of efforts by state or political authorities to recognize the identities of ethno-national groups in the public sphere, as well as various measures taken to accommodate existing cultural differences within a given society.*”

Within the discourse on liberal democracy and multiculturalism, a central tension arises between two competing policy paradigms: the *politics of equal civil rights* and the *politics of difference*. While the former seeks to eliminate discrimination by promoting a form of equality that is “blind to difference,” the latter calls for a redefinition of non-discrimination through differentiated treatment that acknowledges individual and cultural particularities. In this conflict, where one perspective prioritizes cultural preservation and the other emphasizes individual rights, neutrality becomes untenable.

As Charles Taylor argues, both misrecognition and non-recognition can inflict profound harm by reinforcing subordination and denying the authenticity of individuals and groups. Taylor illustrates this with the example of African Americans, who, subjected for generations to denigrating stereotypes imposed by white society, have internalized damaging self-perceptions—a powerful mechanism of social domination. He asserts that recognition is a fundamental human need, relevant on both intimate and societal levels. This understanding has brought the politics of recognition to the forefront of contemporary political and philosophical debates. Identities, Taylor maintains, are shaped not by rigid, preordained roles but through open, reciprocal dialogue.

French political analyst Andrea Semprini identifies three foundational questions raised by multiculturalism: (1) the question of diversity; (2) the rights of minorities in relation to the majority; and (3) the issue of identity and its recognition. He emphasizes that categorizing the different models of multiculturalism across developed societies is challenging, as they involve overlapping concerns in both public and private spheres. Drawing on John Rex's conceptual framework, the *public sphere* is typically associated with a singular, universal culture rooted in the principle of individual equality. This encompasses domains such as law, politics, economics, and education—particularly when educational content aims to cultivate life skills and civic competencies. Conversely, the *private sphere* is where cultural diversity is more freely expressed, encompassing ethical education, religious beliefs, and primary socialization.

Will Kymlicka's liberal multicultural model proposes the institutional recognition and protection of cultural communities within a broader political framework, with the aim of preserving their distinct identities. This model has proven resilient in addressing the practical challenges of cultural pluralism in democratic societies. Kymlicka advances a liberal-democratic theory of ethno-cultural justice, critiquing both classical political liberalism and ethno-cultural neutrality, particularly as manifested in U.S. policy. He advocates for the protection of cultural practices and institutions that sustain minority identities, rather than the preservation of group boundaries per se.

Kymlicka's model envisions a more equitable distribution of public space, allowing minority communities to integrate into a sufficiently inclusive *societal culture*. This concept refers to a territorially concentrated culture grounded in a shared language and institutional framework that enables participation in a full range of social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic activities—across both public and private domains.

While multiculturalism has been widely adopted in democratic societies as a framework for managing cultural diversity, it has also attracted substantial criticism from a range of ideological, philosophical, and practical perspectives. These critiques question its theoretical foundations, practical implementation, and broader social consequences.

A central **critique of multiculturalism** is that it promotes **cultural fragmentation** rather than unity, potentially undermining **social cohesion**. Critics argue that by emphasizing group differences, multiculturalism can lead to the formation of isolated communities or “parallel societies,” weakening shared national identity and solidarity.

Bhikhu Parekh has acknowledged this tension, noting that if not managed carefully, multicultural policies may create a sense of division rather than integration. Critics on the **center-right** (e.g., David Cameron, Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy) have declared multiculturalism a failure, suggesting it has not encouraged integration but rather separation and mutual suspicion.

Some liberal theorists criticize multiculturalism for **prioritizing group rights** over **individual rights**. From this view, multicultural policies may violate liberal principles of equality and autonomy by reinforcing group-based norms, some of which may be **illiberal** or **patriarchal**.

Brian Barry, for instance, argues that multiculturalism is incompatible with liberal egalitarianism, because it allows group rights that may limit individual freedoms, especially for vulnerable members within those groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ individuals).

This critique warns against **cultural relativism**, which can result in tolerance of harmful practices under the guise of cultural preservation (e.g., forced marriage, gender inequality, or resistance to secular education). Multiculturalism has also been criticized for **essentializing culture**, treating cultural groups as static, homogenous, and internally coherent. This can result in the **reification of identities**, where complex, evolving identities are reduced to simplistic categories.

Ayelet Shachar highlights the “paradox of multicultural vulnerability,” where multicultural recognition can inadvertently **empower group elites**, who then define the boundaries of culture and enforce conformity within the group.

This leads to what critics call “**minority within minority**” problems—where multiculturalism empowers communities at the expense of dissenting voices within them. Critics argue that multiculturalism has failed to **adequately promote integration**, particularly in European contexts. Rather than encouraging mutual adaptation, it has sometimes been associated with **segregationist policies** that allow immigrants and minorities to live apart from the mainstream society.

In France and Germany, public debates have focused on the **perceived failure of Muslim integration**, with multiculturalism blamed for encouraging separateness rather than civic participation.

Opponents claim that multicultural policies offer **symbolic recognition** (such as cultural festivals or bilingual signage) without requiring real social or economic participation, thereby **perpetuating inequality**.

Another critique targets the **instrumental use** of multiculturalism by states and institutions for **political legitimacy** without addressing structural inequalities. Critics refer to this as “**happy diversity**” or “**corporate multiculturalism**”, where diversity is celebrated in rhetoric but **depoliticized and commodified** in practice.

Sara Ahmed critiques institutional diversity work as a “non-performative”—something that is declared but not substantively enacted.

Cultural recognition is often **disconnected from social justice**, allowing governments and institutions to avoid more challenging commitments to redistribution or anti-discrimination reforms.

Post-9/11 and amid rising populism, multiculturalism has come under fire in **national security debates**, with some claiming that it has **enabled extremism** by tolerating isolationist or anti-democratic views in the name of cultural respect.

This perspective is most evident in the discourse around **Muslim communities in Europe**, where multiculturalism is accused of failing to uphold liberal democratic norms.

However, critics of this critique warn that it often relies on **racialized and Islamophobic narratives**, and can be used to justify **assimilationist** or **repressive** policies.

The critiques of multiculturalism raise valid concerns about identity politics, social integration, and the limits of cultural recognition. However, many scholars argue that these problems stem not from multiculturalism *per se*, but from its **inconsistent application, weak institutional support, or misunderstanding** of its goals.

Rather than abandoning multiculturalism, some propose **rethinking it**—through models such as **interculturalism, inclusive citizenship, or deliberative democratic pluralism**—that aim

to balance cultural recognition with shared civic values, mutual adaptation, and structural inclusion.

Culture of memory refers to the ways in which societies and institutions remember, represent, and transmit collective memories of the past—particularly those involving traumatic or controversial events. It encompasses the stories, experiences, and histories of diverse groups and plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals understand their identities, their place in society, and their relationships with others.

A strong culture of memory ensures that the contributions and experiences of all groups are acknowledged and preserved, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. Examples of cultivating cultural memory include celebrating cultural festivals, preserving historical sites associated with marginalized communities, and incorporating diverse narratives into educational curricula.

George Orwell famously observed, “*Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.*” This quote underscores the significance of the politics of collective memory and the culture of memory—issues that are deeply political, cultural, and social in nature, and thus demand the close attention of scholars in the social sciences and humanities. Memory studies has emerged as a robust, multidisciplinary field, bridging disciplines such as sociology, history, philosophy, media studies, and communication. One key area of empirical focus is the role of collective memory in the creation, legitimation, institutionalization, and maintenance of national identities and nation-states. Another central concern involves grappling with difficult and violent pasts, collective traumas, and political struggles over how the past is defined and remembered. More recently, scholarship on the politics of memory has expanded to explore transnational and global dimensions of the culture of memory, highlighting how memories cross borders and shape identities beyond the nation-state. (Zubrzycki G. & Wozny A., 2020:176)

The study of collective memory occupies a central place in the scholarship on nationalism. In its early phase, this literature primarily focused on demystifying nationalist claims of ancient, continuous national histories in order to highlight the modernity of the nation. Since the nation emerged as a new form of political organization in the 19th century, considerable effort was required to legitimize and naturalize it. Historians played a crucial role in this process, crafting new narratives and adopting new modes of storytelling. The historical narrative shifted away from dynasties and courtly intrigues to portray the nation itself as the central protagonist, progressing steadily through time (Anderson, 1983). In this context, historians were often seen as nation-builders, with some even elevated to the symbolic status of “fathers of the nation.”

The unique political needs of each country shaped the construction of new national narratives. However, in order to foster public attachment to the nation, it was necessary to create a new form of national collective memory across different contexts. In their seminal work *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Ranger and Hobsbawm convincingly demonstrated how states and government institutions manufactured new customs—often with fabricated links to the past—to establish this collective memory. They argued that much of what is popularly remembered as national history was, in fact, invented by self-interested actors between 1870 and 1914. During a period marked by significant social and political upheaval, the cultivation of loyalty to the newly formed nation-states and their ruling elites became a central objective.

The commemorative frenzy in France was explored by Pierre Nora (1984) and his collaborators, though from a Durkheim's rather than a Marxist perspective. They meticulously documented what they termed *lieux de mémoire*—symbolic sites of memory—through which the French government and society engaged in the ritualized veneration of the nation. According to Nora, the rise of commemorative practices in the 20th century was linked to the decline of *milieux de mémoire*—environments of lived, organic memory. This shift marked a transition from lived experience to symbolic representation. Nora's work therefore moved beyond the initial formation of national identity to offer a more reflective—and often nostalgic—critique of the condition of identity and collective memory in contemporary society.

Collective amnesia is just as essential to the construction of national identity as shared memory. French historian Ernest Renan famously asserted in his 1882 lecture *What Is a Nation?* that “*forgetting [and] historical error are... crucial... in the creation of a nation*”. As early as the late nineteenth century, Renan recognized that national unity often requires the selective erasure or distortion of the past.

Benedict Anderson echoes this idea, arguing that the discursive transformation of the modern nation into an “old” familial community—a fraternity that has overcome its internal divisions—is made possible by misremembering and then downplaying past conflicts between opposing groups as mere fratricides. Ultimately, it is this sense of familial love, not necessarily hatred of the “other”, that “*allows so many millions of people, not so much to kill, but to willingly die for [the nation]*.” This emotional and symbolic framework is central to understanding how nations forge deep, enduring attachments among their citizens.

As multiculturalism and identity politics gained political prominence in Western societies—and as postmodernist and postcolonial perspectives gained scholarly influence—the field of memory studies began shifting its focus toward the forgotten or marginalized histories of women, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, and other disenfranchised groups.

This shift gave rise to an important branch of nationalism and memory studies that, while less state-centered, remained deeply attuned to questions of power and political dynamics. Scholars began to explore oral histories, folk traditions, and material culture as vital repositories of suppressed communal memory, offering alternative narratives that challenged dominant historical accounts and enriched our understanding of national identity. (Zubrzycki G. & Wozny A., 2020:178)

Cultural memory theory is a framework, which elucidates the relationship between the past and the present. At its most basic level, it explains why, how, and with what results certain pieces of information are remembered. (Dinter M.... 2023: 1) Maurice Halbwachs, emphasizes that remembering of certain pieces of information are preserved beyond the individual level. Maurice Halbwachs' theory of *collective memory* laid the foundational groundwork for the later development of the concept of *cultural memory* in three important ways. First, he redefined shared memory as the product of lived experience rather than biological inheritance, shifting the discourse on memory from a naturalistic or biological framework to a cultural and social one. Second, he emphasized that “every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others,” arguing that individual experiences are not isolated but instead shaped through social interaction, ultimately giving rise to memories shared by entire communities. Finally, Halbwachs highlighted the crucial role of symbolic stimuli—such as physical objects, monuments, or rituals—in triggering communal recall. In short, his theory demonstrated that collective memory (a) can be deliberately constructed, (b) is embedded within social networks, and (c) is sustained through meaningful cultural artefacts.

Ron Eyerman (2002) in his study explores the formation of the African-American identity through the theory of cultural trauma. The trauma in question is slavery, not as an institution or as personal experience, but as collective memory: a pervasive remembrance that grounded a people's sense of itself. Unlike psychological or physical trauma, which involves an individual experiencing a wound and intense emotional distress, **cultural trauma** refers to a collective rupture in meaning and identity—a disruption in the social fabric that affects a group with a shared sense of cohesion. Crucially, not every member of the group needs to have directly experienced the traumatic event; what matters is the group's recognition of the trauma as significant to its collective identity. **National trauma**, as a specific form of cultural trauma, is marked by its enduring impact: it resists closure, repeatedly resurfaces in individual and collective consciousness, and becomes deeply embedded in the group's memory. To be fully understood and integrated into a nation's self-conception, such trauma must be publicly acknowledged, interpreted, and debated. In this sense, national trauma requires not just remembrance but also ongoing processes of narrative construction and collective meaning-making. (Eyerman R. 2002: 2).

XI. Balkans in the context of the Collective Stereotypes, Traumas and Memories.

In the context of achieving cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity in the Balkans, the national idea and the rise of nationalism often served as instruments of exclusion and violence. Even the Austrian Foreign Minister warned in 1853 that “*the establishment of new states according to the borders of nationality is the most dangerous of all utopian schemes*” (Mazower, 2000: 149). As new nation-states emerged, they brought with them pressing questions regarding the status of minorities—initially religious, but later also ethnic and national. This included concerns over the protection of minority religions, languages, and cultures, as well as their broader social and political rights.

In 1997, Marija Todorova, a professor at the University of Illinois, published *Imagining the Balkans*, a work that sparked intense debate across academic, political, journalistic, and public circles. Her study examined the often contradictory—and predominantly negative—representations of the Balkans in Western discourse. Todorova developed the concept of **Balkanism**, or the “nesting of Balkanisms,” building on Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism and Milica Bakić-Hayden’s “nested Orientalism.” She explained that the core idea of *Imagining the Balkans* is the existence of a discourse—Balkanism—that stereotypes the region in ways that are deeply political. As Todorova stated, “*The central idea of Imagining the Balkans is that there is a discourse, which we call Balkanism, which creates a stereotype of the Balkans, and politics is significantly and organically intertwined with this discourse.*” This assertion, she noted, often causes discomfort, especially in political contexts. One persistent stereotype within this discourse is the tendency to absolve Western Europe of responsibility for Balkan instability by shifting blame to the Ottoman legacy and, by extension, to Turkey—often cast as the perennial scapegoat (Todorova, 1997: 276). A key term that has emerged from this discourse is “**Balkanization**”—commonly used to describe the fragmentation of larger political or geographic entities into smaller, often unstable nation-states. Interestingly, this term did not originate during the long process of imperial decline, as the Balkan states separated from the Ottoman Empire. Instead, the term *Balkanization* was coined after World War I, when Albania became the last of the Balkan nations to be added to the 19th-century map of new states (Todorova, 1997: 46).

After World War I, scholars and politicians began using the term to describe the geopolitical disintegration of regions into small, politically unstable states—often referencing the Balkan Wars as a case in point. A more comprehensive interpretation came in 1921 from Paul Scott Mowrer, European correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*. Analyzing the postwar conditions in Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Greece, he concluded that the region had become “Balkanized.” His rationale was that this area, marked by a “hopeless mixture of races,” was populated by economically and politically weak, conspiratorial, fearful, and easily manipulated small states—frequently driven by internal passions and external pressures. This aspect of foreign interference in the domestic affairs of small states later prompted Michael Foucher to define Balkanization in 1994 as “*the constant involvement of foreign powers (Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, and Great Britain) aimed at protecting or establishing their spheres of interest*” (Todorova, 1997: 49).

The terms and discourses associated with the “Balkans” reflect broader processes of constructing European identity by defining the “Other” as Oriental—unpredictable, dangerous, chaotic, lazy, primitive, cruel, and uncooperative (Muršić & Jezernik, 2007: 7). Yet historical evidence reveals a different picture. For centuries, the Balkans were a site of coexistence,

cooperation, and cultural richness. The region had long-standing traditions of urbanization, classical philosophy, and pre-industrial economic efficiency. Notably, the Balkans embraced multiculturalism well before it became a political ideal in the West. A striking example of this tolerance is found in the year 1492, when the Sephardic Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by the Catholic Church. At that time, the Balkans—then under Ottoman rule—offered a safe haven for the expelled Jewish communities. This act of refuge is a testament to the peninsula’s historical openness to people of different religions, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds (**Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2002: 79–96**).

During the 19th-century processes of “liberalization” and emancipation of so-called “enslaved” peoples, ideals such as tolerance and peaceful coexistence were among the first casualties of the imposition of Western concepts—including liberal democracy, capitalism, and the nation-state. Nationalism, aspirations to construct post-Ottoman empires, and the continuous redrawing of political borders in the Balkans became part of a broader phenomenon commonly referred to as “Balkanization.” Yet, as Muršič and Jezernik (2007: 8) argue, Balkanization should not be understood as the antithesis of modernization, but rather as a direct result of **Europeanization and Westernization**.

The term *Balkan* first appeared in Western literature in 1490, in a memorandum issued by Pope Innocent VIII to the Italian humanist and diplomat Filippo Callimachus. It entered the English language through Frederick Calvert in 1767. In 1808, German geographer Johann August Zeune introduced the term “Balkan Peninsula” in his work *Gea*, describing it as a region separated from the rest of Europe by the long Albanus or Skadar mountain range, known also as the Balkan Mountains or Stara Planina, extending from the Istrian Alps in the northwest to the Black Sea in the east. This notion reinforced the Renaissance-era paradigm of a *Catena Mundi*—a sacred mountain chain stretching from the Pyrenees to the Balkans.

In 1830, French geographer Ami Boué offered a more precise geographical description of the Balkan Mountains, while in the mid-19th century, German author Theobald Fischer proposed the term “Southeast Europe.” As a result, the boundaries of the Balkans remain fluid and contested. Depending on the source, they may encompass all of Southeast Europe or merely the region between the Danube River and the Aegean Sea—sometimes excluding Greece altogether.

The term *Balkans* gained prominence in the first half of the 19th century when it became necessary to define the region more explicitly, particularly as it came to be associated with the Russo-Turkish wars and the region’s strategic importance as the last defensive line before Istanbul until 1877. Prior to this, the area now referred to as the Balkan Peninsula was divided between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires and was typically described in Western sources as part of the *Orient*, *Turkey in Europe*, or by the classical term *Hemus*. Within the Ottoman Empire, these European territories were called *Rumelia*, meaning the “land of the Romans” or the Christian parts of the empire.

For Western travelers and intellectuals of the 18th and 19th centuries, the peoples of Rumelia often functioned as a mirror through which Western Europe constructed its self-image—affirming its own sense of advancement and civility by contrasting itself with the perceived backwardness of the “Other.” In this sense, the Balkans played a crucial role in Europe’s self-definition: **there could be no “European identity” without its imagined opposite—the Balkans**.

In the 18th century, the dominance of absolutist monarchies in Europe and the political power of the Ottoman and Chinese empires even inspired admiration among certain European thinkers for “Oriental” systems of governance. However, the subsequent decline of these empires

and the expansion of European colonialism led to a shift in perspective: from respect to **contempt**, often framed within a discourse of *oriental despotism*, stagnation, and ahistorical development—concepts critiqued later by Edward Said in his foundational work on Orientalism.

During the early 19th century, Romantic nationalism and Classicism in European culture led to renewed interest in the Balkans, seen by some as the cradle of European civilization. The uprisings in Serbia, Wallachia, and Greece caught the imagination of European national romantics. This was especially evident in the philhellenic movements, which garnered widespread support in Britain and France for Greek independence. These efforts ultimately contributed to the establishment of an independent Greek state.

Yet by the mid-19th century, European *Balkanophilia* began to give way to *Balkanophobia*. The national revolutions of the Balkan peoples led to the formation of new states, but also ignited a wave of ethnic and territorial conflicts. Although the influence of the *belle époque* brought urban development and early industrialization to the region, and Balkan societies increasingly followed a path of Europeanization, this process was not without contradictions.

The escalation of the so-called "Eastern Question" after 1875—especially amid great power rivalries—further destabilized the region. Tensions between the emerging Balkan states, coupled with imperial interests, culminated in the 1878 Congress of Berlin. It was there that Otto von Bismarck famously remarked, "*The whole of the Balkans is not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier,*" and ominously predicted that if war were to break out in Europe, "*the reason would be some damn foolish thing in the Balkans.*"

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 were the culmination of that process and met with great reactions in Western opinion, such as the first report of the Carnegie Commission on the Balkans, the journalistic report of Leon Trotsky, etc. While Bismarck predicted that "*if war breaks out in Europe it will be because of a Balkan madness*", the "barrel" of gunpowder exploded in June 1914 when the Austro-Hungarian crown prince Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, setting in motion a chain of events that would lead to the outbreak of World War I. The disintegration of Austria-Hungary and later the Ottoman Empire, as well as the creation of new states, became the reason for the creation of the term "balkanization".

XII. Western Balkan countries and EU integration process

The current political map of Europe—and particularly of the Balkans—reflects the triumph of the *nation-state* paradigm, a project that has persisted through the fragmentation processes accompanying globalization and Europeanization. In this political-historical contest, **cultural pluralism does not appear to be among the victors**. Rather, what has prevailed is the political (and cultural) consolidation of small and medium-sized states, whose national interests—historically and presently—have often come at the expense of lesser-known or marginalized ethnic and cultural communities.

Southeast Europe remains one of the most **ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse** regions on the continent. These diversities are not incidental but rather the **logical outcomes of complex historical trajectories**, including centuries of imperial rule (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian), migration, conflict, and coexistence. As such, the populations of Southeast Europe—and particularly those in the Western Balkans—are marked by enduring pluralities that transcend rigid national borders.

Contemporary liberal democracies, however, continue to struggle with the **integration of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other minority groups**. A fundamental misunderstanding—namely, the failure to distinguish between multi-ethnic diversity as a sociological fact and the need for proactive, equitable governance of that diversity—has often led to interethnic tensions and social conflict. This has been especially evident in the aftermath of communism’s collapse in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, where efforts to establish liberal-democratic institutions were rapidly undermined by violent nationalist conflicts.

Countries such as **Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo** have endured some of the most devastating episodes of ethnic conflict in recent history. These states are now engaged in ongoing, internationally mediated processes of **post-conflict reconstruction**, guided by peace agreements shaped significantly by global and regional actors.

On 30 October 2024 European Union published the “2024 Communication of EU Enlargement Policy”² with a message that It continues to uphold and promote shared values such as democracy, the rule of law, and respect for fundamental rights, while also supporting economic growth. A credible path to EU membership encourages reform and plays a vital role in fostering reconciliation. The Commission has initiated bilateral screening meetings, which are now well underway. Following the Council’s decision confirming that Montenegro had met the interim benchmarks for the rule of law chapters, the intergovernmental conference held on 26 June communicated the closing benchmarks for these chapters. This marked a significant step forward, enabling the provisional closure of negotiating chapters. For Albania and North Macedonia, the screening sessions were completed by the end of 2023. Subsequently, the fundamentals cluster was opened with Albania on 15 October 2024. In March 2024, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In November 2023, the Commission adopted the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. A key component of this plan—the €6 billion Reform and Growth Facility—entered into force on 25 May 2024. The Growth Plan is designed to complement the existing Economic and Investment Plan for the region, aiming to accelerate economic convergence with the EU and advance reforms linked to the core areas of the accession process. The plan outlines a gradual integration of the

² https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2024-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en

Western Balkans into specific sectors of the EU single market, contingent on progress in regional economic integration, alignment with the relevant EU acquis, and the establishment of adequate administrative capacities and procedures. Drawing on the framework of the NextGenerationEU initiative and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Reform and Growth Facility is intended to incentivise key socio-economic and enlargement-related reforms. These reforms will be defined in each beneficiary's ambitious, tailor-made Reform Agenda. Upon satisfactory implementation of reform milestones and compliance with essential conditions, financial disbursements will be made directly to national budgets. These funds will be complemented by targeted investments in the green and digital transitions, private sector development, and human capital, delivered through the Western Balkans Investment Framework.

Montenegro has opened all negotiating chapters, with three provisionally closed. In June 2024, the country reached a significant milestone with a positive assessment confirming it had met the interim benchmarks for the rule of law chapters. The intergovernmental conference held on 26 June paved the way for the provisional closure of additional negotiation chapters.

Serbia has opened 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters, with two provisionally closed. However, frequent electoral cycles have negatively impacted the continuity and pace of reform efforts linked to EU accession. While Serbian authorities continue to reaffirm EU membership as a strategic goal, further progress—particularly the opening of additional clusters—will depend on tangible advances in rule of law reforms and the normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

Albania and North Macedonia have consistently reaffirmed their political commitment to EU integration and their ambition to advance in the accession negotiations through sustained reform efforts. Following the first intergovernmental conferences held with both countries in July 2022, screening meetings across all six clusters were successfully completed by December 2023.

In line with the Commission's recommendation, the European Council decided in December 2023 to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once the country achieves the necessary level of compliance with EU membership criteria. According to the Commission's report from March 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina made progress in adopting EU-related reforms and achieved full alignment with the EU's foreign policy. However, this positive momentum was undermined by developments in the Republika Srpska entity. Notably, the adoption in April of separate entity-level laws on elections, referenda, and immunity—along with continued non-recognition of the authority and decisions of the Constitutional Court and persistent secessionist rhetoric—hampered progress toward EU accession.

Since 1 January 2024, holders of Kosovo biometric passports have enjoyed visa-free travel to the EU. As of October 2024, this benefit has also been extended to holders of Serbian passports issued by the Serbian Coordination Directorate. Kosovo has remained committed to advancing EU-related reforms throughout this period.

XIII. Diversity Management and Culture of Memory in the Western Balkan countries

Within modern democratic frameworks, the **adequate protection of national minorities** has become a cornerstone criterion for legitimacy and democratic consolidation. In the European context, two pivotal instruments have contributed to this shift: the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM) and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (ECRML), both under the auspices of the **Council of Europe**. For many scholars and policymakers, these conventions signal the beginning of a **new era in international minority rights protection**, emphasizing that genuine democracy must go beyond majority rule to ensure inclusion and equity for all cultural and linguistic communities.

Article 5 of the FCNM define that “...*The Parties (states) undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage*”. In a continuation, this Article predicts that state authorities shall refrain from policies or practices that attempt to force members of national minorities to assimilate against their will and shall shield them from any action that would do so, without affecting actions taken in accordance with their general integration policy.

Furtherer, Article 5 of the Framework Convention places an obligation on States Parties to promote conditions conducive to the preservation and development of national minority cultures and identities. The article aims to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities are not assimilated, but are instead enabled to maintain and develop their distinct identities and fully enjoy their minority rights.

The in the *Thematic Commentary No. 4*³ of Advisory Committee of FCNM is welcomed assistance schemes that are accessible not only to officially recognized national minorities but also to other groups that might otherwise lack the means to preserve their unique characteristics. All support measures should be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of different groups to affirm and protect the cultural differences that define them. This may require targeted efforts by the authorities to revitalize essential elements of minority cultures, without which certain aspects of identity expression may not be possible. Larger minorities whose cultures are well-established typically rely less on state support compared to smaller or geographically dispersed minorities, which may face greater challenges in preserving their identities and resisting assimilation.

Advisory Committee of the FCNM in 2024 in its *Thematic Commentary No. 1 on Education under the FCNM*⁴, explores the role of history education in fostering reconciliation, intercultural understanding, and democratic values in line with Article 12 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). It examines how history education can support minority inclusion, counteract hate speech, and enhance societal cohesion through multi-perspectivity and inclusive curricular design. It also considers the risks of politicized or one-dimensional narratives and the importance of evidence-based historical teaching, particularly in post-conflict and multicultural societies.

In multicultural and post-conflict societies, education plays a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding. Article 12 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of

³ <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806a4811>

⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-104224-gbr-2568-framework-convention-thematic-commentary-no1-a4-/1680b1ff31>

National Minorities calls on states to promote knowledge of the histories, cultures, languages, and religions of both minorities and majorities. This educational imperative gains heightened relevance in contexts marked by past or ongoing ethnic tension. The significance of inclusive and multiperspective history education approach is fundamental not only for protecting minority rights but also for preventing future conflicts and building a shared civic identity.

Education is not a neutral endeavor; it plays an active role in shaping societal values, identities, and relations. In line with the FCNM, education should be a vehicle for reconciliation, particularly in societies emerging from violent conflict. This includes fostering a shared civic identity based on common democratic values while avoiding polarizing narratives or the instrumentalization of history for nationalistic or exclusionary purposes.

History education, in this framework, must contribute to interethnic understanding and counteract hate and intolerance. It should be considered a component of human rights education, grounded in values such as pluralism, non-discrimination, and democratic participation.

The Advisory Committee of the FCNM has emphasized the necessity of teaching history through multiple perspectives. Such an approach encourages critical thinking and challenges monolithic or state-centered narratives that may exclude or stigmatize minorities. Multiperspectivity does not imply relativism; rather, it requires that different experiences and interpretations are presented alongside methodologically sound and evidence-based historiography.

Importantly, this approach distinguishes between legitimate pluralism in historical interpretation and the denial of established facts, such as the Holocaust. While denialism is incompatible with human rights principles and often prohibited by law, students should nonetheless be exposed to these views in order to develop the critical tools needed to reject hate-based narratives.

Minority inclusion in the design and evaluation of educational content is essential. Historical education that omits or marginalizes minority experiences contributes to their symbolic exclusion from the national narrative. States should therefore involve representatives of national minorities in curriculum development and ensure that new research findings and minority perspectives are integrated over time.

Teaching about minority contributions to state development, including the roles played by women and numerically smaller groups, helps to counteract harmful stereotypes. Equally, contentious historical roles played by individuals or communities should be acknowledged without ascribing collective guilt or questioning the loyalty of minorities in the present.

Innovative teaching practices such as "living history" — where individuals from minority backgrounds share their experiences in classrooms — have shown promise in humanizing historical narratives and reducing intergroup prejudice. Local history components in curricula also offer opportunities to raise awareness of minority communities within students' immediate environments.

Moreover, history teaching should be age-appropriate and incorporated across all educational levels. Teacher training—both pre-service and in-service—must incorporate multiperspectivity and equip educators with the tools to handle complex, sensitive historical topics.

States should support historical research that includes minority perspectives and promotes trust in academic independence. Cross-border cooperation, such as bilateral historical commissions or joint research projects, can foster mutual understanding and promote good neighborly relations. This is particularly important where minority communities are linked to kin-states, potentially triggering bilateral tensions or securitization of minority issues.

In the current context of rising antisemitism, racial discrimination and historical revisionism in Europe, robust history education is a vital tool in the fight against hate speech and hate crimes. Teaching about past human rights violations — including the Holocaust and other atrocities — serves not only to honor victims but also to prevent the repetition of such crimes. It enables students to identify root causes of exclusion and understand the enduring impact of historical injustices.

History education, when guided by the principles of multiperspectivity, inclusion, and human rights, is a cornerstone of democratic societies. In line with Article 12 of the FCNM, states must ensure that educational systems reflect the plurality of their populations, include minority voices, and promote mutual respect. This requires ongoing curriculum reform, investment in teacher training, support for academic research, and vigilance against the instrumentalization of history. Ultimately, inclusive historical education contributes not only to the protection of minority rights but also to the strengthening of democratic resilience and social cohesion.

Diversity Management and the Culture of Memory in the Western Balkans is a critical and complex topic, intersecting issues of ethnicity, identity, post-conflict reconciliation, and political memory in a region marked by violent conflict in the 1990s.

V. Country-by-Country analysis

1. Bosnia and Herzegovina

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) resulted in over 100,000 deaths, the displacement of more than two million people, and the widespread destruction of communities along ethnic lines. As the most brutal conflict in Europe since World War II, it left a society fractured along ethno-nationalist divisions—primarily among Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Managing diversity in such a deeply divided post-conflict society is critical not only for peacebuilding but also for the broader democratic consolidation of the Western Balkans.

In this context, the role of memory is crucial. Public narratives of the past shape collective identities, influence political discourse, and can either promote reconciliation or perpetuate division. Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a unique case study where institutional diversity management—through mechanisms like consociational power-sharing—exists alongside highly fragmented and contested memories of the past.

The academic literature on post-conflict societies highlights two major frameworks relevant to this analysis: diversity management and memory politics. Lijphart's (2004) theory of *consociational democracy* posits that deeply divided societies can achieve stability through power-sharing, elite cooperation, and autonomy for cultural groups. Bosnia's post-Dayton governance reflects this model, though critics argue it has led to entrenched ethnic divisions and political deadlock (Bieber, 2006).

In parallel, *memory studies*—especially the works of Nora (1989) on *lieux de mémoire* and Halbwachs on collective memory—emphasize how societies construct and institutionalize memories of the past. Memory politics in Bosnia are shaped not only by victimhood and trauma but also by competing nationalisms and the politicization of history. Transitional justice literature, including David & Choi (2009), explores how truth commissions, war crimes trials, and memorialization efforts contribute to or complicate reconciliation processes.

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, known as the Dayton Agreement, ended the war but institutionalized a complex and rigid ethno-territorial structure. BiH was divided into two main entities—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (shared by Bosniaks and Croats) and Republika Srpska (predominantly Serb)—as well as the self-governing Brčko District. Governance is shared among three constituent peoples, with a tripartite presidency and ethnic quotas in state institutions.

Power-sharing is operationalized through fixed ethnic representation at nearly every level of government. While this consociational model has ensured peace and basic functionality, it has also entrenched ethnic divisions and limited the emergence of civic-based political identities. Institutions such as the Presidency and Parliamentary Assembly are designed to prevent majoritarian rule, but in practice they have incentivized nationalist rhetoric and policy deadlock. The system has been criticized for inefficiency and exclusion. The *Sejdić-Finci* case, in which the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the constitutional framework discriminated against minorities not belonging to the three constituent peoples, exemplifies the limitations of Bosnia's diversity management model. Moreover, the role of the international community, particularly the Office of the High Representative (OHR), remains contentious—balancing between oversight and encouraging domestic political responsibility.

Public memory of the 1992–1995 war is fragmented along ethnic lines. Bosniaks emphasize the genocide in Srebrenica and the siege of Sarajevo, Croats focus on their victimization in central Bosnia, while Serb narratives often highlight their own displacement and casualties, frequently downplaying or denying events such as the Srebrenica genocide. These divergent memories are reinforced through political discourse, media, and education systems.

Separate memorials reflect these divisions. The Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial honors victims of the 1995 genocide, but in Republika Srpska and Serbia, denial or relativization of these crimes persists. Memorials dedicated to Serb victims further institutionalize separate narratives. Education systems reinforce these divides: students often learn different versions of history depending on the entity or canton, contributing to what is known as “two schools under one roof.”

Transitional justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and domestic war crimes courts, have played a vital role in establishing legal accountability. However, their effectiveness is limited by the lack of political consensus on verdicts and widespread public denial. Civil society initiatives, such as RECOM (the Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts about War Crimes), and local NGOs have attempted to create spaces for shared memory, but these efforts are often marginalized.

Dervo Sejdić, one of the plaintiffs in the landmark “Sejdić-Finci” case, which resulted in a ruling against the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the European Court of Human Rights, and a prominent member of the Roma community, shared his perspective on the culture of memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In our conversation, he remarked: “*In B&H, only the Chetniks, Ustashas, and the soldiers of the Handžar Division are glorified.*”

Approximately 45,000 Roma currently reside in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Sejdić, nearly two-thirds of the Roma population has been displaced since 2013. To date, the state has not provided financial support for the celebration of any holidays or commemorative events of minority communities. During the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than 500 Roma were officially registered as war victims. On June 24, 2025, for the first time, a publication documenting the suffering of Roma in the Podrinje region was released by the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Center, with support from the British Embassy⁵.

The interaction between institutional diversity management and memory politics in Bosnia&Herzegovina is complex and often contradictory. On one hand, the consociational system ensures representation for all major ethnic groups, providing a foundation for coexistence. On the other hand, the lack of a shared historical narrative undermines social cohesion and perpetuates mistrust.

Memory politics reinforces ethnic cleavages by maintaining incompatible interpretations of the past. Segregated education systems and ethnocentric curricula reproduce nationalist ideologies, particularly among younger generations. Political elites instrumentalize memory to mobilize ethnic constituencies, making reconciliation efforts difficult. While some civil society-led initiatives have made localized progress, their impact remains limited in the absence of broader institutional support and political will.

Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a paradox: it is a state designed to manage ethnic diversity through institutional pluralism, yet it lacks a shared historical consciousness necessary for long-term reconciliation. The fragmented culture of memory continues to hinder democratic consolidation and interethnic trust.

⁵ https://kalisara-ric.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/lzvjestaj%20o%20stradanju%20Roma%20-%20WEB%20PAGES.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawLOHWRleHRuA2FibQlxMABicmlkETFoY0JsT1F5UDdPZDA2WVRSAR7gJ8EoVeHDla4fBmgC768weETSJihTwhJ5tNb7ivElr_O2wq0X1yvYsJQu-g_aem_rVQ6jfWpljIAMA0SJ-ivFQ

To move forward, Bosnia must simultaneously reform its political institutions and cultivate a more inclusive, pluralistic memory culture. This includes revising education curricula to promote critical engagement with the past, supporting joint memorialization initiatives, and leveraging EU conditionality to incentivize deeper reforms. Civil society must also be empowered to challenge dominant narratives and foster dialogue across ethnic lines.

Only through the convergence of institutional and cultural transformation can Bosnia fully transition from a post-conflict society to a genuinely democratic and cohesive state

Recommendations for Bosnia & Herzegovina

Indeed, the long-term peacefulness and social cohesion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with its EU membership prospects, depend on the movers from ethno-political fragmentation to a common civic identity based on human rights, inclusive remembrance and democratic pluralism. The EU should be a facilitator to these processes, not just a conditioned partner.

A. Diversity Management

1. Reform or modernize the consociation system so that it becomes more inclusive

- Power-sharing is essential in a post-conflict situation, but the current system perpetuates ethnic divisions. Reforms should facilitate cross-ethnic political participation and individual rights that transcend ethnic affiliation, as prescribed in the 2009 ruling in the Sejdic-Finci case from the European Court of Human Rights.

2. Improve Minority Representation outside the Constituent Peoples

-To secure institutional access and political voice for Roma, Jews, and non-constituent minority groups at the state and entity levels. That ranges from PR to legal rights and funding.

3. Support Local-Level Interethnic Cooperation

- Encourage community-to-community co-operation and working relationships in education, local governance and service delivery at the municipal level. This bottom-up approach is a means of creating trust where politics at national-level remain in gridlock.

B. Culture of Memory

1. Foster a Pluralistic Memory Culture

- Moving from the practice of ethno-exclusive remembrance to supporting shared or parallel memory that acknowledges multiple victim experiences—including civilian casualties on all sides.

2. Commission a Truth and Memory Process

- A non-judicial body with a multiethnic composition involving civil society and victims associations, and including academic experts, should be established in order to record war narratives and foster recognition of past crimes beyond judicial sentences.

3. Integrate Multiperspectivity in Education

- Rethink history textbooks to tell different stories of 1992–1995 war and develop critical thinking and human rights education. The joint history book programmes and regional academic cooperation should be further developed, with the support of the EU.

4. Preserve and Fund Minority Heritage

- Provide state-level resources for preserving minority religious, cultural, and historical sites, including those that fell into disrepair and were destroyed during the conflict, such as Roma and Jewish heritage monuments.

C. EU Integration

1. Depoliticize Memory in EU Conditionality

- The EU must maintain steady pressure for transitional justice and anti-discrimination advances, without making history political: It goes without saying that EU should continue to press for transitional justice and anti-discrimination reforms in the Western Balkans. Aspects of the EU's memory mechanisms should help encouraging inclusive (memory) policies and contribute also to the processes of consolidation.

2. Deliver the 14 Key Priorities – Driving an Inclusive Economy

- As Bosnia and Herzegovina progresses towards meeting the EU's 14 key priorities, particular attention should be given to the independence of the judiciary, non-discrimination and protecting the rights of minorities, including by monitoring and benchmarking these areas through the EU's enlargement instruments.

3. Support Civil Society as a Bridge Actor Instead of the Military Of course there's not.

- Develop EU support and funding to NGOs, particularly those working on interethnic dialogue, minority rights and youth education. Civil society can help to narrow the institutional spaces between state actors and citizens.

4. I. Promote Regional Rapprochement Through Cross-Border Initiatives

- Provide security, political and financial assistance to Bosnia to enable its active role in regional efforts for truth and reconciliation, including re-engage with the initiative to develop a RECOM and work on academic and cultural exchanges between Bosnian and Serb, Croat, and Montenegrin counterparts in order to address historical narratives.

2. Albania

Following the collapse of one of Europe's most repressive Communist regimes in 1991, Albania embarked on a difficult transition toward democracy, state pluralism, and European integration. Despite Albania is home to several recognized minority groups, including Greeks, Egyptians, Roma, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Aromanians, Boshniaks, Serbs and Montegrins. . Managing this diversity poses unique challenges in a state historically marked by rigid centralism and state-enforced nationalism. At the same time, Albania's relationship with its Communist past remains unresolved, with limited mechanisms for transitional justice and remembrance.

Scholars have examined ethnic integration in post-Communist contexts through the lens of nation-building and democratization. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" and Miroslav Hroch's typologies of national movements are useful in understanding the construction of Albanian identity. Memory studies—especially those focusing on collective memory, trauma, and the politics of history—provide further insight into Albania's difficulty in reckoning with its authoritarian past (e.g., Judt 2005; Todorova 2009).

The literature also highlights the ambiguous status of minority rights in post-Communist Albania. Despite constitutional guarantees and international commitments (e.g., the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities), implementation gaps persist. This is especially true for Roma and Egyptians, who face severe social exclusion and underrepresentation. Albania's minority management is undermined by intermittent nationalism, especially during periods of political instability. Tensions between the Albanian state and the Greek minority, particularly regarding property rights and education, remain unresolved. Meanwhile, Roma, Egyptians, and Macedonians face entrenched socioeconomic exclusion with minimal state intervention. Albania's EU integration process has pushed for reforms, but local implementation lags behind.

Enver Hoxha's Stalinist regime (1946–1985) created an authoritarian memory regime, erasing alternative histories and marginalizing ethnic minorities. The legacy includes mass surveillance, forced labor, and the suppression of religious and ethnic identities. Roma and Egyptians, viewed as “socially backward,” were targeted for assimilation and invisibility in national narratives.

Post-1991 Albania has struggled to reckon with this legacy. No truth commission has been established, and transitional justice remains fragmented. While memory museums and documentaries have emerged, political elites continue to exploit selective narratives for electoral purposes.

Efforts toward national reconciliation remain superficial. Public memory is dominated by either glorification of the anti-fascist struggle or victimization under Communism—often with little space for minority voices. The experiences of Roma, Egyptians, and others during the Communist period have received little official recognition.

Albania's national memory is structured around dominant Albanian myths, often excluding minority perspectives. Historical disputes—such as the *Chameria* issue with Greece—continue to inflame bilateral tensions and affect the domestic treatment of the Greek minority. Roma and Egyptian histories, including experiences of marginalization under Communism and during the transition, remain absent from school curricula and public commemoration.

In our conversation with *Arjan Lile*, a member of the National Committee for Minorities, as a representative of the Egyptian community, we learned that *in the curricula and textbooks we cannot find any information about the history, culture and contributions of the Egyptians to Albanian society*. For example, one of the most famous "people's artists" *Laver Bariu*, a famous clarinetist for whom the city of Permet in southern Albania erected a monument, is not mentioned as a member of the Egyptian community. In addition, *not a single street in the cities of Albania is named after a member of this community*, although there are many who gave their lives during the people's liberation war.

Ligor Karamelo, a prominent figure, former member of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania, a member of the Greek minority, says that *the culture of memory towards the Greek community has been quite ambivalent, since the time of the Kingdom of Albania*. The public discourse is dominated by *the concept of Greater Albania and that the Chameria region (Epirus) is part of "ethnic Albania"*. Although a commission was established to consolidate history textbooks between Albania and Greece 15 years ago, there have been no results so far. In the town of *Dropul* in southern Albania, a bust of *Vasil Shahini* has been erected, placed by the municipality, although a narrative has spread among the Albanian public that he is the leader of the Greek agents against the Albanians⁶.

And from the conversation with *Vasil Sterjovski*, historian, president of the political party Macedonian Alliance for European Integration, we were informed that *the state does not allocate any funds or conduct a proactive policy regarding the culture of memory for the Macedonian community in Albania*. The municipality of *Pustec*, which is located in the border region with the Republic of North Macedonia, and where ethnic Macedonians lived, has erected a memorial bust of *Goce Delchev*, one of the most prominent historical figures in the history of the Macedonian people. Also, with the help of EU funds, a *museum-memorial room of the teacher Sterjo Spase* was built in the village of *Globočani*. The council of the municipality of *Pustec* has decided to also make a bust of the first teacher in the Macedonian language, *Boris Manev*.

Memory and diversity are intimately connected in post-Communist Albania. The exclusion of minority experiences from official memory limits the effectiveness of diversity management and reinforces narratives of ethnic homogeneity. This is evident in education, where history curricula rarely reflect the contributions or sufferings of minorities.

The EU has increasingly tied minority rights to the accession process, encouraging Albania to adopt more inclusive memory policies. Yet memory politics remain volatile. Unresolved narratives of Communism, alongside nationalist sentiment, inhibit meaningful integration of Roma, Egyptians, and other minorities.

Albania's post-Communist transformation faces a dual challenge: managing ethnic diversity and confronting a contested past. Although constitutional reforms and EU conditionality have prompted progress in minority rights, practical enforcement is weak

The country's inability to engage with its authoritarian past further undermines the creation of an inclusive national identity. Sustainable reconciliation and democratic deepening require a pluralistic memory culture that integrates minority voices and promotes truth and accountability. The sustainable reconciliation and democratic consolidation require both more inclusive memory politics and consistent protection of minority rights, particularly in light of Albania's EU accession aspirations.

⁶ <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/u-denoncua-si-antishqiptar-greket-i-bejne-bust-ne-mes-te-dropullit>

Recommendations for Albania

For Albania to become a successful democracy and an EU member state, it must have a two-pronged strategy: an approach that views ethnic diversity as a civic asset, and addresses the legacy of authoritarianism through inclusive, democratic memory work. The compatibility of these with EU values will bring about not just the formal requirements, but also the strengthening of the social corporatism and institutional maturity of Albania.

A. Diversity Management

1. Enhance the Legal Recognition and Rights of Minorities

- Implement in full the 2017 Law on the Protection of National Minorities, which would provide for guarantees for effective protection of linguistic, cultural, and educational rights of all recognised minorities, including Greeks, Macedonians, Roma, Vlachs (Aromanians), and Egyptians, among others.
- Support underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, to include Egyptians and Ashkali, who are frequently left in a position as neither being recognized nor being socially and bureaucratically excluded through the gaps in ethnic categories.

2. Improve Political and Social Inclusion

- Increase minority participation in local and national government, especially in areas with substantial minority populations.
- Enforce anti-discrimination laws, policies and affirmative action in education, employment and housing to enhance the standing of the Roma and Egyptian communities who are amongst the most marginalized.

3. Invest in Local-Level Inclusion Programs

- Support community-based initiatives to promote intercultural discussion and common public spaces in mixed areas, with a special focus on Southern/South East Albania, having in mind the concentration of the minorities in the south and south east.

B. Culture of Memory

1. Confronting the Communist Past For institutional reform

- Set up a truth and memory commission to record human rights abuses in the Hoxha period and provide victim recognition and public recognition.
- Declassify state files, especially those of the Sigurimi (state security), and promote academic study and public education about the dictatorship.

2. Develop Inclusive Public Narratives

- Create a plural memory culture and take into account the fate of ethnic minorities, political prisoners, displaced persons and religious communities persecuted under the Communist regime.
- Promote joint exhibitions, oral history work and memory work projects to bring together multiple narratives including those of the Roma and Egyptian public.

3. Reform Educational Curricula

- Revise history and civics curriculum to incorporate multiperspective stories about the Communist period, the role of minorities in Albanian society and regional history.
- Engage minority representatives and historians of memory in the development of textbooks and training of teachers.

C. EU Integration

1. Condition EU Assistance: Minority and Memory Reforms

- Incorporate minority inclusion and transitional justice more directly as part of the accession negotiation system, particularly in the context of the Copenhagen criteria for human rights and rule of law.
- Meet the obligations of Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) of the EU acquis.

2. Empower Civil Society and Oversight Groups

- Enhance the monitoring role of civil society organizations, minority councils, and human rights institutions with respect to reforms and memory policies with the direct assistance and co-funding of EU.

3. Facilitating regional cooperation in memory and rights

- Instead promote regional discussion with neighboring countries (Greece, North Macedonia) on memory Tales and minority rights.
- Take an active part in RECOM-like processes and cross-border education visits to help generate mutual understanding of historical backgrounds.

4. Converge on European Model for Minorities

- Have multicultural, multilingual education, cultural autonomy and anti-racism models supported by the EU, especially for the Roma and the Egyptian communities (See EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030).

3. Kosovo

With an overwhelming ethnic Albanian majority, Kosovo has struggled to integrate its Serb minority and manage competing historical narratives. The legacy of the war, marked by ethnic cleansing, territorial disputes, and issues of transitional justice, complicates efforts to create a unified and peaceful society.

Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 marked a critical juncture in its post-conflict reconstruction and state-building. Emerging from the violent conflict of the late 1990s, Kosovo has faced the challenge of creating a cohesive national identity in a deeply divided society. Ethnic Albanians, Serbs, Boshnjaks, Turks, Roma, Ashkalie, and Egyptians all inhabit Kosovo, but the Albanian-Serb divide remains the most politically and socially significant. In this context, the role of memory in shaping identity and diversity management policies is crucial.

Diversity management in post-conflict societies often involves mechanisms such as power-sharing, decentralization, and multicultural integration (Lijphart, Kymlicka, Taylor). These models emphasize institutional representation, cultural recognition, and protection of minority rights. Scholars like Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora explore how collective memory and sites of memory influence national identity. In the post-conflict Balkans, memory is often a political tool, used to affirm group identity and justify claims to justice or victimhood.

Authors such as Bieber, Vickers, and Donia have documented the ethnic dimensions of the Kosovo conflict, while Hayden and Jansen examine memory politics and transitional justice in the region. The ICTY and later Kosovo-based initiatives have addressed war crimes, but their societal impact remains contested.

Official state statistic is saying than Kosovo's population is approximately 90% ethnic Albanian, and 10% of minorities include Serbs, Bosniaks, Turks, Roma, Ashkalie, and Egyptians. The Egyptian and Ashkalie communities, often conflated with Roma, have distinct identities and histories. All face challenges of social exclusion, limited access to education, and economic marginalization.

The 2008 Constitution guarantees minority rights, including political representation, language rights, and cultural autonomy. The Brussels Agreement (2013) granted autonomy to Serb-majority municipalities. Reserved seats in the Assembly ensure minority voices, but political divisions and Serbian influence in the north hinder effective governance.

Key issues include the persistence of Serb parallel institutions, internal displacement of minorities (especially Serbs and Roma), and lack of trust between communities. While some legal frameworks exist, implementation remains weak, particularly regarding education, housing, and employment for Roma, Ashkalie, and Egyptians.

The 1999 war, characterized by Serb-led ethnic cleansing, NATO intervention, and KLA resistance, has left a lasting imprint on Kosovo's memory culture. Kosovo Albanians largely commemorate the KLA and NATO as liberators, while Kosovo Serbs view the war as a period of victimization.

Kosovo has built memorials honoring Albanian victims and KLA fighters. However, the memory of Serb victims or non-Albanian suffering remains marginalized. Roma, Ashkalie, and Egyptians, who were caught between sides and often victimized, are largely absent from public commemorations.

In this regard, two interesting cases:

1. In 1998, a special operation was carried out by the Serbian armed forces in the village of Prekazi and the Skenderaj area, where a total of 68 people were killed, 40 of whom were unarmed civilians. Among the killed were three people from the Roma community - Fatime Gashi (50) with her children Gazmend (16) and Makrifete (13). These people are never mentioned in public. In a debate on social networks, a certain Emin Daka writes that during the period when they were killed, all the people were buried with the same attention, but after the war, the 3 people from the Roma community were "taken away" from this cemetery and taken somewhere without a trace⁷.

2. The second case is with the minor Roma Elizabeta Hasani from Mitrovica, who died on March 13, 1999, from a thrown grenade, along with 6 other people of Albanian origin. When the municipality of Mitrovica erected a memorial plaque with the names of the dead, 5-year-old Elizabeta was not mentioned. Later, after the reaction of the representatives of the minority communities in the Parliament, the name was added⁸. Veton Berisha, a member of the Kosovo Parliament, says that there is a similar case with a victim from the Egyptian community at the Poterca memorial complex in Klina.

Violence against Roma, Egyptians, and Ashkali communities in Kosovo following the end of the NATO bombing campaign was part of a politically motivated, systematic effort to ethnically "cleanse" Kosovo of non-Albanian populations and to reinforce claims for an independent Albanian-majority state. Nearly 3 decades after these crimes against humanity were committed, perpetrators largely remain unpunished. Among the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian ("RAE") populations currently residing in Kosovo, only a small number have returned to their devastated and abandoned neighborhoods. Despite concerted efforts by the international community to facilitate the resettlement of "RAE" returnees, the absence of genuine and sustainable peace has compelled the majority to leave the province once again. Those who remain often live as internally displaced persons (IDPs), dependent on external assistance for survival. These "RAE" IDPs experience persistent fear and distrust, frequently avoiding contact with visitors due to years of broken promises, and lament the lost opportunities for emigration as a means of securing a safer and more stable life⁹.

Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities remain among the most vulnerable groups in Kosovo. After the 1999 conflict, these communities continue to experience marginalization and have struggled to rebuild their lives. Many reside in segregated, informal settlements characterized by substandard and overcrowded living conditions. A significant number remain internally displaced, unable to return to or reconstruct their original homes.

Educational attainment among these communities is also alarmingly low. Many children do not complete primary education, and only a small number progress to secondary or higher education. Access to education is further hindered by extreme poverty, while school segregation remains a concern in some areas.

A substantial number of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians remain outside Kosovo, subject to forced returns to a society that is often unprepared to support their reintegration. While Kosovo possesses a robust legal, policy, and institutional framework for Roma inclusion, its effectiveness

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10162285661313294&set=pb.731278293.-2207520000&type=3>

⁸ <https://insajderi.com/vendoset-emri-i-romes-elizabeta-hasanit-ne-pllaken-perkujtimore-ne-mitrovice/>

⁹ https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/roma-rights-3-4-2005-justice-for-kosovo.pdf

is undermined by inadequate information dissemination, limited funding, weak implementation, and insufficient representation of these communities in public and private institutions.¹⁰

Despite commitments outlined in the Action Plan to review and revise textbooks and to "promote the values, heritage, and identity of the Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities," significant gaps remain in educational content. Neither the Albanian nor the Serbian education systems in Kosovo incorporated curricula or textbooks that were specific to—or adequately reflective of—the culture and history of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians.

Educational materials predominantly focus on the dominant ethnic narratives, whether Albanian or Serbian, and often present a biased account of history and culture that excludes minority perspectives. Furthermore, Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian students lack access to community-specific educational subjects that would enable the preservation of their cultural identity and support the teaching and promotion of their history, language, and traditions. This absence not only undermines cultural continuity but also perpetuates structural inequalities in the education system¹¹.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Kosovo Specialist Chambers have addressed war crimes, including those committed by the KLA. However, prosecutions have sometimes been perceived as biased or insufficient. Civil society organizations and artists attempt to foster inclusive remembrance, but political narratives dominate.

Xhavit Berisha is an activist for the protection of human rights, especially of the Egyptian, Ashkali and Roma communities in Kosovo, and says that for many years he has been collecting materials on all missing persons from these communities, in order to leave a trace and memory of the victims, as well as to invite domestic and international institutions to open investigations. He says that it is very difficult to work in this field, because the families of the victims themselves are afraid to tell their stories and have it published or processed.

Memory politics in Kosovo reinforce ethnic divisions. Competing narratives of victimhood undermine reconciliation and hinder the formation of a shared national identity. Diversity management efforts, though institutionally embedded, often fail due to deep-seated historical grievances. The EU conditions Kosovo's integration on progress in minority rights and reconciliation, making memory politics central to state legitimacy.

Kosovo's efforts to manage diversity and navigate memory politics are ongoing and fraught with complexity. The state has made legal strides in minority inclusion, but societal reconciliation is hindered by exclusive narratives and political polarization. The EU plays a critical role in encouraging reforms, yet local ownership of memory dialogue remains essential.

¹⁰ <https://www.errc.org/reports-and-submissions/abandoned-minority-roma-rights-history-in-kosovo>

¹¹ https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/abandoned-minority-roma-rights-history-in-kosovo-dec-2011.pdf

Recommendations for Kosovo

Kosovo and should work to actively encourage inclusive processes of memorialization, that recognize the respective histories and experiences of all communities, including the Roma, Ashkalie, and Egyptian communities, that ensure that their achievements are duly noted in the public space. Reform of educational agenda is inherently important in fostering inter-ethnic understanding, by putting forth a balanced and nuanced historical narrative that better mirrors the country's multifaceted identity. Institutional mechanisms to ensure justice for minorities, education to them and for ensuring minority's right to an adequate housing are also important for social justice. Finally, the promotion of sustained dialogue across ethnic lines through collaboration between civil society and local authorities will build trust and bring communities closer, strengthening the inclusive and stable society.

Diversity Management

1. Strengthen Legal Protections for Minorities:

Ensure effective implementation of laws that protect ethnic minorities (Serbs, Egyptians, Ashkalie, Roma, Turks, Bosniaks) and pay special attention to political participation, cultural rights, and language usage.

2. Enhance Minority Representation:

Increase the representation of minorities in public institutions, local government and security institutions to plant trust and legitimacy.

3. Improve Access to Services:

Ensure minority communities, including in the Serb-majority municipalities, have equal access to education, healthcare, and social services.

4. Support Interethnic Dialogue:

Create spaces for dialogue and collaboration between communities that mitigate tension and foster social cohesion.

Culture of Memory

1. Inclusive Narratives:

Foster acknowledgment of different historical experiences and interpretations, including minority experiences of the wartime and post-war era.

2. Transitional Justice:

Pursue truth-seeking, reparations, and reconciliation efforts that find space for war crimes and ethnically centered grievances.

3. Education Reform:

Develop a multi-ethnic approach in schools for people to understand and respect each other.

4. Memorialization:

Support building diverse memorial sites and cultural projects to reflect Kosovo's multiethnic history.

EU Integration

1. Bring Minority Rights Standards in Line with the EU:

Fully transpose EU directives and instruments in the area of minority protection, anti-discrimination, and fundamental rights.

2. Regional Cooperation:

Enhance dialogue and cooperation with neighboring countries on minorities and cross-border issues.

3. Transparency and Monitoring:

Introduce conditionality and monitoring on minority rights and reconciliation in the EU accession process.

4. Leverage EU Support:

Make use of EU financing and expertise for diversity management programmes, civil society empowerment and culture of memory activities.

4. Montenegro

As a multicultural society emerging from the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Montenegro faces the dual challenge of consolidating a coherent national identity while addressing the historical narratives and ethnic divisions inherited from its past.

Montenegro's post-Yugoslav journey has been marked by significant political and social transformation. Since its independence in 2006, the country has sought to navigate the complexities of building a unified national identity while accommodating its diverse population, including Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosnjaks, Albanians, Croats, Roma and Egyptians. This process has been complicated by historical legacies stemming from the Yugoslav era, the wars of the 1990s, and Montenegro's longstanding relationship with Serbia. The interplay between ethnic diversity and memory culture is particularly salient in shaping contemporary Montenegrin politics and its European aspirations.

The scholarly literature on ethnic diversity management offers models such as multiculturalism (Kymlicka) and consociationalism, which emphasize the institutional accommodation of diverse groups. In memory studies, scholars such as Halbwachs and Nora explore the role of collective memory in shaping identity and post-conflict recovery. In the context of Montenegro, studies by Bieber (2006) and Vujadinović (2013) analyze how nationalism and memory intersect with state-building and European integration. The literature highlights the persistent influence of the past in shaping political and ethnic dynamics in the Western Balkans. Montenegro's ethnic makeup reflects a complex interplay of historical and cultural identities. According to census data, Montenegrins constitute approximately 45-50% of the population, while Serbs account for about 30%. Bosniaks, Albanians, Croats, Roma, Egyptians and ethnic Turks form the remainder. The Montenegrin-Serb identity debate remains contentious, rooted in questions of language, religion, and historical allegiance. Serb nationalism, including visions of a "Greater Serbia," has exacerbated divisions and complicated the construction of a cohesive national identity.

The 2007 Montenegrin Constitution enshrines the equality of all citizens and guarantees minority rights, including language use, cultural preservation, and parliamentary representation. Legal frameworks support minority participation, but implementation remains uneven. Ethnic minorities are allotted reserved seats in parliament; however, their effective political influence is often diluted by broader nationalist narratives. Religious institutions, particularly the Serbian Orthodox Church, play a powerful role in shaping identity and politics, often in opposition to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and state initiatives.

Ethnic tensions persist in various regions, particularly between Serbs and Albanians in border areas. Roma communities continue to experience systemic discrimination and social exclusion, facing barriers in education, employment, and housing. The political divide between pro-Serbian and pro-Montenegrin factions remains a central fault line, manifesting in debates over foreign policy, language, and historical memory.

Montenegro's historical role within Yugoslavia was characterized by complex allegiances and a relatively privileged position. Nostalgia for Tito's socialist era coexists with contested memories of nationalism and economic hardship in the 1980s and 1990s. The collapse of

Yugoslavia and subsequent alignment with Serbia during the wars have left enduring scars on Montenegrin political consciousness.

Montenegro's involvement in the Yugoslav Wars, particularly its support for Serbian military campaigns, remains a source of internal contention. Under Milo Đukanović's leadership, Montenegro initially aligned with Serbia but gradually distanced itself, culminating in its eventual independence. Commemorative practices related to the wars differ widely, reflecting ethnic and political divisions. Narratives surrounding the Kosovo War and regional war crimes are particularly polarizing.

The 2006 independence referendum continues to shape Montenegro's political landscape. The narrow margin of victory highlighted deep divisions, many of which persist today. National identity is often constructed in opposition to Serbian influence, complicating efforts to create inclusive narratives. Politicians and media outlets frequently invoke historical grievances to mobilize support, further entrenching ethnic and ideological boundaries.

Montenegro's EU accession process includes criteria aimed at promoting minority rights, transitional justice, and inclusive memory politics. The EU encourages historical reconciliation as part of broader democratization and human rights reforms. However, the politicization of history and ethnic narratives poses challenges to these efforts. The EU's emphasis on a shared European memory can be difficult to reconcile with localized historical experiences and traumas.

The relationship between memory and diversity management in Montenegro is both synergistic and antagonistic. Efforts to foster national unity often rely on selective historical narratives that marginalize certain groups. At the same time, inclusive memory practices have the potential to bridge ethnic divides and support democratic consolidation. The tension between Montenegrin and Serb identities is emblematic of the broader struggle to balance historical legacies with aspirations for European integration and social cohesion.

Montenegro's experience since independence illustrates the profound interconnection between memory politics and diversity management. The country has made legal and institutional progress in recognizing ethnic pluralism, but societal reconciliation remains incomplete. Memory continues to serve as both a source of identity and a point of contention. For Montenegro to build a more inclusive and democratic society, it must cultivate shared historical narratives, strengthen minority protections, and embrace the European model of pluralism and transitional justice.

Recommendations for Montenegro

A commitment to insert a culture of memory through education, public history and active involvement of civil society into the official memory policy is a priority for Montenegro's EU process. This should result in changing school programmes, and their contents (in particular making curricula more diverse) so as to make it possible to educate school pupils in historical perspectives conducive to interethnic understanding and mutual respect of communities. Just as important, are the concerns raised with respect to the practical application of the legislation relating to minority rights such as the Róma and Albanian communities, as regards their enjoyment of equal opportunities socially, politically and economically. Reconciliation processes must also be actively promoted and mainstreamed through the EU accession framework, supporting truth seeking, dialogue and healing and strengthening social cohesion as well as demonstrating Montenegro's commitment to democratic values and regional stability.

1. Diversity Management

1. Enhance Minority Rights Protection:

Strengthen protection of ethnic minority (e.g., Bosniaks, Albanians, Roma, Croats) constitutional and legal provisions, including political, cultural, and language rights.

2. Promote Multilingualism:

Develop education and advocacy services in the minority languages to prevent the isolation and marginalization of minority groups.

3. Foster Interethnic Dialogue:

419) Support nationwide and community-based dialogue and partnership initiatives to help dissolve tensions and bring communities together.

4. Strengthen Minority Representation:

Advocate for more minority representation in local and federal government, appointed bodies and public organizations.

2. Culture of Memory

1. Inclusive Historical Narratives:

Support scholarly and public debates reflecting diverse views on Montenegro's recent history, in particular the legacy of the Yugoslav wars and nation-building.

2. Develop Transitional Justice Measures:

Support truth-seeking and reconciliation mechanisms for addressing war legacies, particularly minority experiences and inter-ethnic relations.

3. Educational Programs:

Incorporate balanced history and memory teaching at schools to counter- nationalism and respect diversity.

4.Support Memorial Projects:

Encourage the creation and maintenance of memorial sites and museums that depict Montenegro's multi-ethnic heritage.

3. EU Integration

1. Adhere to EU Minority Rights Requirements:

Pursue minority protection and anti-discrimination legislative reform to meet EU acquis standards.

2. Regional Collaboration:

Actively participate with neighbouring countries for the harmony of the minorities and exchange of cultural heritage for regional peace and integration.

3. Transparency & Accountability:

Develop follow-up indicators to monitor the progress of diversity and reconciliation as benchmarks of EU accession.

4.Leverage EU Resources:

Use EU funds and expertise to back minority empowerment, cultural schemes and capacity development.

5. North Macedonia

With a population that includes ethnic Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Serbs, Vlachs (Aromanians), Roma, Boshnjaks and smaller ethnic groups, North Macedonia has grappled with issues of ethnic inclusion and national identity since gaining independence in 1991. The 2001 Ohrid Agreement was a critical milestone in managing inter-ethnic relations and granting greater political representation to ethnic Albanians. However, ongoing ethnic tensions and differing historical narratives pose challenges to both social cohesion and the pursuit of European Union integration.

Since gaining independence in 1991 following the breakup of Yugoslavia, North Macedonia has faced substantial challenges in forging a cohesive national identity within a multicultural society. The presence of a significant Albanian minority, alongside other ethnic groups, has necessitated the development of inclusive governance frameworks. At the same time, the politics of memory—particularly those concerning the Yugoslav period, the 1990s transition, and the 2001 conflict—have complicated efforts to build a unified historical narrative.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on both diversity management literature and memory studies. Arend Lijphart's model of consociational democracy and the works of McGarry and O'Leary provide key insights into power-sharing arrangements in divided societies. Multiculturalism and integration models are especially relevant to understanding the position of ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia.

In terms of memory studies, foundational concepts from Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora frame collective memory as a social construct with political implications. Scholars such as Aleida Assmann and Yael Zerubavel explore how memory can either promote reconciliation or deepen divisions. In the context of the Western Balkans, national identity formation has often occurred through contested historical narratives and selective memory. The evolution of Macedonian identity, the legacy of Yugoslavia, and the impact of the 2001 insurgency are particularly relevant to this study.

The EU's approach to historical reconciliation and minority rights further influences how memory and diversity are managed in aspiring member states. The EU's conditionality framework encourages alignment with democratic norms, human rights standards, and inter-ethnic cooperation.

North Macedonia's population is ethnically diverse, with Macedonians constituting about 65%, Albanians around 25%, and other groups. National identity has often been defined in ethnic Macedonian terms, marginalizing non-majority groups. The Albanian minority has demanded recognition and rights in areas such as language, education, and political participation. These demands have occasionally clashed with the dominant national narrative, leading to tensions between Macedonian and Albanian nationalists.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001) was instrumental in transforming North Macedonia into a multi-ethnic democracy. It mandated constitutional reforms to recognize the Albanian language in municipalities with an Albanian majority, guaranteed proportional representation in public institutions, and promoted decentralization. The Macedonian Constitution now provides protections for minority languages, cultures, and religions. Local governance structures, including ethnic quotas, aim to ensure that minorities participate meaningfully in decision-making processes.

Despite institutional reforms, significant challenges persist. Ethnic divisions remain pronounced, particularly in Skopje and rural areas where Albanian communities feel marginalized. Ethnic Albanian political parties often serve as kingmakers in coalition governments, contributing

to political volatility. The Roma community continues to face systemic exclusion and discrimination, particularly in housing, education, and employment. Nationalism—both Macedonian and Albanian—has complicated the development of an inclusive national identity. The long-standing name dispute with Greece further exacerbated nationalist sentiments.

North Macedonia's Yugoslav past plays a dual role in the national imagination. On the one hand, the socialist period is remembered for economic stability and ethnic coexistence; on the other hand, it is also seen as a period of suppressed national expression. The legacy of Yugoslavia continues to influence political discourse, particularly in relation to identity formation and state legitimacy.

The 2001 conflict between ethnic Albanian insurgents and Macedonian security forces remains a defining moment in the country's modern history. For Albanians, it represents a struggle for equal rights; for Macedonians, it is often perceived as a threat to state sovereignty. The Ohrid Agreement aimed to foster reconciliation, but its implementation has been uneven. Memorials and commemorations reflect divided memories, with parallel narratives that rarely intersect.

Competing historical narratives shape national identity and public discourse. Political parties often instrumentalize memory to solidify their ethnic constituencies. Education systems reinforce these divisions, as history curricula vary across communities. Public commemorations and monuments tend to reflect mono-ethnic perspectives, deepening societal fragmentation. Efforts to revise historical interpretations are frequently viewed as political threats rather than attempts at inclusive memory-making.

Memory politics and diversity management are intimately connected in North Macedonia. Ethnic identities are reinforced through selective memory practices, which in turn shape political behavior and inter-ethnic relations. The Ohrid Agreement's vision of coexistence requires a shared historical narrative, yet such a narrative remains elusive. Instead, memory often serves as a barrier to integration, reinforcing ethnic boundaries.

However, EU integration provides a framework for transformation. The EU promotes historical reconciliation, minority rights, and regional cooperation as prerequisites for membership. These incentives have encouraged some progress in inter-ethnic relations and memory practices. Nonetheless, the balance between acknowledging historical grievances and fostering a common future remains delicate.

The bilateral dispute between North Macedonia and Bulgaria centers on conflicting interpretations of history, national identity, and the legacy of historical figures, particularly those from the Ottoman and early modern periods. At the heart of the disagreement is the question of whether certain historical figures and cultural elements—most notably the revolutionary leader **Goce Delčev**—should be considered part of a shared Bulgarian-Macedonian heritage or claimed exclusively by one nation. Bulgaria has argued that the modern Macedonian identity and language are historically derived from Bulgarian roots, a position that North Macedonia has strongly contested.

This dispute is deeply embedded in memory politics, where national histories are not just academic accounts but serve to legitimize modern national identities. The Macedonian state has promoted a distinct narrative of national origin and continuity, especially since independence in 1991, while Bulgaria views aspects of this narrative as historical revisionism. These conflicting narratives have become central to both countries' nation-building projects, making compromise politically sensitive.

In 2017, North Macedonia and Bulgaria signed the Friendship Treaty, aiming to foster good neighborly relations and establish a joint historical commission to address contested

interpretations. However, progress has been limited. Bulgaria later used its position as an EU member to block the opening of accession talks for North Macedonia in 2020, citing the need for more tangible progress in historical reconciliation and the recognition of shared heritage.

The negotiating framework for North Macedonia's EU membership was subsequently amended to include bilateral issues with Bulgaria, effectively making historical interpretation a criterion for accession. This move sparked domestic backlash in North Macedonia, where many citizens perceived it as an infringement on national sovereignty and historical identity. Critics also argued that it introduced a precedent in EU enlargement where collective memory and identity politics become conditional factors, potentially undermining the EU's normative standards of integration.

This dispute underscores the complex entanglement of **diversity management, memory politics, and external diplomacy**. While the EU has traditionally promoted reconciliation through shared values and institutional alignment, in the case of North Macedonia, it has also become an arena where unresolved historical grievances play out. The Bulgarian veto not only delayed North Macedonia's accession process but also deepened domestic polarization and ethnic tensions, particularly as ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia generally support swift EU integration and are less tied to the Macedonian-Slavic historical narrative.

The resolution of the dispute requires balanced memory politics, inclusive historical education, and constructive dialogue supported by EU mechanisms. If managed inclusively, this challenge could become an opportunity for broader regional reconciliation and the promotion of **a multi-perspective historical discourse**, aligning with the EU's emphasis on pluralism, democracy, and human rights.

North Macedonia's efforts to join the European Union hinge on its capacity to manage ethnic diversity and navigate its contested historical memory. The Ohrid Agreement has laid the groundwork for institutional inclusion, but social cohesion remains fragile. Memory politics continue to influence public opinion and inter-ethnic dynamics. To move forward, North Macedonia must promote inclusive historical education, fully implement the Ohrid Agreement, and invest in cross-ethnic dialogue.

Recommendations for North Macedonia

A. Diversity Management

1. Reinforce the Ohrid Framework Agreement in Practice

- To guarantee total political, social and economic integration of all communities, particularly at the local level.
- Track and improve the efficiency of proportional representation in public service, police and education.

2. Address Roma Inclusion More Systematically

- Adopt specific policies for Roma inclusion in the areas of education, housing, employment, and health.
- Ensure political participation of Roma's and combat systemic discrimination through legal reforms and empowerment of communities.

3. Promote Interethnic Dialogue and Collaboration

- Support local and national initiatives that seek to promote interaction between young people and civil society members from different ethnic communities.
- Foster collaborative community ventures and intercultural education to bridge ethnic silos.

B. Culture of Memory

1. To Foster Inclusive and Multifocal Historical Narratives

- Help public institutions and museums, as well as schools reflect diversity of history via more than one ethnic and political slant.
- Preserve the voices of both the Macedonian and Albanian interpretations of the events (e.g. of the 2001 conflict) and Roma, Turkish, and other minorities.

2. Create a National Commission for Memory and Reconciliation

- Establish a separate commission of historians, teachers and representatives of all ethnic groups to clarify contentious issues of memory and to take steps toward reconciliation.
- o Promote public discussion & debate on symbols and figures in a positive, non-politicised setting.

3.Reform History Education

- Review school curricula to reflect the multicultural character of North Macedonia and to exclude a nationalistic bias.
- Foster civic education that stresses democratic values, tolerance, and national citizenship in common.

C. European Union Integration

1. That is not at the expense of EU member states and the limitations of joint constructive engagement regarding historical dispute.

- Maintain contact with Bulgaria and Greece in a spirit of respect for each other and international mediation where necessary.
- Ensure that issues related to memory controversies do not compromise general EU alignment and rule of law standards.

2. Synchronise Reconciliation Policies with EU Standards

- Put policies in place that encourage minority rights, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination in accordance with the EU acquis.

- Use EU financial and technical assistance to create inclusive institutions and strengthen governance in multi-ethnic areas.

3. Use the EU Integration as Glue

- Present EU integration as a collective objective that overshadows and unites across ethnic lines, rallying all communities around common values and visions.

- Persuade politicians to avoid the temptation of immediate political benefit, and embrace long-term ones that would bind society as a whole together.

6. Serbia

Examining Serbia within the context of diversity management and culture of memory offers a deeply complex and critical study of how a country with a history of ethnic homogeneity and later conflict navigates the post-Yugoslav era. Serbia's history, particularly in the 1990s with the wars of the breakup of Yugoslavia, the loss of Kosovo, and its transition to a modern European state, offers fertile ground for understanding the entanglement of ethnic identity, memory politics, and national reconciliation.

Serbia's ethnic composition, though more homogeneous compared to some other former Yugoslav republics, includes significant Hungarian, Bosniak, Roma, and Croat minorities, each facing varying degrees of political, social, and economic marginalization. At the same time, Serbia's memory politics are dominated by the contested legacies of the 1990s wars, the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, and the Kosovo conflict.

From the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to its role in Socialist Yugoslavia and eventual break-up in the 1990s, Serbia's ethnic and national identity has been shaped by its dominant role in Yugoslavia. Post-1990s Serbia faced the challenge of navigating ethnic diversity after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, especially with the loss of Kosovo and the rise of ethnic nationalism. Memory politics play a critical role in shaping Serbia's identity, particularly regarding its view of the 1990s wars, the NATO bombing in 1999, and the loss of Kosovo.

Theories of ethnic diversity management in post-conflict societies, with a focus on ethnic majorities and minorities (e.g., Lijphart's consociationalism and Kymlicka's multiculturalism), inform the analysis. The rise of Serbian nationalism in the 1990s has had a lasting impact on contemporary politics, influencing the treatment of minority rights, particularly for Hungarians, Roma, and Bosniaks.

Collective memory in post-war societies (Halbwachs, Assmann, Nora) highlights how states construct narratives of victimhood and victory. These narratives contribute to the construction of national identity and serve as tools of nationalism and political mobilization, especially in the Balkan context.

Serbia's involvement in the Yugoslav Wars—in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo—and the role of Slobodan Milošević are central to memory politics. The Kosovo issue, particularly the 1999 NATO intervention and Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, remains one of the most contentious topics in Serbian public discourse.

The European Union promotes historical reconciliation, minority rights, and democratic reforms in the Western Balkans. These requirements challenge nationalist narratives and push for transitional justice and dialogue.

Ethnic Composition and National Identity Serbia has a predominantly ethnic Serb population (approx. 83%), with significant minorities including Hungarians, Bosniaks, Croats, Roma, and Albanians. The legacy of ethnic homogeneity and nationalist ideologies has influenced the treatment of minority communities. Serbian nationalism, reinforced by the Serbian Orthodox Church and diaspora networks, continues to shape national identity and state policy.

Institutional Framework for Diversity Management Serbia's constitution guarantees rights for minorities, including political representation in parliament and mechanisms such as the National Council of Ethnic Minorities. The Roma community, despite formal protections, experiences deep social exclusion. In Vojvodina, the Hungarian minority benefits from regional autonomy, though ethnic autonomy remains a sensitive political issue.

Challenges in Diversity Management Despite legal frameworks, ethnic minorities—particularly Bosniaks and Albanians—report discrimination, particularly in southern Serbia and

Vojvodina. The Roma face systemic exclusion in education, employment, and housing. Nationalist political discourse, including skepticism toward multiculturalism and minority claims, exacerbates ethnic polarization and undermines reconciliation efforts.

Memory of Yugoslavia and Its Legacy Serbia's self-image is shaped by its leadership role in Socialist Yugoslavia. The Tito era is remembered nostalgically as a time of unity and prosperity, contrasting with the fragmentation and violence of the 1990s. This legacy complicates Serbia's approach to post-Yugoslav reconciliation.

The memory of the Yugoslav Wars is dominated by a narrative of Serbian victimhood and Western aggression. The NATO bombing of 1999 and the Kosovo War are portrayed as defensive struggles. The legacy of Slobodan Milošević remains divisive, reflecting unresolved tensions over Serbia's role in regional conflicts.

Memory of Kosovo and the Loss of Sovereignty Kosovo holds a central place in Serbian national mythology. Its 2008 independence is framed as a national tragedy and historic injustice. Memorials and public discourse emphasize Serbian suffering, often excluding Albanian perspectives. These narratives complicate efforts at reconciliation and EU-mandated dialogue with Kosovo.

The EU demands accountability for war crimes and historical reconciliation as part of Serbia's accession process. However, domestic political elites often rely on historical revisionism and nationalist memory to maintain public support. The resulting tension hinders both minority rights and progress toward European integration.

Diversity Management and Memory Politics Memory politics intersect with ethnic identity, reinforcing nationalist sentiments and obstructing inclusive policy. Serbian nationalism continues to shape public memory, often at the expense of minority narratives. Reconciliation with Kosovo and internal reforms required by the EU are constrained by political resistance to revisiting the past.

Serbia's complex relationship with ethnic diversity and collective memory remains a major obstacle to national reconciliation and EU accession. The persistence of nationalist memory and the marginalization of minority communities hinder efforts to build a shared national identity.

Recommendations for Serbia

Serbia must cultivate culture of memory The process of building a culture of the memory has become an imperative for Serbia which better than any exclusion, forgets and forgives past, opening wounds and sticking in the suffering of all peoples in the war. Part of this is also fostering cross-ethnic dialogue, especially between the Serb and Albanian communities, as a path to reconciliation and to greater mutual understanding. Minority rights are paramount, with a systematic approach and deepened policies in the field of social integration of the Roma community and discrimination. Furthermore, the cooperation of public speech and the education system towards EU-type of standards on historical accountability will enable Serbia to build a constructive approach to its past towards a common understanding and allegiance to democratic principles and regional stability.

Diversity Management

1. Strengthen Legal Protections for Minorities:

Strengthen the implementation of the laws on minority rights, providing full protection for the minorities, including the Hungarians, the Roma, the Bosniaks, and the Albanians, especially in the field of anti-discrimination.

2. Promote Minority Participation:

Promote the increase of minorities in local and national government, judiciary, and public institutions, to foster inclusiveness and trust.

3. Enhance the availability of education and services:

Enlarge multilingual education alternatives and access code to medical, lodging and societal work for ethnic being.

4. Support Interethnic Dialogue and Integration:

Promote initiatives and projects that promote inter-ethnic dialogue, complementarity and cooperation as a measure to defuse tensions and provide social cohesion.

Culture of Memory

1. Encourage Inclusive Historical Narratives:

Support public discourse and educational reform to reflect plural perspectives on Serbia's contentious past, including the wars of the former Yugoslavia and their aftermath.

2. Advance Transitional Justice:

Mechanisms of support to encourage truth-telling, reparations, as well as reconciliation to resolve wartime grievances and create trust between parties.

3. Reform Education:

Impart objective history in the school toward the promotion of knowledge and mutual respect among the nations.

4. Support Memorial and Cultural Projects:

Encourage memorials and other forms of remembrance that recognize the sufferings of all communities impacted by war and political violence.

EU Integration

1. Harmonize Domestic Legislation with the EU Acquis:

Pursue further reforms of minority rights, anti-discrimination, and the rule of law, in line with EU criteria and standards.

2. Enhance Regional Cooperation:

Pursue initiatives with neighbors in cross-border cooperation in discussion on minorities and reconciliation.

3. Implement Transparent Monitoring:

Define clear benchmarks and reporting on progress on diversity and reconciliation within the EU accession process.

4. Utilize EU Funding and Expertise:

Be active in attracting EU financial and technical aid for programs for the inclusion of minorities, cultural heritage protection and social cohesion.

Instead of Conclusions

The Western Balkans remain one of the most ethnically, culturally, and historically complex regions in Europe. The legacy of violent conflict, authoritarian regimes, contested statehood, and unresolved historical grievances continues to shape diversity management and collective memory across the region. From Bosnia and Herzegovina's rigid consociational system to Serbia's unresolved nationalist narratives, and from Kosovo's fragile inter-ethnic relations to North Macedonia's memory disputes with Bulgaria, the management of ethnic plurality and political memory remains central to both domestic governance and international diplomacy.

The comparative analysis of six Western Balkan countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia—reveals several critical trends:

1. **Memory Politics as a Double-Edged Sword:** In all cases, collective memory is not only a reflection of the past but an active tool in shaping present political narratives and inter-ethnic relations. Politicized memory often hinders reconciliation and undermines social cohesion by reinforcing victimhood, denialism, and exclusive nationalism.
2. **Incomplete and Asymmetric Diversity Management:** Although all six countries have made legal and institutional commitments to protect minority rights—often under pressure from international actors—the actual implementation remains uneven. Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, in particular, continue to suffer from deep marginalization, regardless of formal policy commitments.
3. **Education as a Site of Exclusion and Possibility:** The role of education in shaping interethnic understanding and memory is paramount. Yet, most countries exhibit segregated or mono-ethnic history curricula, reinforcing ethnic silos and perpetuating one-dimensional narratives. Inclusive, multiperspective education, as outlined in the FCNM, remains a critical unmet goal.
4. **The EU as a Normative Anchor and Political Battleground:** EU integration has served as both a source of reform and a stage for unresolved historical grievances. Conditionality mechanisms have promoted minority rights and reconciliation frameworks, but the politicization of accession processes—such as Bulgaria's veto of North Macedonia—reveals the fragility of historical consensus and the limits of EU leverage when memory becomes a bargaining chip.

Civil Society and Local Initiatives Matter: While state institutions often struggle to foster inclusive memory cultures, grassroots organizations, educators, artists, and activists have shown the potential to disrupt dominant narratives and build cross-ethnic solidarity. These efforts, however, require greater institutional support and visibility.

A future-oriented politics of memory and diversity in the Western Balkans must go beyond symbolic gestures. It must confront structural inequalities, dismantle nationalist exclusivism, and foster a genuinely pluralistic and democratic political culture. Only then can the region meaningfully integrate into the European project—not only in legal and economic terms, but also in its core values of inclusion, justice, and shared memory.

Policy Recommendations

To advance sustainable peace, democratic consolidation, and EU integration, the following strategic actions are recommended:

- 1. Promote Inclusive Historical Education**
Encourage the incorporation of multiple perspectives into history curricula, including minority experiences and the recognition of past injustices, as part of civic education reform.
 - 2. Support Cultural and Memorial Pluralism**
Invest in minority heritage preservation, multiethnic commemorative practices, and inclusive public symbols to reflect the diverse histories of all communities.
 - 3. Strengthen Institutional Implementation**
Move beyond legal formalism by ensuring consistent funding, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms for minority inclusion policies at local and national levels.
 - 4. Combat Segregation and Structural Inequality**
Implement targeted social and economic inclusion programs, especially for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, to address long-standing systemic exclusion.
 - 5. Enhance Cross-Border and Regional Reconciliation**
Foster bilateral and regional historical commissions and educational exchanges to address contested memories in dialogue with neighboring states and communities.
 - 6. Empower Civil Society and Minority Voices**
Provide institutional and financial support to grassroots initiatives that challenge exclusionary narratives and promote interethnic understanding and cooperation.
 - 7. Align EU Conditionality with Memory Justice**
Ensure that EU enlargement policies do not instrumentalize memory politics but instead promote human rights-based approaches to history, education, and minority protection.
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