

**Summary of Activities organized in the Framework of Eurasia-Net Project
To be submitted for discussion in the Final Conference
organized**

by

Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (CRG)

on 18-20 March 2010 at Swabhumi, Kolkata

by Samir Kumar Das

The final conference is being held as per the project terms and the tentative dates suggested at the project planning meeting on 15 April 2008 in Bolzano, Italy. It was suggested that the final conference scheduled on the 29th month of the project should be advanced by two/three months. Subsequently the dates were finalized in course of the Delhi Review meeting on 22 February 2009 and Kathmandu PSG meeting on 21 August 2009. The idea was that CRG should start organizing the final conference enough in advance. It was decided that the final conference should be the occasion where entire findings of the programme will be fruitfully discussed. The conference committee was expected to provide CRG with sufficient time for the preparation of the report, arrive at conclusions and make final recommendations.

The key objectives of the conference were decided to be: (a) to bring together the outcomes of all project activities; (b) to provide an occasion for presenting and discussing the Joint Research Agenda prepared by Ranabir Samaddar and Samir Kumar Das, and discussed and finalized in the project steering group meeting held in Bolzano in August-September 2008; (c) to make recommendations for its effective implementation, (d) to sensitize the media to the promotion of human rights and the significance of existing democratic values in South Asian societies concerning the protection of minorities and (e) finally to evolve a transnational and trans regional platform for the protection of minority rights in Europe and South Asia. It was decided that the conference will consist of panel and working group discussions, roundtable and plenary sessions, presentation of research reports and policy recommendations, etc. The organization of the conference would coincide with the publication of a series of books, mentioned below.

Work Packages

The work plan was organized in 5 Work Packages and has a total duration of 30 months, which would enable the partners to adequately prepare all activities.

WP1 – Eurasia Scholar Exchange

WP2 – Summer Schools

WP3 – EU Officials Information Sessions and Exchange

WP4 – Trans-Regional Platform

WP5 – Project Management

The focus of WP1 was mutual learning and exchange among scholars. This aim was pursued by a variety of means: seminars, joint publications, study visits and exchanges. WP2 intended to widen the scope of research cooperation by engaging researchers, stakeholders and decision-makers, who would participate in two trans-regional Summer Schools. Participation of young researchers and civil society activists in Summer Schools was considered as fundamental towards the maximisation of the impact of cooperation in the long term. In the Summer Schools South Asian and European experts and young researchers and activists participated. WP3 was designed to make information on analysis of trends in South Asian regional integration and human and minority rights issues relevant to the development and implementation of EU policies available to EU officials and institutions. At the same time, the aim was to expose South Asian researchers to current EU strategic issues in the region so that policy needs could be incorporated in future joint research with South Asian partners. The aim of WP4 was to create a Trans-regional Platform as a forum for the exchange of knowledge and best practices between all stakeholders (scholars, universities, media, decision makers, activists, coordinate the dissemination of results, and prepare the ground for future joint research activities. Finally, WP5 had the mandate to accompany the whole project to ensure the smooth management of the different activities.

The Kickoff Meeting

The kickoff meeting of the Eurasia-Net project was held in London on 18 February 2008. Dr Rautz in his brief introduction identified the consortium partners and the outline of the project (EURASIA-NET). Analyzing the strategies of a successfully funded project underlined the importance of transfer of knowledge in both directions (e.g. Europe-South Asia Scholar Exchange, Summer Schools), implementation of research (e.g. Training of EU officials and media) and setting up of a multidisciplinary consortium (e.g. Universities, Research Institutes, NGOs, Regional Organisations). He also noted the three pillars on which EURAC is based, these being the Research/training, the consultation (applied research) and the publications.

Stock Taking Report and the Proposals for Research Initiatives

In aiming to define a common academic engagement between the Eurasia-Net partner organizations, the following issues were identified as the possible inputs to the current state of the art on research in Europe and South Asia. The analysis of these issues was expected to provide us with further exploratory themes for future research and examination during the course of the project:

1. Standard Setting instruments on Minority Protection and Human Rights on a National and Supranational Level in Europe;
2. Standard Setting Instruments on Human Rights Protection and Minorities on Supra-National Level within South Asia
3. European view on South Asia in the field of Human Rights, Minority Protection and Conflict Solution

4. South Asian views on Europe in the field of Human Rights, Minority Protection and Conflict Solution
5. Differing or Conflicting Views Emerging from States within South-Asia vis-à-vis Europe or European Regional Organizations

Research Material

The project generated a formidable corpus of research material circulated during the summer schools. CRG is the lead partner of WP4 in the frame of which SAFHR prepared and disseminated a set of materials for South Asian NGOs and University of Dhaka prepared a set of material on South Asian and regional cooperation for higher education institutions. All these materials were used for the preparation of the ground for the implementation of the Joint Research Agenda, the final conference and the platform (round table exchange and recommendations). CRG created a corpus of instruction material for the purpose of the Summer Schools. More than 21 items consisting of books, excerpts and papers running several hundred pages formed part of the course patch provided to the participants of the Summer School held in Bolzano in August-September 2008. CRG's in-house research material was also used generously in the Summer School. CRG's own publication titled 'Towards a New Consideration: Justice for the Minorities' (Policies and Practices 14: Report on Social Justice II, Kolkata: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2007) was used as an outline for South Asian Regional Framework for the Protection of Minority Rights.

Assessment of Research Policies and Resources:

CRG was primarily responsible for the preparation of the 'Assessment of research policies and resources' (Deliverable 16). The assessment is expected to (a) lend to our researches and studies conducted under the project some kind of a collective focus; (b) help in devising South Asian, European and Eurasian instruments for the protection of minority rights; (c) derive and disseminate the lessons from the model cases and 'best practices' relating to the solution of minority problems and (d) critically assess their possible applicability across culturally and politically diverse regions.

Deliverable 16 was prepared (in the form of a Discussion Paper on Research Policy) through a series of in-house meetings held during July-August 2008 and sent to EURAC for circulation amongst the project partners before the Project Steering Group meeting held on 29 August 2008. The oral presentation was made by Samir Kumar Das and it was followed by discussion. The paper was presented and praised as a valuable analysis of the state-of-the-art of research policies and trends in India and South Asia in general.

Review Meeting, New Delhi (February 22, 2009)

The meeting hosted by SAFHR discussed in detail the progress made in respect of publications, summer school and study visits among other things and made important recommendations for meeting the project objectives within the stipulated time frame.

Public Dialogue, Kolkata (August 8, 2009)

A public dialogue on 'Minorities and Their Alienation' was organized by CRG at Rang Durbar, Swabhumi in Kolkata on 8 August 2009. The Programme was attended by 30 participants from diverse walks of life including academics and researchers, feminist scholars and representatives of indigenous people, legal activists, minority and human rights activists from all over India. The meeting raised such questions as: a) should a regional charter be signed by the nation-state or should it be treated as guidelines to be followed by them? b) will it make sense to speak of a model national law than regional charter? c) do regional charters in the present scenario derive inspiration from the European experience since Europe has a history of the formation of the charters including people's charters? In this connection, it was also felt that sovereignty needs to be reinterpreted as responsibility that the States owe to their citizens. It was commented that the draft charter on Minority Rights framed by Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury in this context was not a panacea but can be a step towards improving the conditions of the minorities. It was also suggested that a much wider database is required, a little more forthrightness and rules of objectivity. The entire preoccupation with the minority issue stems from a moral position. Hence as a methodology, while delving into minority issues objectivity is required. It was also decided that there is need for an ethnographic exploration of the dialogues taking place in everyday life with regard to minority rights.

Review Meeting, Dhaka (November 1, 2009)

The review meeting hosted by University of Dhaka discussed in detail the draft publication prepared by Borhan Uddin Khan and Muhammad Mahbubur Rahman. Although not part of the project, it was suggested that the possibilities for its publication by a prestigious publisher should be explored. Detailed discussions were also held on SAFHR and CRG publications. The draft schedule of the final conference was circulated and discussed by members who attended the meeting.

The members also addressed the students of the Faculty of Law as a panel and responded to the questions from them regarding the protection of minority rights in South Asia and Europe.

Study Visits

About 25 participants drawn from different parts of South Asia and Europe have undertaken study visits. A proportional geographical balance between Europe and South Asia was pursued (indicatively the same number of Study Visits was realized in both

areas taking into consideration a balanced gender quota). Appropriate balance between Partners' and Associates' institutions/ organizations and themes was ensured in order to avoid a concentration of Study Visits in one or few institutions. All partner countries were visited. There was a low percentage of female researchers from South Asia- as the existing figures confirm there was a positive gender balance from Europe: more women from Europe undertook visits as compared to women. EURAC hosted five visits, Brunel hosted four visits, Frankfurt hosted one visit, the University of Paris hosted one visit, MCRG hosted five visits, University of Dhaka hosted three visits, DCHD hosted one visit and SAFHR hosted two visits.

The rationale of the study visits was to achieve the objectives of WP 1 and the project as a whole. The specific objectives of WP 1 are as follows:

- (a) To improve cooperation and exchange between European and South Asian scholars in the field of supra-national instruments for the promotion of human and minority rights, with the goal of developing a common agenda for future research.
- (b) To improve circulation of South Asian research results in the selected field within the European scientific community and vice versa.

There was a wide variety of research topics relating to minorities as agreed in the implementation plan. The overall analysis of study visit topics shows that a variety of research interests were supported, creating a wide pool of knowledge and of research into this area which can be fed back into the overall aims and objectives of Eurasia-Net.

Since there is no specific budget allotted to the special programme for media sensitization and this has not been visualized in terms of deliverables, the participants in the meeting held in Bolzano on 15 April 2008 discussed ways about how to implement this programme. There was discussion about how EURAC could help CRG in this. The media workshops and the 3 media fellows are expressly described under WP4. CRG accordingly prepared a draft proposal for the media programme entitled "Media and the Protection of Minorities in South Asia (with emphasis on the reporting of administrative responses to riots, legal interventions, court decisions, application of international standards, functioning of human rights institutions such as the NHRC, constitutional interpretations, jurisprudence and working of citizens' enquiry commissions etc.)" on the basis of which discussions were held with EURAC. CRG again raised the issue of "media fellowships" in the PSG meeting held on 29 August 2008 and how to insert it into the frame of the programme. Guenther Rautz suggested considering specialized journalists in the selection of candidates for Summer Schools and Study Visits. Finally, a media workshop could be arranged in the context of the final conference.

Subir Bhaumik, Sanjay Barbora and Sumon K. Chakrabarti conducted study visits under the programme. While Subir and Sumon have been practising journalists working with two very prestigious news agencies, Sanjay works with Panos South Asia and is concerned with monitoring and strategizing media activity in South Asia. CRG has received the feedback that their studies have been highly appreciated.

Summer School (Bolzano July-August 2008)

The First Trans Regional summer school took place in Bolzano/Bozen (Italy), between 25 August and 6 September 2008. Out of almost 100 applications, 18 candidates (researches, civil servants, media fellows, human rights activists) dealing with human and minority rights issues from Europe (Finland, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Romania, Denmark, Ukraine and Turkey) and South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal) were selected and invited to participate in the summer school. During the 10 working days of the Summer School the participants were offered a wide range of activities: lectures, workshops, case studies, group work, study visit as well as an excursion. In the frame of the summer school programme, two public events were organized: 1) Public Lecture on “Monitoring racism and discrimination against ethnic and religious groups across the European Union: the work of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)” by Mr. Ioanis N. Dimitrakopoulos (Head of FRA Unit on Research & Data Collection) on Thursday, 28 August. 2) Panel discussion on “South Asian cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity as a field of experience for future diversity management in Europe? (Giovanni Poggeschi, Gabriel N. Toggenburg, Tapan Kumar Bose, Samir Kumar Das) on Tuesday, 2 September.

Summer School (Kathmandu August 2009)

About 25 participants drawn from Europe and South Asia have taken part in the Summer school organized by DCHD. The picturesque Dhulikhel provided the ideal landscape for very dense interaction amongst the participants. Besides lectures, there were interactive sessions in which resource persons from Europe and South Asia addressed the participants. The Summer school generated a good deal of material concerning minority rights and the materials were circulated amongst the participants and partners.

Publications

A. Project Publications

- Thomas Benedikter (ed.), *Europe’s Ethnic Mosaic*, (EURAC, Bolzano 2008)
- Rautz, Tomaselli and Zabielska (eds.), *Material for Specialized Media*, (EURAC, Bolzano 2008)
- Samir Das and Ranabir Samaddar, *Assessment of Research Policies and Resources*, (MCRG, Kolkata 2008)
- Subir Bhaumik & Sumon K. Chakrabarti, *View from India: Media and Minorities in Europe*, Policies and Practices 27 (MCRG, Kolkata 2010)
- Text Book Reader” – Borhan Uddin Khan and Muhammad Mahbubur Rahman coauthored the text on *Protection of Minorities: A South Asian Discourse*. It was meant to be a text book targeted at the University level, and given the diversity of situations across South Asia, the volume was organized around country specific chapters.

- Readings on Minority Rights in South: New Challenges, edited by Tapan Bose and Rita Manchanda. The volume has been planned as a second phase work, beyond the primary task of mapping the status of minorities. It addresses the changing and more difficult environment for minority rights in South Asia in the wake of cultural doctrines on the march that reinforce xenophobia and racism, (Islamic, Hindutva, Christian and Buddhist fundamentalisms), globalization which has increased structural inequalities and disproportionately shifted the burden onto vulnerable (often minorities) stigmatized (e.g. new minorities: migrants) as responsible for security problems and unemployment; and securitization of minority rights public discourse. The volume addresses thematic and new cross cutting regional challenges. It looks at new conflict fault lines - pitting minorities within minorities as well as the possibility of new alliances. It includes a “survey” that maps the status of minorities in Sindh and Baluchistan. It audits the experience of the various pathways (e.g. reservations, ethnically determined territorially focused autonomies, etc) and posits policy prescriptions. The structure of the book remains dominated by largely country specific chapters and therefore the Introduction bears the burden to mapping a South Asian and comparative canvas. As the book is targeted at a mixed readership including activists and policy makers – the essays have a strong policy orientation. The introduction will also suggest that the post colonial ‘nationalizing’ state system of South Asia, of kith and kin state network in which a minority is a majority across the border, predicates a regional framework of policy and structure. However, given the political dynamics of South Asia state interactions, these states have been particularly resistant to widening the mandate of its regional mechanism e.g. the SAARC or sub regional frameworks like the BIMSTEC. At this stage the emphasis shifts to revitalizing civil society and regional networking.
- “Scientific” Volume: MCRG - Samir Kumar Das edited the volume on *Minorities in South Asia and in Europe: A New Agenda*. The volume is structured in two segments, one focusing on South Asia and the other Europe. While country-specific researches on minorities of South Asia are by no means rare, study of minorities on a regional scale and their comparisons with the European experience is not. Such comparisons are expected to (a) coordinate the country-specific studies by way of providing them with a focus; (b) enable us to learn from each others’ experiences and develop the much-needed synergy between them; (c) throw light on the evolving global and transnational nature of minority networks and mobilizations and (d) explore into the possible frameworks of policies to be followed towards them. Since EURASIA-NET project comprises a wide variety of Partners and Associates cutting across different countries and geopolitical regions (Europe and South Asia are under review), it is ideally suited to undertake such a study. The papers being of comparative nature will be written by authors who will draw lessons from the ongoing project and bring them together in the form of this publication
- *EYMI* Special Issue on South Asia

Website

EURAC maintains a segment of its website providing latest information and updated details about the progress of the project. Similarly other partners in their sites provide information about the project. Besides furnishing information, CRG also posts invitations and online registration forms for those who are willing to participate in the public events under the Programme.

Information Sessions and Exchange

The Universität Frankfurt am Main is the lead partner of Work Package 3 (WP3) of the project. Objectives of this work package are:

- To make information on analysis of trends in South Asia regional integration and human and minority rights issues relevant to the development and implementation of EU policies available to EU officials and institutions.
- To better understand which strategic topics are high on the EU agenda to incorporate policy needs in future joint research with South Asian partners.

The work package is expected to complement the research efforts realised in the other Work Packages and provide the occasion to present project's results and achievements to EU officials and institutions. Furthermore, researchers are expected to be exposed to current EU strategic issues in the region so that policy needs can be incorporated in future joint research with South Asian partners.

The organizer, the University of Frankfurt am Main, with support from the EC Delegation to Pakistan, EURAC Institute for Minority Rights, Brunel University and the Pakistan Democratic Commission for Human Development, successfully organized the first of the two EC Delegation sessions to be held in South Asia in the frame of the EURASIA-Net project. Designed to make project results available to EC officials and institutions, the focus of the informative session was on the analysis of trends in South Asian regional integration and human and minority rights issues relevant for the development and implementation of EU policies.

However, the planning and the execution of the event have been largely affected by the security conditions of the country. The organizers were therefore unable to confirm the meeting well in advance; this unfortunately prevented the South Asian partners from a timely visa application for Pakistan. Consequently, most of the South Asian partners were in fact unable to participate and contribute to the meeting.

Although the PSG at Kathmandu agreed to hold the second EU Session in New Delhi with the Delegation of the European Commission to India, Bhutan and Nepal, in concomitance with the Final Conference to be held in Kolkata on 23 March 2010, this could not be organized for reasons known to us all.

Transregional Platform for the Protection of Minority Rights

CRG has been instrumental in bringing the lessons of the current programme together, to build a platform that cuts across nations and regions across Europe and South Asia and most importantly make it sustainable. One feature marking the current efforts aimed at protecting minority rights is the wide divide in perceptions and reality between the developed world and the post-colonial world. These differences are around issues, such as modalities of dialogues and reconciliation, individual rights and group rights, the notion and practices of legal pluralism, the effect of anti-terrorism drive by the states on minorities, the depletion of common property resources, the impact of globalization, emergence of new minority groups, immigrants as new minorities, the principle of autonomy etc. These issues have not only reinforced the global reality of discrimination, they have rendered some of the earlier legal understandings (as encoded in municipal and international law) inadequate. Similarly the process of marginalization has worsened the conditions of minorities. The root question that this programme has brought to light is: will the language of rights be enough to work as the basis of a trans-regional platform, or do we need justice as the language of claim making, fairness, and dialogue?

One more issue remains cardinal to this discussion. The principle of autonomy is linked to issues of federalism, decentralization, and devolution of power. It is also linked to the issue of subsidiarity. In short we may call it the federal idea – federalization of social, cultural, and political life based on horizontal linkages and not vertical alignments. The present programme has brought to light these lessons – namely, the need to think of new ways to protect rights of minority groups in diverse socio-cultural and political fields, such as media, representative organs, special methods to protect vulnerable sections, etc.

The project is nearing completion. Three of the major achievements that the partners can be proud of at this stage are:

- (a) Successful establishment of a network of partners on a sustainable basis expected eventually to lead to the formation of a trans-regional platform;
- (b) Comparative research and collective learning from each others' fund of knowledge and experience particularly in relation to the policies of minority protection, and
- (c) Orientation and training, dissemination and circulation of knowledge across national and regional boundaries.

For these tangible gains, the design of the WPs proved crucial. The coordinating activities of the programme led by EURAC were of immense importance. Likewise, the information sessions under WP3 are crucial to its dissemination and the translation of the research findings into policy recommendations. The summer schools, study visits, research findings, and collation of appropriate study material, summer workshops, and different publications – all have proved interconnected in their relevance and gains. CRG while preparing this short summary of the activities under the programme takes

opportunity to thank all the partners and wishes to let all know that these activities were successful because they were of network nature. The experience shows how the design of a programme is important in terms of strategizing the implementation of a set of objectives. Likewise it thanks SAFHR and University of Dhaka for helping the fulfillment of the WP4 mandate.