

AHRC report on the value and impact of arts and humanities research.

Chapter: "Measuring our standing: benchmarking and sharing good practice".

Historical analysis contributes to policy debates on minority rights in Europe

"Ending Nationalism? The Quest for Cultural Autonomy in Inter-War Europe"

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A project on cultural autonomy for minorities created opportunities to share expert knowledge with the governments of Romania and Armenia. The research focused on the concept of non-territorial cultural autonomy for national minorities, which was first devised by socialist politicians in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire and later implemented in the independent Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania during the 1920s. By doing so, it brought to light an overlooked contribution to debates on European unity from Central and Eastern Europe, which has particular relevance in light of increasing strains on the cohesion of the now enlarged European Union.

Through this project, lead researcher Professor David Smith was invited by the Romanian government to give a briefing on cultural autonomy for minorities. The invitation was issued via the European Centre for Minority Issues, and led to the Romanian government preparing a draft law on cultural autonomy that went before parliament. It did not pass into law, but it did help to shape the debate around minorities in Romania. The research has also fed into a draft law in Armenia. In addition the research team participated in a roundtable organised by the New Security Foundation in 2008, which was in part concerned with discussing the possible relevance of cultural autonomy to a UK context.

The project also led to a joint seminar in 2007 with the Venice Commission, an advisory body on constitutional law set up within the Council of Europe. This seminar on the participation of minorities in public life was hosted by the Republic of Croatia in Zagreb. Subsequently, a member of the Venice Commission's Secretariat stated that the seminar 'succeeded in building a meaningful link between historical issues around cultural autonomy in Eastern Europe and today's wider challenges faced by most European States, which have the duty under international law to create conditions ensuring a real participation in decision-making processes for various minority groups'.