International Organisations and Ethnic Autonomy Regimes in Eastern Europe
ESRC Research Grant Proposal
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Introduction

Ethnic tensions and self-determination conflicts are prominent in several states in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Caucasus.[1] The nature of these conflicts has ranged from violent wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo to less prominent but violent conflicts in Moldova and Georgia to largely non-violent tensions in Serbia, the Baltics and Ukraine. The management and prevention of such conflicts have been among the main security challenges in the post-Cold War era.[2]

As a result, international organisations such as the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe have paid considerable attention to such conflicts. These organisations have – to varying degrees – been involved in conflict intervention and post-conflict settlement and reconstruction, and see this as one of their main security tasks in the region. For example, the European Union frequently mentions it in its recently adopted European Security Strategy (EU 2003), and almost all OSCE missions have been to this region (OSCE 2000). Similarly, the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe are designated as priority areas in the conflict prevention activities of the UK government, which also stressed the importance of cooperation with international organisations (UK Government 2003).

This project assesses the impact of international organisations on self-determination conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The specific focus is not so much on short-term military interventions to stop violence, but on possible governance structures that may be able to manage or prevent conflicts in the long term. In particular, we are interested in *autonomy regimes*, i.e., arrangements where ethnic communities or ethnically distinct territories have the legally established power to take decisions independently of other sources of authority in the state, but subject to the overall legal order of the state. Analysts often endorse autonomy arrangements as an appropriate mechanism to deal with self-determination claims by geographically concentrated minorities (e.g., Hannum 1996, Lapidoth 1996, Hechter 2000), and international organisations such as the OSCE (1999) and Council of Europe (2003) have recommended it as a promising conflict regulation tool.

However, autonomy arrangements have been implemented only in a few cases (e.g., Crimea, Bosnia). In other cases, ethnic minorities have not been granted autonomy (e.g., Russians in the Baltics, Serbs in Croatia), or there is still no agreement on the longer-term governance structure of the territory in question (e.g., Kosovo, Transnistria). Thus, the first question of this project concerns the choice of governance structure. Which factors determine this variation in outcomes, and the possible establishment of an autonomy regime? And what is the influence of international organisations and other external agents in this process?

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[1] Self-determination conflicts can be defined as conflicts in which a self-defined segment of a state's population, inhabiting solely or with others a specific territory, seeks to increase the level of, and resources for, self-governance (Weller and Wolff 2005). Note also that the three mentioned regions were summarised as "Eastern Europe" in the project title for convenience.

[2] Although not the focus of this project, such conflicts also occur in many other parts of the world. See Gurr (2000) for an overview.

The establishment of an autonomy regime by no means guarantees security and the settlement of self-determination conflicts. For example, if autonomous institutions lack the capacity to establish practices of good governance, then granting autonomy will not resolve the underlying conflict. Thus, this project will address a second question, concerning the viability and stability of autonomy regimes. Under which conditions will autonomy regimes be stable, and how do international organisations contribute – or fail to contribute – to this?

The remainder of this proposal discusses first the background to the project in the context of the existing literature, and then presents research hypotheses, the proposed empirical analysis, and our output and dissemination strategy.

Background
This project can make a significant and original contribution to existing knowledge on ethnic conflict regulation. Most prominent works on ethnic conflict management provide an overview of various conflict management instruments (e.g., Horowitz 1985, McGarry and O'Leary 1993, Danspeckgruber 2001, Coakley 2003, Schneckener and Wolff 2004), but do not provide a detailed analysis of autonomy arrangements. Moreover, contributions focusing specifically on autonomy regimes do not focus systematically on the role of international organisations and other external agents in the establishment and performance of these regimes (e.g., Hannum 1996, Lapidoth 1996, Ghai 2000, Weller and Wolff 2005). There is some academic work on the role of specific organisations, such as the UN (Doyle and Sambanis 2000, Stedman et al 2002), EU (Hill 2001) and World Bank (Van Houten 2004). However, these have not generated general arguments about the role of external agents, and the simultaneous involvement of various international organisations is yet to be explored thoroughly.

We can, of course, build on some aspects of this literature. Moreover, studies of specific ethnic conflicts abound, and international organisations are often mentioned in these. Most relevant for our project are detailed studies of the outbreak and dynamics of ethnic wars in the Balkans (Woodward 1995, Judah 2002) and the position of minorities in Europe and the former Soviet Union (Hughes and Sasse 2001, Gal 2003), which indicate the significance of international organisations in various aspects of these conflicts. In addition, there are analyses of specific organisations in these conflicts (e.g., Packer 1998, 1999; Schneckener 2002; Bieber 2004; Wolff 2003, 2004) and evaluations by international organisations themselves of their role (World Bank 1998, UN 2000, Kemp 2001, EU 2001). However, these do not add up to a systematic and comparative evaluation of the impact of the whole range of organisations, and do not focus specifically on the potential long-term viability and stability of governance structures. This is what our project sets out to do.

This proposal was inspired by discussions in a working group on the "International Politics of Autonomy." This working group, established in the context of conferences on autonomy arrangements funded by the Carnegie Corporation, consists of academics and practitioners from Europe and the United States. The group has so far engaged in conceptual work, some of which is reflected in this research proposal. Future group meetings have been funded by the British Academy. These meetings will be a forum to present work from the project proposed here, and will provide valuable feedback on its progress.

Research Hypotheses
The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the conditions for the establishment and stability of autonomy regimes, and the impact of external agents on them.

An autonomy regime is established when the involved parties – principally, the group or territory receiving autonomy and the host state – are forced into such an arrangement or voluntarily accept it. In the latter case, and arguably also in the former if the

arrangement is to have any prospects of succeeding, the actors involved must believe that it is in their best interests to do this. The establishment of an autonomy regime almost inevitably involves significant compromises by both sides. The host state needs to relinquish partial control over part of its territory, and the political leaders of the ethnic group usually need to withdraw or postpone claims to fuller forms of sovereignty. Consequently, territorial autonomy is only attractive in the perceived absence of viable alternatives.

International organisations and other external agents can influence these perceptions. They can *directly* force such an arrangement, or any other governance structure deemed appropriate, on the host state and ethnic group, or they can induce it through 'conditionality' and incentives policies. For example, the EU could make membership dependent on the implementation of an autonomy settlement for an ethnic minority. Interestingly, international organisations can also have *indirect* influence. For example, the reluctance of the international community to accept changes to international boundaries serves as a constraint for self-determination movements. Similarly, emerging international norms on the treatment of minority populations and an increasing willingness to enforce them on the part of international organisations may encourage the application of an autonomy regime as mechanism to resolve self-determination conflicts.[3]

Our second concern is with the *viability* or *stability* of autonomy regimes if they are established. This occurs when no significant political forces mobilise to undermine the regime, and when the autonomy regime has no structural flaws that will inevitably lead to major grievances by one or more of the involved parties in the future.

A first condition for the viability of an autonomy regime is that each involved party must believe that the other side will stick to the agreement. This is not straightforward, as an agreement inevitably involves concessions by both parties and may make the minority group more vulnerable in the future. Even if both sides intend to honour the agreement, they may have problems convincing the other of their sincerity. In other words, they face a *commitment problem*. The possible presence of commitment problems has been identified and analysed in the context of the outbreak of ethnic conflict (Fearon 1998, Van Houten 1998, Laitin 2001), the settlement of civil wars (Walter 2002), and the stability of federal arrangements (Weingast 1995, Hechter 2000). Our framework builds on these analyses.

In the case of autonomy regimes, two conditions need to be satisfied for the commitment problem to be overcome: credible security guarantees for the ethnic group, and credible beliefs that the arrangement will be viable. The former condition can be achieved if there is a neutral, but interested, external agent willing to guarantee the arrangement (Walter 2002). On the other hand, external agents supporting radical factions in the rebellious group or territory will diminish the prospects of the regime. Moreover, if international organisations fail to coordinate their actions, this may also signal to involved parties that they do not need to adhere to the agreement.

The latter condition – credible beliefs about a regime's viability – has two aspects. First, the regime has to be financially and economically viable. This ideally involves sufficient revenues from autonomous sources, but can also be achieved by properly constructed subsidies from the host state. External agents can play a role in this. International financial institutions could include the needs of autonomous units in their financial assistance to the countries. The promise of financial support from other external agents

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[3] Note, however, that the September 11th attacks may have changed this. While the enforcement of human and minority rights has always been selective (e.g., not applied in cases like Chechnya or Burma), the overriding concern with terrorism has further diminished the opportunities of some self-determination movements to be recognised and increased the opportunities of states to crack down on them.

– such as individual states, international or regional organisations, and diasporas – may increase the viability of a proposed autonomy arrangement.

Second, the regime has to be politically viable. The various political actors in the autonomous unit and the state must have incentives to adhere to the arrangement. In the context of federal arrangements, it has been suggested that constitutions (Weingast 1995), independent courts and norms of justice (Hechter 2000, Bednar et al 2001), and party systems (Riker 1964, Filippov et al 2004) can facilitate this. But international organisations can play a role in this too, by committing to punish infringements of the arrangement (through intervention, financial sanctions, or other means), and by threatening sanctions against other external agents that promise to reward behaviour that undermines the arrangement.

The stability of autonomy regimes will, thus, be enhanced by security, financial and political guarantees by international organisations. In the long term, autonomy arrangements will be more stable if international organisations actually live up to these guarantees and continue to support the autonomy regime. Economically, however, stability also requires that the regime can eventually function without a large amount of external support.

In summary, several hypotheses will structure the project:

- Autonomy regimes are established if the involved groups regard alternative solutions that may be more attractive to them individually as impossible to achieve. International organisations and other external agents can help to create these perceptions.

- Autonomy regimes are more likely to be established if international organisations favour such arrangements.

- An autonomy regime will be stable if the minority group has credible security guarantees, if there are political mechanisms and processes that discourage minority and state representatives, as well as other external agents, from undermining the arrangement, and if it is financially and economically viable in the long term.

- External agents can positively contribute to each of these conditions. However, if they push their own agenda against the interests of the involved parties or fail to coordinate their actions, then they can reduce the stability prospects of an autonomy regime.

Evaluation of Hypotheses: Case Studies
An evaluation of these hypotheses faces two main challenges. First, due to the lack of systematic attention to the influence of external agents on conflict settlement arrangements so far, there is not sufficient empirical information to test hypotheses. We need to undertake detailed case studies, based on primary and secondary sources and fieldwork. Second, with many different factors potentially influencing the operation and stability of autonomy or other conflict regulation arrangements, it is difficult to isolate the effects of international organisations and other external agents. Careful case selection and analysis are necessary to be confident that we can achieve this.

Table 1 gives an overview of the main self-determination conflicts in Central Europe, the Balkans and the Caucasus. As the table indicates, for some of these conflicts it is still uncertain which governance arrangements will be established in the longer term, while in other cases autonomy arrangements have been established or explicitly rejected as means to accommodate the forces underlying the conflicts.

Autonomy arrangement	No autonomy arrangement	Undetermined
Crimea (Ukraine)	Russians (Baltic states)	Kosovo (Serbia-M)
Gagauzia (Moldova)	Albanians (Macedonia)	Transnistria (Moldova)
Vojvodina (Serbia-M)	Serbs (Croatia)	Abkhazia (Georgia)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Hungarians (Romania, Slovakia)	Nagorno Karabakh (Azerbaijan)
		South Ossetia (Georgia)
		Northern Cyprus

Table 1. Examples of self-determination conflicts in Central and South-Eastern Europe

The empirical analysis will consist of two comparisons of three cases (with one case – Bosnia – featuring in both). The first comparison focuses on attempted conflict settlement mechanisms in Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo. Bosnia features three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Tensions between these groups and conflicts about control of the new state led to a bloody regional and civil war in the early 1990s. This war came to an end with the Dayton agreement in 1995, which established a complex governance structure for the Bosnian state. In Kosovo, Albanians make up a large majority of the region's population. Their mobilisation for self-determination, and Serbian resistance to grant this, eventually led to a violent conflict in the late-1990s, stopped by NATO intervention in 1999. Macedonia also contains a significant Albanian ethnic group, which has been pressing for more powers in the new state. Despite some incidents, large-scale violence has been avoided in this case.

This selection of cases makes it possible to investigate our first research question on the factors influencing the choice of governance structures used in response to self-determination conflicts. One case has an autonomy settlement (Bosnia; the focus will be especially on the Serb entity), in another such a settlement was rejected (Macedonia), while the chosen structure in the third case is still undetermined (Kosovo, where the issues include both Kosovo's status within Serbia and the position of the Serb minority in Kosovo). International organisations have been extensively involved in all three of these cases. The case studies will investigate what the effects of this involvement have been, and how these interacted with other factors, including the actions and motives of the groups and host states involved. Moreover, these cases share a number of similarities. In particular, they were all formerly part of Yugoslavia, which means that the conflicts originated in similar contexts. Also, similar ethnic groups are involved in some of the cases (e.g., Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo), which allows for some control on the influence of kin-states.[4]

The second comparison focuses on the operation of autonomy settlements in Bosnia, Gagauzia, and Crimea. The two constituent units of the Bosnian state have a very large degree of autonomy. Most interesting is the situation of the Serb entity. While it has so far proven to be politically viable, there are serious concerns about its future economic viability. Gagauzia, a region in Moldova inhabited by a Turkic ethnic group, strove for autonomy after the end of the Soviet Union (leading to some low-level violence), and received autonomy status in 1994. This autonomy arrangement has operated for a decade now, but some political factions are trying to undermine it and questions remain about its long-term stability. Crimea's largest ethnic group are Russians, and there were serious worries about its conflict potential within the Ukrainian state in the early-1990s. However, autonomy measures for the region seem to have diffused the situation, and observers are optimistic about the long-term stability of this arrangement.

Thus, these cases have different forms of autonomy regimes, which have proven to be viable so far, but have different prospects for long-term stability. This allows us to

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[4] In other words, this case comparison is based on a "most similar system design" (Peters 1998: 30-43).

address our second research question on the conditions for the viability and stability of autonomy regimes, and the influence of international organisations on this. These cases are more varied than the cases in the first comparison in their geographical and historical context, nature of the involved groups, and external involvement. This makes it potentially possible to isolate the viability and stability factors that they do or do not share.[5]

Our case studies will build on existing publications and documents. However, fieldwork is essential to get a better sense of the role of international organisations and recent events. The first stage of the project will focus on the international organisations themselves. Through interviews and document analysis, we will investigate their motives and actions. Our focus will mostly be on established organisations such as the EU, OSCE and Council of Europe. In the second stage, we will focus on the five selected cases. This involves reviewing existing work on these cases, collecting relevant documents on the involvement of international organisations, and fieldwork to collect further material and interview involved actors and local experts. Table 2 provides the timetable for the project.

Period	Planned tasks
January-April 2005	round research on cases, literature review, further development of theoretical framework, establishment of contacts with international organisations, meetings with UK government agencies
May-August 2005	rch on selected cases, interviews with international organisations
September-December 2005	ued research on selected cases, fieldwork for three case studies, first analysis of fieldwork results
January-April 2006	ork on two cases, analysis of results, start writing up
May-August 2006	Writing up results and implications
September-December 2006	tation of results to government agencies and international organisations, revisions of monograph and articles

Table 2. Timetable of the project

Output and dissemination
This project will produce output of both academic and practical relevance. Academically, it will begin to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing a systematic comparative analysis of the influence of several involved organisations across a number of cases. Theoretically, our analysis will provide clearer indications of the conditions under which international organisations and other external agents can influence ethnic conflicts, the precise nature of such influence (whether positive or negative), and the requirements for the stability of autonomy arrangements. Empirically, it will generate new and detailed information about the role and influence of international actors in several conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

To disseminate these contributions, we will present papers at academic conferences (e.g., ISA, BISA and ECPR conferences), and submit at least two articles to leading journals in the field. Possible outlets are *International Organization*, *Review of International Studies*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *Conflict and Cooperation* and *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*. Most significantly, we will write a monograph with all results and implications of the project, and submit this to a major academic press.

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[5] This comparison is closer to a "most different system design" (Peters 1998: 30-43).

We expect our study to have a number of significant policy implications. It will provide indications of which strategies by international organisations are most likely to achieve their objectives, how external agents can more effectively coordinate their activities, and how ethnic minorities can anticipate and possibly influence the impact of external agents.

To disseminate this, we will write a report on the implications of our research findings, and present this to various government officials, international organisations, and NGOs. We plan to establish contacts with and present our findings to the FCO Conflict Prevention Unit, the DFID Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department, and the FCO/DFID/MoD Global Conflict Prevention Pool of the UK government; European Union officials and the EU Institute for Security Studies; the OSCE and its office of the High Commissioner for National Minorities; the Council of Europe; and the European Centre for Minority Issues.

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