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To cite this article: Peter Vermeersch (2009) National Minorities and International Change: Being Ukrainian in Contemporary Poland, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61:3, 435-456, DOI: [10.1080/09668130902753291](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130902753291)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130902753291>



Published online: 09 Apr 2009.



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National Minorities and International Change: Being Ukrainian in Contemporary Poland

PETER VERMEERSCH

Abstract

This article explores the question of how the dynamic of interstate relations affects the domestic processes of minority mobilisation. It analyses Ukrainian minority activism in contemporary Poland against the background of the changing relations between Poland and Ukraine. The article argues that the influence of interstate relations on Ukrainian minority activism is more complex than a traditional view of national minority politics would lead us to presume. Starting from this case study, the article argues that there is a need for a contextual and process-oriented understanding of the categories commonly deployed in the study of minority politics in the region.

IN WHAT WAY DO CHANGES IN INTERSTATE RELATIONS have an influence on domestic processes of minority mobilisation? More precisely, how should we understand the connection between the development of national minority activism in Central and Eastern Europe and crucial shifts in interstate relations in this region? To explore this question, this article analyses recent developments in Ukrainian minority activism in Poland against the background of the changing relations between Poland and Ukraine.

The aim is twofold. First, by analysing a case that has so far received relatively little scholarly attention this article is intended as a contribution to the empirical study of minority politics in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. Second, it aims to contribute to a discussion about the analytic categories commonly deployed in the study of minority politics in this region. The case of the Ukrainian minority is important because it shows that the ways in which domestic minority policies define particular national minorities may not always completely overlap with the ways in which minority activists themselves define their ‘own’ group. The term ‘national minority’ can acquire different meanings depending on the context, and the concepts ‘kin’ and ‘host’ state are not always the univocal terms they seem to be. Moreover I call for an understanding of minority politics that takes into account the complex and fluid ways in which ‘national minority’ activism is influenced by the relationship between the ‘kin’ state and the ‘host’ state.

The article provides an outline of the usual view on minority politics (a relationship that sees national minorities as entities that somehow 'belong' to a foreign source state) and develops an analysis of the case of the Ukrainian minority in Poland, showing how the empirical details of this case do not correspond well with the usual conceptual framework. The analysis draws on public statements, some original interview material and official reports covering recent policy-making debates. It argues for a nuanced understanding of national minority politics, a view that takes into account the perspective of minority activists themselves as well as the shifting institutional context and the dynamics of the political mobilisation process.

National minorities and interstate relations

There is an implicit assumption in much of the literature on national minorities in Central and Eastern Europe that national minority demands and international relations are strongly connected. This literature tacitly assumes that states will act to defend the interests of co-ethnics abroad. It also assumes that national minorities will seek to cultivate a link with their external home state and will try to amplify domestic demands by making them the subject of interstate negotiations. The assumption is detectable, for example, in international documents on minority protection. The OSCE's Copenhagen Document (1990) was one of the first international initiatives regarding minority protection in post-Cold War Europe, and it clearly linked the question of minority protection to the preservation of international stability and peace. When the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) was established, it was exactly with the assumption in mind that national minority issues were tangled up with interstate relations. It assumed that by moderating minority–majority tensions within countries, international conflict could be avoided, or that by mollifying disagreement between states about conflicting territorial claims, a more peaceful climate of minority–majority relations within countries might be reached. As the matter was formulated by the HCNM, 'adequate protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities contributes greatly towards a state's success in minimising ethnic tensions that could create a context for wider conflict'.¹

This assumption may have been proven right in a lot of cases. However, it also implies a homogenising language about national minorities that may not be suitable to describe, understand and analyse all cases in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. It seems natural to conceptualise national minorities as populations that in some way or another 'belong' to a state other than that in which they live. It also seems perfectly natural to expect that minority issues should be described in terms of interstate relations, of states seeking to preserve a feeling of national belonging among the people who are deemed to be part of the same nation, even if they are citizens of another state. And it seems natural to assume that minority populations will rely on their larger nation to enforce policy changes in their 'host' state.

In reality, however, this is not always the way in which minority citizens themselves and other participating actors interpret and conceptualise the situation. One can

¹High Commissioner on National Minorities, available at: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/13019.html>, accessed January 2009.

imagine a situation in which national minorities are seen as members of an ethnic nation that extends the territorial borders of a national state but are, in practice, not accepted as full members of such an a-territorial nation. Consider, for example, the ethnic Hungarians who have in recent years migrated for economic reasons from Romania to Hungary. As Fox (2007) has pointed out, Hungarian nationalists have been redefining membership in the Hungarian nation to include all Hungarians in the region, irrespective of citizenship. Yet ethnic Hungarians from Romania who have gone to Hungary in search of work have not discovered national unity. Even though their linguistic and cultural affinities could in theory facilitate their entry into the local labour market in Hungary, these co-ethnic migrants 'were greeted with the same combination of suspicion and scorn that greets labour migrants the world over' (Fox 2007, p. 85). One can also imagine a situation in which members of a national minority do not want to define themselves only as members of the external national homeland. This may be experienced as too narrow a categorisation, especially when such an affiliation would preclude them from being categorised as part of the dominant nation in the 'host' state.

Such matters of self-perception and self-presentation may colour patterns of minority activism. It is likely that minority activists who have ambiguous feelings about the tendency of their domestic state to define them as belonging to 'another nation' might also be wary of getting carried along by the dynamic of the interstate relations between the state in which they live and 'their' kin state. One might also imagine a situation where these activists feel ambiguous about the claims of national unity projected onto them by nationalists from 'their' kin state. In short, interstate politics might have diverse and complex effects on patterns of domestic minority mobilisation.

In order not to lose sight of this potential diversity, I argue we need a context-oriented and process-oriented focus in the study of national minority politics. Such a focus, which, in part, can be derived from the literature on social movements, will lead to a more nuanced understanding of what meanings actors and participants assign to the terms 'national minority', 'host' state and 'kin' state. Depending on the institutional context and on how instances of minority mobilisation are publicly framed, the same analytic categories may mean different things in different cases. The case of the Ukrainians in Poland very well illustrates the need for such context-oriented and process-oriented research focus.

Ukrainian minority activists in Poland can only claim to represent a small group of people. Although most officials agree that the number according to the last Polish census (27,172 people, or less than 0.08% of the total population of Poland) was too low, there are no serious estimates claiming that their number is higher than 300,000 (Łodziński 2006, p. 189).² However, their case compels us to think beyond the

²Official numbers come from the 2002 official census, reported in Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2003). Ukrainian activist groups such as the Association of Ukrainians in Poland (*Związek Ukraińców w Polsce*) have claimed that irregularities during the census created a bias in the official numbers. As is true in other cases, census figures suggest a level of clarity and stability which is not there; see, for example, Kertzer and Arel (2002). Identification is dependent on context. In Poland, some people may be regarded as Ukrainians but may not identify themselves as such, while others who think of themselves as Ukrainians might not (always) use this identity in a public context. Moreover, since

common assumptions of analysis. Where in other cases the development of minority–majority relations within a country is seen as positively related to international cross-border relations—for example, tensions between Hungarian minority activists in Slovakia and the Slovak government in 1990s were, so it seems, in large part related to the troublesome diplomatic relations between Hungary and Slovakia (Wolff 2001)—the Ukrainians in Poland have continued to see Ukrainian–Polish relationships within Poland as problematic despite increasingly friendly bilateral interstate relations between Poland and Ukraine.

Within Poland, so Ukrainian minority activists have claimed, there continues to be an atmosphere of tension between Poles and Ukrainians. This has mainly been caused by different understandings of the historical episodes of violence and displacement during and after the Second World War. It is suggested that people belonging to the Ukrainian minority in Poland feel that they are a frequent target of discrimination; they are made part of a broader historical narrative; and are depicted as the eternal enemy of the Poles. Such a discourse of antagonism also finds its expression in Polish popular culture, where the stereotype of the Ukrainian as a subaltern looms large (Kmita 1997; Sosnowska 1995). Moreover, current debate about (illegal) immigration from Ukraine has led to the further negative valuation of Ukrainian identity. Although there is some evidence that because of increasing contacts between Poles and Ukrainians there is less stereotyping than in the past (Dziadul 2005, p. 30; Konieczna 2003, p. 28), the fact that Poland between May 2006 and October 2007 was governed by a coalition of centre-right conservatives, populists and extreme nationalists threw the negative attitude of powerful political actors in Poland towards any minority, including the Ukrainians, again into sharp relief. During parliamentary debates in an earlier period, between 2001 and 2005, elected representatives of the three parties of that governing coalition, Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS), Self-defence (*Samoobrona*), and the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR), had voiced strong criticisms of the adoption of a law for minorities.³

Yet in the official Polish discourse about Ukraine and Polish–Ukrainian interstate relations a very different theme can be identified. Since the early 1990s there have been important political forces in Poland who have actively pursued a ‘strategic partnership’ with Ukraine (Wolczuk & Wolczuk 2002). There has been a wide concern among politicians, including important voices from among the ranks of PiS, for reconciliation

Ukrainians were dispersed over the Polish territory after World War II and were made subject to linguistic assimilation, there is a discussion as to whether language (the ability to speak Ukrainian or the tendency to use Ukrainian as a language of preference) should be considered as a necessary attribute of Ukrainian identity. Matters are further complicated by recent immigration from Ukraine and the high rate of intermarriages between Poles and Ukrainians (Górny & Kepińska 2004).

³The LPR, for example, argued in 2004 that a legal provision that would enable minority citizens to use their own language as an auxiliary language during official contacts at the municipal level would ‘harm Polish interests’ (LPR Press release, 24 September 2004, available at: <http://lpr.pl>, accessed August 2006). The LPR also argued that adopting a law for the protection of minorities in Poland would deprive Poland of its good reputation (quoted in Łodziński 2005, p. 10). The current government, led by the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), has internationally been regarded as more attuned to European standards on tolerance than its predecessor. The PO, nevertheless, has a large conservative wing (Slysz 2008) and so far it has in practice been very cautious on issues of minority protection and anti-discrimination.

and friendship between Poland and Ukraine. Politicians promoted the solidarity of Polish citizens with Ukraine during the Orange Revolution. Bilateral discussions in the context of EU enlargement and the EU's neighbourhood policy further invigorated a Polish official discourse within which Polish support for Ukraine and mutual interest in reconciliation between Polish and Ukrainian populations were central themes (Czech 2006; Kość 2005; Vermeersch 2007).

There seems to be a complex contrast between, on the one hand, the developments of the relations between Poland and Ukraine and, on the other, Polish–Ukrainian relations within Poland. In what way are these two fields of politics related? In order to be able to answer that question we first have to gain a more detailed insight into how these two fields of politics developed into what they are today.

Ukrainian minority activism in Poland

The meanings of the past

Since a lot of the claims made by Ukrainian minority activists in Poland are related to events and policies in the past, any analysis of their movement needs to start from a historical inquiry. There is a complex relationship between past events and current processes of political mobilisation for national minority groups. Some people may have personal memories of certain past events, but the way in which these events are told and retold by various political actors makes these events into something more than personal memories. Narrating and commemorating certain past events are important in the formation of what has been called 'mnemonic communities' (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Zerubavel 1999). In an effort to construct, promote and preserve a feeling of national identity within an established mnemonic community, and in order to reinforce that sense of community, states and political leaders may emphasise specific elements of that collective past while downplaying or simply ignoring other aspects. Historical narratives about specific past events turn these events into collective memories that legitimate current political action in the name of the collective. These symbols of political mobilisation, as Reicher and Hopkins (2001, p. 24) have noted, 'gain meaning through their usage in specific fields of social relations', and because they are used in the present their meaning is constantly shifting. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between the past events and current action. Past events shape current political action, but current political action also reshapes the past. Which events, then, are generally seen as crucial in the history of the Ukrainians in Poland and in the current debates about Polish–Ukrainian relations?

Much of the history of the Ukrainians in Poland takes place against the background of the larger history of the area that now forms the eastern part of Poland and the western parts of Ukraine and Belarus. The current borderland region between Poland, Ukraine and Belarus was for a long time a peripheral area that remained unaffected by central attempts at nation-building and state-building. Before the First World War it was a multilingual border zone at the periphery of the Russian and the Austro–Hungarian empires, and as such it was not the focus of much political attention from the centre. At that time, the people inhabiting these areas described themselves as 'locals' (Hann 1998; Brown 2004), not as nationals. One author characterised the area

as 'a continuum of cultures that stood literally and figuratively between Poland, Ukraine, and Russia, in a place where mass media had not yet standardised vernaculars or made boiler-plates of ritual and tradition' (Brown 2004, p. 40). In the first decades of the twentieth century, however, the Ukrainian and the Polish nations gradually but forcefully became the dominant foci for social and political identification. It took at least until the 1930s to complete a massive reorganisation of the political map according to nationality, but even then the people in these areas still often identified themselves rather with the shifting and fluent categories of everyday life than with the fixed category of nationality proffered from above (Brown 2004). Yet during and after the First and the Second World War, some particular events occurred that had such profound consequences that they had a significant impact on local processes of national community formation.

Following the First World War, when Poland was reinstated on the map after more than a century of non-existence, claims for dominance in the regions of eastern Galicia and Volhynia caused tensions and fighting between those who identified themselves as Ukrainians and those who considered themselves to be Poles (Snyder 1999). In the period between the wars, the policies introduced by the Polish authorities towards the Ukrainian population in its eastern provinces were seen as assimilatory. In an attempt to counter Ukrainian nationalism, Polish military colonists were settled in frontier areas, many Ukrainian schools were closed and others were turned into bilingual institutions in which Polish predominated, and the use of Ukrainian in government agencies was banned (Davies 1982, p. 407; Subtelny 1988, p. 429). The Polish government imposed 'Polish control over the political, cultural, and economic life of the region' (Subtelny 1988, p. 427), which, in turn, reinforced radicalisation among Ukrainian nationalists. The paramilitary forces of the Ukrainian national movement began to build their mobilising potential in these regions.

In the early 1930s, complaints were laid at the League of Nations and Western states severely criticised Polish authorities for oppressing about three million Ukrainians, and by so doing creating receptive ground for Russian influence in the region. During the Second World War, a civil war between Poles and Ukrainians broke out during which the military wing of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (*Organizatsiya Ukrains'kikh Natsionalistiv*, OUN), and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrains'ka Powstans'ka Armiya*, UPA), engaged in violent ethnic-cleansing campaigns directed against Polish communities (Snyder 2003). Large numbers of Poles were killed and, in return, a large number of Ukrainians died as victims of reprisals by the Polish resistance army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK) (Czech 1993). Fights continued to take place throughout the period from 1944 to 1947 and involved various factions: the UPA fighting against Poles, Germans and Soviet soldiers; the AK fighting against Germans and Ukrainians; and Polish communist units controlled by the Soviet NKVD acting against Ukrainian and Polish partisans. As has been pointed out by Snyder (1999), the actions of these different groups were rooted in opposing ideas about who had the legitimacy to rule this area. For many Poles the region was a legitimate territory of the Polish state since it was included in Poland by international treaty after the First World War. For many Ukrainians the area was historically and ethnically Ukrainian. War drove claim-makers into action and made it much easier to 'conflate the actions of particular groups with the intentions of entire nations' (Snyder 1999, p. 92).

In 1943 and 1944 the UPA targeted Polish civilians and liquidated entire villages. In the period from 1944 to 1947 the newly established Polish state attempted to remove the Ukrainian populations from Poland. Snyder called this action 'one of several examples of Polish communism's appropriation of Polish ethnic nationalism and wartime suffering, as well as its betrayal of the more tolerant traditions of the Polish left voiced even during the worst hours of the war' (Snyder 1999, p. 101). In 1944 the Polish National Liberation Committee (PKWN) had agreed with the government of Soviet Ukraine to initiate a large-scale population exchange operation. According to some sources, 482,000 people were relocated from Poland to Ukraine in the period from September 1944 to June 1946 (Czech 1993, p. 268). In 1947, a large-scale forced resettlement operation was organised, replacing approximately 140,000 people identified as Ukrainians from the south-eastern border zone to the north and the west of Poland (known as *Akcja Wisła* or 'Operation Vistula'). The basic idea underpinning these initiatives was to obliterate support for the UPA in the eastern regions. In practice, the primary objective soon turned out to be the assimilation of Ukrainians and the elimination of Ukrainian identity in the Polish eastern regions by dispersing Ukrainians among Poles in the rest of the country.

This history left a clear imprint on the way in which Ukrainian–Polish relations were experienced during the post-World War II period. In this period particular events (especially the events related to the civil war, the establishment of the border and the resettlement campaigns) were becoming important elements in the formation of specific, distinctive national narratives among Poles and Ukrainians. In these narratives each portrayed the other nation as responsible for creating injustices and initiating violent conflict. While the official Polish view on the past cultivated the image of the Ukrainians as enemies and Nazi collaborators, Ukrainian minority communities tried to benefit from Poland's formally proclaimed friendship with all the nations of the Soviet Union in order to demand the freedom to develop Ukrainian culture, organise education in the Ukrainian language, conduct religious services and return to the eastern regions of Poland (Czech 1993, p. 269). Between 1958 and 1968, some Ukrainians did return to the south-eastern part of Poland, a Ukrainian cultural organisation was allowed to be established, and a number of Ukrainian magazines and schools were founded. After 1968, however, during the last two years under party leader Gomułka, and later during the period under Gierek, minority policy again became more restrictive and it became difficult for minority leaders to organise the Ukrainian community in Poland.

By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Ukrainian activism had found support from the growing opposition movement in Poland—especially from independent catholic journals such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Znak* and *Więź*—and from Polish diaspora publications in the West, not in the least the Paris-based journal *Kultura*. The intellectuals associated with *Kultura* sought to abandon Polish territorial claims to Ukrainian territory and promoted the idea of friendship with Ukraine as an ideal way of protecting Poland from the Russian sphere of influence (Jelenski 1990, pp. 18–19). In order to win such independence in the long term, so they argued, short-term Polish claims for revision of the border and the annexation of Ukrainian territory needed to be abandoned, and instead a process of reconciliation was to begin.

During the 1980s, Ukrainian activism remained at the margins of the opposition movement mainly because of the rigid assimilation policy that marked this period, but also because the events surrounding *Solidarność* absorbed almost all of the opposition's energy. Yet the fact that independent intellectuals and dissident thinkers had given so much attention to the case of the Ukrainian minority in the early 1980s made matters easier for Ukrainian minority activists when it came to publicising their cause at the end of the 1980s. Many people remembered the arguments of the intellectuals linked to *Kultura* and in the run-up to the round table negotiations in Poland a number of minority activists—among them three Ukrainian activists, Michał Łesiów, Włodzimierz Mokry and Stefan Kozak—appealed to Lech Wałęsa for the discussion of a more generous approach to national minorities at the round table talks. The Committee for Cooperation with the National Minorities (*Komisja Współpracy z Mniejszościami Narodowymi*) that was subsequently established within *Solidarność* brought intellectuals such as Jacek Kuroń and Bohdan Skaradziński together with minority representatives such as Włodzimierz Mokry. Soon thereafter, Mokry was given a favourable place on the list of *Solidarność* at the first parliamentary elections. From 1989 to 1991, he was the first Ukrainian minority activist to have a seat in the Polish lower house (*Sejm*).⁴ Thanks to the work of mainly Kuroń and Mokry, a special committee dealing with national minorities was established in the *Sejm*, and work on new legislative initiatives was started.

Contemporary Ukrainian minority activism

Contemporary Ukrainian minority activists have mainly made claims related to the recognition and commemoration of past injustices, measures of compensation for these injustices, language protection and financial support for cultural activities.

Through the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language of January 2005 (further referred to as the Minorities Law),⁵ Poland has now officially recognised nine national and four ethnic minorities.⁶ According to the results of the 2002 census, the four largest minority groups are the Silesians (172,682), the Germans (147,094), the Belarusians (47,640) and the Ukrainians (27,172). The case of the Silesians is interesting: although 172,682 citizens referred to their nationality as 'Silesian' in the census, the Polish authorities did not regard the Silesians as a separate minority group (Łodziński 2006).⁷

⁴In elections in 1993 and 1997, other candidates representing the Ukrainian minority were elected as MPs from lists of the liberal Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*, UW) and the Alliance of the Democratic Left (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, SLD).

⁵Law 141, 'Ustawa o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym' (Dziennik Ustaw nr. 17), available at: http://www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/178/2958/Ustawa_o_mniejszosciach_narodowych_i_etnicznych_oraz_o_jezyku_regionalnym.html, accessed January 2009.

⁶Poland has recognised the following national minorities: Armenians, Belarusians, Czechs, Germans, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians and Jews. Ethnic minorities are the Karaites, the Lemkos, the Roma and the Tatars.

⁷The 2003 report of the Polish statistical office called groups such as the Germans, Belarusians and Ukrainians 'nationalities' (*narodowości*). Groups that have no external homeland such as the Silesians and the Roma were defined as 'communities' (*społeczności*) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2003, p. 39). But while the official list of minorities published by the Ministry of the Interior included the Roma, it

Although the census results show minorities making up only about 1% of the total population, both official estimates and figures compiled by minority organisations offer total figures of 2.2–5.1% (Łodziński 2006, p. 198). Given the small numbers, it may seem surprising that minority rights protection became the focus of a prolonged political debate. The call for more minority rights protection in Poland found its way to the current political agenda mainly thanks to the work of a number of self-appointed minority leaders. This is true in particular for the Ukrainian minority.

There are good reasons for analysts of ethnic mobilisation to focus on the actions of minority leaders. The claims made by these national minority leaders often serve two purposes: both to defend the population from perceived or real injustices, and to 'construct' the minority group and to ensure their position as 'representatives' of that group. Different actors who claim to represent a minority often have different demands, define the minority group differently, and compete with each other in order to 'monopolize the legitimate representation of the group' (Brubaker 1996, p. 61). Since it is my aim to find out more about the views of the main actors active in issuing demands for the Ukrainian minority, I focus here on those activists who have been included in the Polish governmental bodies responsible for minority affairs. Although they may not be in a strict sense 'representative' for the entire Ukrainian minority in Poland, I assume that these actors represent the dominant political stance within the field of Ukrainian minority politics because they have been 'ratified' as minority leaders through their inclusion in official government bodies. Such recognition offers them a powerful position to speak and act on behalf of the entire minority.

In 1997, a governmental body, the Interdepartmental Group for National Minority Issues was established within the government administration (*Międzyresortowy zespół do spraw mniejszości narodowych*). In February 2002, the body was renamed as the Group for National Minority Issues (*Zespół do Spraw Mniejszości Narodowych*). Another governmental body, the Division of National Minorities (*Wydział mniejszości narodowych*), was founded in 2000 and was placed at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The Interdepartmental Group gathered the representatives of various governmental departments. Although it did not have minority representatives among its members, it organised dialogues and information sessions with prominent activists and representatives of officially recognised minority organisations. The Division of National Minorities, on the other hand, was established as a purely ministerial body aimed at raising the government's activities in the field of minority protection without opening the official meetings up to minority activists. The Division did, however, maintain contact with minority organisations. The Minorities Law of 2005 led to the establishment of yet another important governmental institution, the Joint Commission of the Government and the National and Ethnic Minorities (*Komisja Wspólna*

did not mention the Silesians (see <http://www.mswia.gov.pl/index.php?dzial=61&id=37>, accessed August 2006). The 2005 Minorities Law followed this logic: the Roma, the Karaites and the Łemkos were recognised as 'ethnic' minorities (*mniejszości etniczne*) because they have no external homeland. Recognised groups with an external homeland were called national minorities (*mniejszości narodowe*). Despite protest from Silesian minority activists, the Silesians were recognised neither as a national nor as an ethnic minority.

Rządu i Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych). This last institution includes minority representatives and functions as an advisory body to the government council.⁸

Although the law did not provide any strict regulations concerning the selection of minority representatives for these organs, for most minority organisations the selection process was not a source of much disagreement. For the Ukrainians, the official inclusion of the Association for the Ukrainians in Poland (*Związek Ukraińców w Polsce*, ZUwP) was a matter of course for almost all players involved in these institutions.⁹ Discussions about whether the leader of the ZUwP could indeed be seen as the legitimate representative of the Ukrainians in Poland only surfaced briefly in the context of the debate regarding the position of the Łemko community. Although Łemko activists did not question the role of the ZUwP as the most appropriate organisation to represent the Ukrainians in general, there was still some discussion as to whether the interests of the Łemko community needed to be represented by the ZUwP.¹⁰

When examining the issues that ZUwP representatives were able to put on the agenda, one can see that while some of their demands were similar to those made by other minority petitioners others were quite specific to the situation of the Ukrainians. According to the reports of the Interdepartmental Group for the period between 2001 and 2005 the issues on which Ukrainian demands were similar to demands of other national minority representatives concerned financial support for minority cultural centres, the organisation of minority education, and the facilitation of access to public media. Most of these claims were made in the context of a long political discussion about various drafts of the Minorities Law (Polish Government 2002), and some led to the adoption of important overall provisions in that law.¹¹

Even though Ukrainian activists were generally happy with the fact that a law on minority protection had been adopted, they remained sceptical about the ability of the law to alleviate some of their more specific concerns. For example, the law allowed the official use of a minority language in municipal institutions where at least 20% of the inhabitants identify themselves as belonging to a national minority (Łodziński 2005; Rich 2005). However, for the Ukrainians this has been of little use. As a result of

⁸Article 23 and 24 of the Minorities Law, available at: http://www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/178/2958/Ustawa_o_mniejszosciach_narodowych_i_etnicznych_oraz_o_jezyku_regionalnym.html, accessed January 2009.

⁹The ZUwP was established in February 1990 and is the successor to the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Society (*Ukraińskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalny*), which had existed since 1956 but was controlled by the communist authorities. Until January 2006 it was led by Miron Kertyczak and, since that date, by Piotr Tyma.

¹⁰Interview with the head of the Division of National Minorities, Dobiesław Rzemieniecki, Warsaw, 30 May 2006. The Minorities Law has recognised the Lemkos as an 'ethnic minority' and they are considered to have their own representative organisations. There are several ways in which Lemkos (or Carpatho-Rusyns) identify themselves. Some of them see themselves as a subgroup of the Ukrainian minority; others regard themselves as a minority separate from the Ukrainians. They have often been regarded as Ukrainians by others. The Lemkos have also been dispersed as a result of Operation Vistula (Nowak 2006).

¹¹Reports of the meetings are available from the following websites: http://www.mswia.gov.pl/spr_oby_mn3.html, http://www.sejm.gov.pl/komisje/www_mne.htm, and http://www.sejm.gov.pl/komisje/www_sue.htm, all sites accessed August 2006.

the widespread dispersion of the people who could potentially register as belonging to the Ukrainian minority, there are no municipalities where the official share of Ukrainians in the total population is higher than 20%. So, in response to the law's limitations, Ukrainian minority activists have pointed to the specific historical circumstances of their case and have argued that their problems are different from those of other minorities, that they have to be treated differently, and they justify the introduction of additional measures. They have argued that general minority regulations disproportionately affect Ukrainians because of the legacy of Operation Vistula. Thus, instead of focusing only on general minority regulations, Ukrainian activists have sought to achieve a discussion on the possibility of tailor-made measures, applicable only to their case.

Evidence of this strategy can be seen in the official documents. The reports of the governmental bodies on minority issues as well as the publications of the ZUwP clearly show that Ukrainian minority activists have been chiefly concerned with issues that only affected the Ukrainian minority. These are mainly issues relating to past injustices: claims for the restitution of property that once belonged to Ukrainian organisations; compensation for the people (and the families of the people) who had been imprisoned in the labour camp of Jaworzno (a former Nazi concentration camp that from 1947 to 1949 was used by the Polish authorities as a detention camp for Ukrainians suspected of cooperation with the UPA); symbolic actions assisting reconciliation, such as an official apology on behalf of the Polish government to the Ukrainian Poles acknowledging the fact that the Polish government mistreated them during Operation Vistula; and the setting up of a monument commemorating the victims of the camp at Jaworzno.

The tendency of Ukrainian minority activists to emphasise the specific circumstances of their case is also part of a longer tradition of Ukrainian minority activism in Poland. Ukrainian minority organisations have been active in this area since the beginning of the democratic transition process. In February 1989, for example, the Ukrainian Socio-cultural Society (*Ukraińskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne*), the ZUwP's predecessor, published a report in which it argued that 'because of the significant spread of the Ukrainian national minority there is not a single electoral district where there is even the slightest possibility of getting elected representatives, whatever the number of votes may be' (*Ukraińskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne* 1993, p. 86). Therefore the organisation demanded a special method of representation that would take into account the historical dispersal of this minority. Such a special method was needed, it argued, to ensure the presence of Ukrainians in both local and national governmental bodies.

More recently Ukrainian minority activists working outside the official institutions have sought to highlight the importance of the past. In 2006, Mirosław Czech, ZUwP activist, journalist and former MP, called Operation Vistula 'still an unhealed wound and a basic element of the relation between the [Polish] state and its own citizens' (Czech 2006, p. 20). My interviews in Warsaw in May and June 2006 with the head of the Division of National Minorities, Dobiesław Rzemieniewski, and with Piotr Tyma, the leader of the ZUwP, confirm this picture. When asked about the issues that Ukrainian minority activists were able to put on the agenda of the meetings of the Division of National Minorities, Rzemieniewski mentioned only Operation Vistula

and the associated demands for material and symbolic compensation. When talking about the activities of the ZUwP, Piotr Tyma repeatedly insisted that the 'old issues' were to be regarded as the organisation's main focal point. Indeed, recent material published by the ZUwP has still revolved mostly around documenting the details of Operation Vistula and its consequences, even though their stated aims have been to raise awareness at the level of policy making and to persuade target audiences to continue to support the organisation (Mokry 1997).

What is important here is that these demands give us an indication of how Ukrainian minority activists think about what it means to be Ukrainian in Poland today. Their activism creates the image of a minority that is different from all other minorities and of a Ukrainian identity that is still related to the civil war and Operation Vistula. More provocatively, one could perhaps argue that the civil war and Operation Vistula 'created' the Ukrainian minority as it is today, in the sense that the present Ukrainian minority in Poland cannot be understood easily outside the context of these specific demands. People who identify themselves as part of the Ukrainian minority in the context of the discussion about symbolic and material compensations for Operation Vistula would not necessarily identify themselves as part of the Ukrainian minority in the context of more 'regular' minority demands, such as demands for greater access to the media or demands for education in the Ukrainian language.

Responses of Ukrainian minority activists to changing interstate relations between Poland and Ukraine

Polish–Ukrainian relations seem to have reached an important point today. There have been an increasing number of attempts at reconciliation recently between Ukraine and Poland on the interstate level (although some tensions remain), and relations between Ukrainians and Poles within Poland are improving. Yet the Ukrainian minority activists do not necessarily find a better context to make their 'minority-specific' claims heard, even if they are increasingly made part of the interstate discussion and Ukrainians are now generally regarded as a 'regular' national minority. Even among Ukrainian minority activists themselves there now appears to be competing conceptualisations of national belonging: some argue they belong to a monocultural but non-territorial Ukrainian nation, while others emphasise multi-cultural but territorial Polish roots. In the current context, it seems increasingly difficult for them to be regarded as a minority that has historically been part of the Polish nation, and not as a minority that is somehow linked to the Ukrainian nation-state.

In order to explore possible connections between international change and domestic minority politics in Poland, it is useful here to highlight briefly some of the basic developments in Polish–Ukrainian interstate relations. Ever since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Polish–Ukrainian interstate relations have fluctuated with the changes in the wider international context. Following the analysis made by Wolczuk and Wolczuk (2002), one may distinguish several periods from 1991 to 2004. In the first, between 1991 and 1994, Poland's foreign policy was driven by the country's desire to improve its prospects of joining NATO. In this context, there was little time

and effort devoted to improve economic and political cooperation with Ukraine, although Poland continued to support Ukrainian independence. From the mid-1990s onwards, after the presidential elections in Ukraine and Poland, Poland put its cooperation with Ukraine more at the heart of its eastern policy. What followed was a brief period during which both countries stepped up their political, economic and military cooperation efforts. Polish policy in this period was mainly driven by a concern to avoid a far-reaching Russian influence at its eastern borders. After 1998, the relations deteriorated again, mainly as the result of Poland's preoccupation with joining the EU and the EU's apparent lack of interest in Ukraine.

More recently Poland has again been able to improve relations by actively supporting Ukraine's bid to become a candidate for EU membership, and it has lobbied for a flexible visa regime for Ukraine (Vermeersch 2005, p. 84). While Poland was obliged to introduce a visa regime for Ukrainian citizens as a result of its accession negotiations with the EU, it still managed to make Ukraine a priority in the European Neighbourhood Policy and stimulated the creation of a European action plan specifically directed towards Ukraine. Poland also showed its willingness to support Ukraine's 'return to Europe' by playing a crucial role in the Orange Revolution. In November and December 2004, Polish political leaders from very different parts of the political spectrum sought media attention for the Orange movement in Ukraine and successfully mobilised Polish citizens in its support by organising protests in the streets of Warsaw and by volunteering to act as election monitors for the OSCE at the run-off vote in the presidential elections in Ukraine. Although some of the action in Poland may have been guided by Polish popular nostalgia for a time of unity in opposition against undemocratic leaders and a common fear of new threats to democracy coming from Russia, it may nevertheless have signalled the preparedness of Poles to construct more positive ideas about Ukraine and Ukrainians. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was one of the important actors at the round table negotiations in Kyiv together with Lithuania's President Valdas Adamkus and the EU's foreign policy representative Javier Solana (Jedras 2004). Public figures such as former Polish President and Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa went to Kyiv to give support to the rallying crowds. The Ukrainian minority activists in Poland obviously benefited from this situation. Since the Orange Revolution the Ukrainian government has also developed a more elaborate programme to support the Ukrainian minority in Poland.¹² Moreover, in response to Polish support for the Orange Revolution, the Ukrainian government has acted more progressively towards developing a better system of protection for the Polish minority in Ukraine.

The positive attitude of both the Polish population and the Polish political elite towards Ukraine did not end with the Orange Revolution. In July 2003, the Ukrainian and Polish presidents, Yushchenko and Kwaśniewski, unveiled two memorials at the Lychakiv Cemetery in L'viv honouring Polish and Ukrainian soldiers who had died fighting each other in the First World War (Zawada 2003). Significantly, attempts at reconciliation at the elite level continued even after the presidency of Poland was passed from Aleksander Kwaśniewski to Lech Kaczyński, who earlier, as a PiS politician, had not been particularly sympathetic to minority demands. To the surprise

¹²Personal interview with Piotr Tyma, Warsaw, 1 June 2006.

of many, on 3 May 2006, Kaczyński and Yushchenko undertook a joint visit to Pawłokoma, a village in the south-eastern part of Poland, where a ceremony was being held to commemorate both Ukrainian and Polish victims of the civil war. In March 1945 a detachment of Polish AK soldiers had made Pawłokoma the scene of a mass killing of Ukrainian inhabitants, a massacre that had been an action of retaliation against an earlier kidnapping and killing of Poles by Ukrainian units.

This case is clearly illustrative of a larger trend in Polish politics. Since the mid-1990s when Poland put Ukraine at the heart of its eastern policy, the Polish political elite has clearly and consistently linked Ukrainian minority demands to the debate about improving relations between Poland and Ukraine and supporting democratisation in Ukraine. For example, in 1997 various political parties declared in favour of a comprehensive package of compensation measures for Operation Vistula, and they all referred to the international context as the most important reason why the government indeed needed to act on this matter urgently.¹³ For example, as noted by Mokry, when Leszek Balcerowicz, at that time leader of the centre-liberal party Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*, UW), was asked whether his party would take the initiative in parliament in order to 'meet the demands of 300,000 Polish citizens of Ukrainian nationality,' his answer was:

The Freedom Union declares itself to be in favour of reconciliation with all our neighbours and this matter concerns most certainly the relations between Poles and Ukrainians. Personally, I am happy to have been part of the government of Jan Krzysztof Bielecki [from January to December 1991], the first government in the world that was ready to recognise the independence of Ukraine. (Mokry 1997, p. 286)

The same immediate connection between domestic minority politics and international relations was made by Lech Kaczyński at the Pawłokoma commemoration. Kaczyński made his reconciliation speech as part of an official visit of Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko to Poland. It was a surprise to many observers—including the Ukrainian minority organisations in Poland—that the Polish President suddenly seemed so actively involved in commemorating Ukrainian victims.

Ukrainian minority activists in Poland have been quite happy with most of these developments; yet these developments have not always corresponded exactly with the

¹³In 1990, the Polish upper chamber (*Senat*) condemned Operation Vistula, an initiative that was first welcomed by Ukrainian activists but later also criticised because of the lack of concrete proposals for compensatory measures (Czech 1993, p. 275). According to the ZUwP, the decision made by the government in 2001 to grant compensation to the former inmates of the camp in Jaworzno was an important but insufficient measure (ZUwP 2002). Ukrainian activists have continued to demand a special measure for the restitution of the property that Ukrainian-speaking populations lost as a result of the resettlement campaign (Szydłowski 2008). Moreover, a condemnation of Operation Vistula by the *Sejm* did not follow. What did follow, however, was presidential action. During his two terms in office (from 1995 to 2005), Aleksander Kwaśniewski responded, at times quite directly, to some of the crucial demands of the Ukrainian minority activists. He made his most important gesture in 2002, on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the event, when he called Operation Vistula 'a symbol of the abominable deeds perpetrated by the communist authorities against Polish citizens of Ukrainian origin' (Maksymiuk 2002). This condemnation came at a time when Poland tried to establish better relations with Ukraine.

aims they have put forward as activists. The situation has brought activists closer to reaching some of the goals they had set for themselves (such as making commemoration services for Ukrainian victims possible), but has led them away from the identity they wanted to construct, of Polish Ukrainians as an intrinsic part of the Polish nation.

Piotr Tyma, head of the ZUwP, has argued that, while in principle the positive attitude of Poland towards Ukraine has been a welcome step towards reconciliation, the ‘internationalisation’ of Ukrainian minority demands (the tendency to make them part of and dependent on Polish–Ukrainian interstate negotiations) might not always have been beneficial to the Polish Ukrainians.¹⁴ There seem to be three main reasons for ZUwP’s cautiousness. First, Ukrainian minority activists in Poland have sought to persuade the Polish government to accept Ukrainian minority claims irrespective of Poland’s current good relationship with Ukraine. In other words, Ukrainian minority activists have sought to make their domestic political position as much independent as possible from Polish foreign policy and from the development of international relations in the region. Secondly, Polish Ukrainians want to be regarded as Polish citizens (who also historically belong to Polish territory) and not as an immigrant minority from Ukraine (even though the Polish Ukrainians are also concerned about the situation of newcomers). Thirdly, Ukrainian minority activists fear that some politicians might exploit the foreign policy goal of a strategic partnership with Ukraine in order to negate domestically oriented demands.

The latter point is the most important one and does not merely refer to an abstract possibility. In February 2008, news of an increasing number of claims for compensation of confiscated property by the descendants of those who were resettled during Operation Vistula led to the following response from Andrzej Zapałowski, a former member of the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR) and currently a member of the European Parliament:

This is a very dangerous situation for Polish–Ukrainian relations. It opens the door to claims by former borderland inhabitants who came from territory that now belongs to Ukraine and were moved to Poland . . . Ukraine is an important partner for the security of Poland, and stirring up a conflict will bring nothing good . . . In my view Operation Vistula was necessary because of the intensity of the activities of groups of Ukrainian criminals whose goal it was to tear away a piece of the Polish state. (Frey 2008)

In this quotation a politician denies the central concerns of Ukrainian minority activism in Poland (the recognition of Operation Vistula as a deplorable policy and the need for compensation) by using a pro-Ukraine argument.

Ukrainian minority activists have been wary of the interstate dimension that some of their claims seem to have acquired. They have feared that Polish domestic policy towards them might be used as currency to trade on issues related to the way Ukraine deals with its Polish minority and, for that reason, policy progress will be dependent on reciprocity. According to Ukrainian minority activists, the political debate surrounding the Ukrainian National House (*Ukraiński Dom Ludowy*) in Przemyśl, a

¹⁴Personal interview with Piotr Tyma, 1 June 2006, Warsaw.

building now owned by the local state that before 1947 had belonged to a Ukrainian organisation, illustrates the difficulty of such internationalisation (Brzeziecki 2008). Although the matter essentially demanded only a local negotiation between the current owner, the municipal authorities in Przemyśl, and the ZUwP, the issue became an element of central government attention. In letters to President Lech Kaczyński and to Prime Minister Donald Tusk, the ZUwP accused the municipal authorities in Przemyśl of waiting for an initiative from the authorities in L'viv, Ukraine, where the local Polish minority had also made claims for property restitution (Tyma & Chmielowa 2006; ZUwP 2007). In a letter to the mayor of Przemyśl, the ZUwP wrote:

With regret we note that the case of our ... house ... has become the topic of Polish–Ukrainian interstate relations and the object of a bargaining process, which has a negative effect on these relations. Not wanting this, we, Polish citizens, inhabitants of Przemyśl have become hostages, victims of a principle of reciprocity that is in this Republic still considered unacceptable. (Tucka 2007)

The ZUwP itself acted upon this internationalisation by seeking contact with the Federation of Polish Organisations in Ukraine (*Federacji Organizacji Polskich na Ukrainie*), which granted its support to this letter. It is telling, however, that the ZUwP emphasised that Polish Ukrainians are Polish citizens.

Such a deliberate self-categorisation has been detectable more widely in the activism of Ukrainian minority activists in Poland. For example, in the discussions in the *Sejm* commission on ethnic and national minorities (*Komisja Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych*) the main focus of debate was the draft minority law. From the comments made by Miron Kertyczak in the commission, one can conclude that Ukrainian affairs were seen very much in the context of the demands made in the domestic context, not in the context of interstate relations (even though a number of important developments were taking place in this field of interstate politics). Public statements by Miron Kertyczak, at that time the leader of the ZUwP, explained this strategy further. In August 2003, Radio Polonia asked Kertyczak whether he thought the enlargement of the EU to Poland but not to Ukraine would change the position of the Ukrainian minority in Poland. His answer was: 'In my opinion: no. And this is because—and I want stress this strongly—we, the Ukrainians in Poland ... have been citizens of the Polish Republic for a century'.¹⁵

Such statements, often made in the margins of larger claims that the Ukrainians have sought to file with the Polish state, illustrate exactly the core of the issue. In contrast to what one would perhaps expect in a classical interpretation of national minority politics, in which it is logical that minority activists seek to cultivate stronger ties with the external kin-state in order to have their interests defended *vis-à-vis* their 'host' state, the Ukrainian activists in Poland have, at times, aimed for just the opposite. They have sometimes emphasised the idea that they belong to Poland and the Polish nation-state and they have sought to regain the position they had before the invention of the present-day Polish nation as a homogenous entity.

¹⁵Kertyczak was interviewed by Radio Polonia, 20 August 2003, transcript available at: <http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia/pl/unia/>, accessed August 2006.

*Conceptualising national minority issues: a context-oriented
and process-oriented approach*

The attempts of Ukrainian activists to define their group as part of the Polish nation (and not as an external part of the Ukrainian state) may lead one to see the Ukrainian minority in Poland as an unusual case in the world of minority politics, an exception that confirms the rule that normally national minority issues in Central and Eastern Europe are about minority populations which seek to distance themselves from their 'host' country, seek to cultivate a link with their historical homeland—the country where their nation is the dominant population group—and, in extreme cases, even try to become part again of that external homeland by emigrating, lobbying for special citizenship measures (status laws) or demanding secession. However, if one more carefully conceptualises the meaning of national minority politics, it does not follow that the Ukrainians in Poland are an exception.

Such a conceptualisation should, first of all, devote serious attention to issues of political and institutional context. That minority activism (and what it means to be a minority) is dependent on the contextual aspect becomes clear if one considers it from the perspective of literature on social movements, internationalism and globalisation. Social movement research has argued that changes in the political and institutional contexts that surround a social movement will lead to changes in the way such a movement acts. In other words, this literature claims that movements—including ethnic movements—will be affected by the political and institutional contexts in which they operate. In order to seize opportunities, movement leaders will adjust their collective action strategies. These general contentions are at the heart of what has become known as 'political opportunity' and 'political process' theories (Kriesi *et al.* 1995; McAdam 1982; McAdam *et al.* 1996). Social movements, these theories argue, are to a large extent shaped by their interaction with the political opportunity structure that surrounds them (McAdam 1996).

This is one way in which minority claims need to be considered. Minority activists act in response to changes in the national or international political and institutional environment. Such a conceptualisation is appropriate for the analytical description of minority politics, because it does not assume that minorities will always act in the same way. It rather assumes that minority mobilisation happens in response to certain institutional and political givens and can therefore be different from one place to another and from one time to another.

What it means to be a national minority is also dependent upon the way in which minority activists categorise themselves and the way in which they are categorised by the state. There is a dynamic of framing and counterframing at play (Benford & Snow 2000; Meyer 2004). Social movement scholars have been interested in framing when understood as the way in which movement actors disseminate their understanding of social reality in order to appeal to a constituency. Different authors have often highlighted different aspects of the framing process. Some authors have centred attention on the individual control over framing processes. In their view, research has to focus on the ability of activists to assign meaning to social reality, promote a certain understanding of reality and intentionally choose a frame for mobilisation. McAdam *et al.* (1996, p. 6) define framing as 'the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people

to fashion a shared understanding of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action'. Others have emphasised that the process of framing is not taking place in a vacuum (Benford & Snow 2000, p. 628). For them, research should not discard the fact that framing is always negotiated and to a certain degree shaped by the complex, multi-organisational, multi-institutional arenas in which it takes place. These authors have emphasised that frame diffusion (how frames spread) and frame resonance (how frames become effective) is affected by the cultural and political environment.

The concept of framing provides a useful contribution to the study of ethnic minority mobilisation since it directs attention to cognition and persuasion. According to the framing approach, the boundaries of ethnic minority identity are continuously reconstituted in the light of the present circumstances, even in cases where there are seemingly 'objective' historical and cultural foundations of this identity. Thus, an ethnic minority is not simply a group of people that differs from the rest of society in terms of language, tradition and so forth, but rather the result of a process in which such differences are deemed socially and politically meaningful and are acted upon. By applying Benford and Snow's concept of framing to the subject area of ethnic mobilisation, an opportunity is created to examine the element of choice in the construction of ethnic identity (the use of intentional frames) as well as the element of designation (the presence of countermobilising frames or the (in)ability of a particular frame to resonate in a given context).

With this literature in mind, it becomes easier to analyse the otherwise rather puzzling case of the Ukrainians in Poland. Social movement literature leads us away from simply assuming that Ukrainian identity in Poland is the same thing as Ukrainian identity in Ukraine. Social movement literature invites us to focus instead on the patterns of identification that Ukrainian minority activists in Poland have tried to promote through political action. The Ukrainian minority activists in Poland have, for various reasons (including but not only strategic ones), sometimes avoided a strong association between, on the one hand, Ukrainian minority identity in Poland and, on the other hand, the position of Ukraine towards Poland. This is important because it says something about the 'project identity' that activists have tried to construct for the group they want to represent. Following Stephen Reicher and Nick Hopkins, minority identity (like majority identity) is not simply about 'being' but it is also related to the process of 'becoming'. Identity can be 'used to mobilize people in support of, or in opposition to, different forms of political projects' (Reicher & Hopkins 2001, p. xi). The political project of the Ukrainian minority activists has clearly not only, or at least not always, been about creating a closer association with Ukraine but rather about seeking justice from the government within the confines of the Polish state.

This is evidenced by the content of the demands that Ukrainian minority organisations have made. These demands have sometimes deliberately been framed as part of a domestic context in order to make them independent from the ongoing interstate dynamic. They have mostly been about issues related to the development of local culture, reparations, monuments and commemoration, and the preservation of culture and language through publications and education in the context of the Polish state. Their demands have been less focused on the preservation of cross-border ties, the possibility of receiving support from Ukraine or the facilitation of travel and

migration to and from Ukraine. From this observation one could conclude that Ukrainian minority activists have often imagined a national homeland that is not Ukraine. If they construct a homeland, it is the homeland of a 'country' that does not exist anymore, more precisely, the Polish borderland regions of the past. An example of this is Miron Kertyczak's plea to the Polish public and to NGO representatives during his speech at the opening of the exhibition about Operation Vistula at the state archives in Warsaw in 2002:

help subsequent generations to maintain bonds with their homeland that their ancestors had been forced to leave. Because we intend to keep returning there, to cultivate the memory of our native roots, sing songs, tend to graves, strengthen our scarce community that inhabits the area from Łemkowszczyzna to Podlasie. We will maintain bonds with our native land because it was, is, and we believe that it will remain for the centuries to come our small homeland in our country: the Republic of Poland.¹⁶

The Ukrainians in Poland are a lesser known national minority in Central Europe. It may, however, be fruitful to compare their situation with that of other groups that have been recognised as national minorities. In these other cases, too, one will find that the homogenising language that is suggested by many international frameworks is to some extent problematic. Kaszub organisations in Poland, for example, did not want the Kaszubians to be labelled as a national minority, but they still wanted Kaszub-speakers to be able to benefit from all the protection measures included in the Minorities Law (Łodziński 2005, pp. 22–3). The Roma in Poland, to give another example, were recognised as a national minority, but policy makers as well as administrators and activists have argued that this minority is 'different' and is in need of social policy measures that cannot be granted within the regular framework for minority protection. Definitional struggles about whether the Roma should be considered a national minority, a transnational group or a social caste are also to be found in other countries in Europe (Vermeersch 2003, 2005).

Conclusion

This article has argued that important positive developments in Polish–Ukrainian interstate relations have, in complex ways, interacted with the rhetoric and strategies employed by Ukrainian minority activists in Poland. This finding points to the fact that transnational political opportunities for ethnic mobilisation are not simply dependent on changes in the international environment, but also on particular responses by activists, the state and other political actors. While a traditional view of national minority issues assumes that national minorities will seek to cultivate a link with 'their' external home state and try to amplify domestic demands by making them a subject of interstate relations, this article argues that this is not a logic all minority mobilisers will automatically follow. Empirical analysis of the case of the Ukrainian

¹⁶A transcription of Miron Kertyczak's speech of 22 April 2002 has been made available on the webpages of the periodical *Ridna Mowa*, available at: http://www.interklasa.pl/portal/dokumenty/r_mowa/strony_pol01/prosvita_wisla.htm, accessed July 2006.

minority in Poland shows that minority activists may sometimes have good reasons to be sceptical about the attempts of domestic governments to frame minority demands as intrinsically linked to the development of interstate relations.

This finding is important because it highlights the fact that the link between national minorities and external homelands is more complex than one would expect at first sight. Ukrainian activists do not always base their political struggle on the idea that they somehow 'belong' to Ukraine. Although Ukrainian minority activists oppose assimilation—they seek to maintain and even revive Ukrainian culture—they still confine their action largely to issues that relate to the Polish public arena, and they, as loyal Polish citizens, do not seek to dissociate themselves from the Polish state. They seek to construct themselves as migrants from the past, from a historical multiethnic Polish nation that does not exist in the same way anymore.

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