

# **Rebranding Non-Governmental Organizations of national minorities in democratic countries: A vision of Ukrainian researchers**

**Marian Tokar\***

**Abstract:** The paper is dedicated to the generalized analysis of the problem of rebranding non-governmental organizations of national minorities in some of the democracies of modern Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine). The process of changing their positioning by highlighting the importance of using four principles – the perception of the political regime, the legal regulation of activity, the nature of interethnic coexistence, and the enhancement of social role – has been in the focus of the author's attention. An attempt has been made to determine the symbolic rating of a group of states by the degree of rebranding non-governmental organizations of national minorities. The author's vision of this process as well as the self-presentation in the conditions of the national non-governmental society of European countries has been presented; the focus being on the views of Ukrainian researchers.

**Keywords:** rebranding, non-governmental society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public administration, state policy

## **INTRODUCTION**

Democratic states with a multinational population are struggling to develop a system of inter-ethnic relations, focusing on maintaining a balance of national priorities and core values of democratic coexistence among the representatives of different nationalities. Accordingly, the positive dynamics of the development of national minorities is reflected both in the state policy and the national legislative framework providing it. Today this framework is the most effective guarantor of the rights and freedoms of all national minorities and ethnic groups that make up the citizenship of democratic countries.

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\* Marian Tokar (✉)

Lviv Regional Institute for Public Administration of the National Academy for Public Administration, Lviv, Ukraine  
e-mail: carpatia.doslid@gmail.com

At the same time, the representatives of national minorities are also using other unlimited national features, opportunities, benefits guaranteed by the state laws and stimulated by the state policy. This also applies directly to voluntary associations of citizens, in particular those called public organizations of national minorities. Being the centers for the consolidation of national minorities, they are not limited in actions related to direct participation in all socio-political processes; they have free access to cooperation within the framework of numerous states and public projects, the programs being allowed to communicate with the participants of public interaction, and fulfilling traditional and specific functions, which is generally typical of associations of different citizens within the state. Therefore, the task is set to specify the current conditions for the rebranding of public (non-governmental) organizations of national minorities of European states, in particular Central European countries, accelerating the democratic ways of development over the past decades.

The paper aims to outlining the current circumstances of the rebranding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of national minorities in European democratic countries as a social subject of institutional relations within the state.

The problem of the activities of NGOs protecting the group interest of national minorities is one of the keys to the effective functioning of democratic states. Almost all European countries, not only of the European Union, recognize the basic rights of national minorities, including the right to voluntary, self-employed activity, association to protect the interest of citizens. This fact has been emphasized by the Ukrainian researcher Larisa Loiko, who studied the problems of typological positioning of national organizations in the institutional structure of non-governmental society (Loiko 2005). Galina Kalinicheva (2013) considered the issue of state support for the development of non-governmental society organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. Svitlana Matiazh (2014) also considered European experience of the development of NGOs. There are several studies dedicated to these processes in some countries. The works of Volodymyr Sukhenko (2015), specifying the experience of Poland for the process of interaction between the authorities and non-governmental society institutions, as well as Julia Okuniovska (2018a; 2018b), touching upon the functioning of NGOs in Poland are worth noting. As for some other countries, we have also tackled the materials suggested by Larysa Usachenko (2009) that describe foreign

experience of state funding of NGOs and a 2001 collective analytical study of legal regulation for public financing of NGOs in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. In the context of our study, we have partially touched the above-mentioned works, which still did not reveal utmost the problem in discussion.

#### MAIN RESEARCH MATERIAL

Since in many European countries there are regions with multinational population, the attention should be paid to the fact that NGOs representing national minorities, especially in places of their compact residence, have considerable potential for solving numerous problems of regional importance and, in particular, the livelihoods of local communities. For example, in Ukraine in the light of the ongoing decentralization reform, one of its components is the transformation of the administrative-territorial system and the formation of one of its levels – united territorial communities with a corresponding self-organized set of power and responsibility. One should understand that public policy must focus on the supportive function of NGOs, the possibilities of which in our opinion, are completely underestimated and, accordingly, are not involved and not perfected in practice. It should also be understood that this is far from the whole list of potential opportunities for NGOs of national minorities that can be used in the context of the prospects of community development with multinational population (Loiko 2005, 53-57).

However, rebranding NGOs in Ukraine is carried out very slowly. Taking into account the importance of the integration of all citizens to non-governmental society, regardless of their ethnic identity, especially during the time of global migration processes, we strongly believe that the development of a state policy promoting the development of NGOs should consider the important factors of social coexistence – historical traditions and modern realities. The states of Central Europe (for example, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, etc.) respect the historical memory and in no way try to violate the historical traditions of coexistence of representatives of various national minorities. In addition, in the past, there were numerous networks of public associations of ethno-national communities, for example, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Tokar 2013, 190-194). Modern conditions of social and political development of Central Europe's states have their own peculiarities. Despite the fact that the process of democratization and distribution of public power has its

own special national color and meaningful management, the leveling of the consequences of negative legacy of the communist-soviet system of state administration and total control of the state over the social sphere was a common feature of the transition period.

Another common feature of the first years of democratic life in Central Europe has been the active, massive and, at the same time, chaotic processes of creating new institutions of the state and non-governmental society, the lack of clear legal regulation of their activities in the context of the transformation of social relations, political competition, ideological alienation and migration processes (Kalinicheva 2013).

However, the events of the last thirty years point to the unique symbiosis of the internal and external factors of the formation and functioning of such key non-governmental society institutions as NGOs.

Significant role in this process has been played by the processes of rebranding, changing the nature of the interaction between government and society, the degree of influence of the state on the development of non-governmental society, motivation of citizens to perform “auxiliary” functions in the state and society, as well as synergetic mechanisms that aimed at forming a coherent program, strategy or policy through the assistance of state institutions of various self-organized NGOs to achieve common state-building goals (Matiazh 2013, 29).

Significant progress in this respect has been made towards the development of NGOs of national minorities, although there are certain differences for each country. Rebranding NGOs of national minorities is treated as the complex of certain measures aiming to change the social brand and its constituent elements. It touches on the ideology of activity and self-presentation, the perception of organizations in society and the state. In this case, rebranding aims to changing the way of activity and perception established in society, which already exists in the minds of citizens. Rebranding can bring the public organization in line with modern social transformations, the dynamics of the state and society development and the prospects of activating the role of organization in the life of citizens.

First of all, the changes refer to a new approach of the role of a public organization in the life of society, strengthening its social purpose. At the same time, the legal status of the organization is practically unchanged; and rebranding aims to change the socially

oriented nature of the association of citizens and their place in society and the state. New features make the organization more attractive and recognizable for citizens, being positioned as a full and active subject of public-state relations. Attention should be paid to the fact that in the overwhelming majority, public organizations of national minorities focus on providing typical cultural and educational services. These include a wide range of issues on the preservation and enhancement of historically significant national and cultural values, legislative protection of the linguistic, educational, cultural and spiritual interests of ethno-national communities in the national environment, the promotion of universal human rights and of equality in the multinational mosaic of the state.

Modern globalization requires public organizations to coordinate with the state and provide a significant layer of social assistance. An effective tool for this process is rebranding. Taking this into consideration, modern NGOs in European countries are highly appreciated both by the state and the citizens. The positioning of their brand takes place within certain socio-legal frameworks, being formed in accordance with the conditions of the political regime.

Thus, speaking about the role of the state in promoting the development of NGOs of national minorities and their place and role in public policy, it should be emphasized that their system varies in different ways under different political regimes. Being non-government society institutions, public organizations are the indicators of the degree of relations between the state and society, the level of their communication and interaction, and even more the attitude of the government towards all of its citizens. Rebranding intends to increase the popularity and recognition of NGOs against the backdrop of the dynamic development of the state and society.

Therefore, it is important to focus on the rebranding of NGOs of national minorities, which is a valuable subject of nation-wide relations. After all, the basic tasks of the modern rebranding of NGOs would be to increase the social uniqueness of the organization, to strengthen the role and importance of the organization in society and to attract new citizens into the scope of its activities. At the same time, rebranding is relevant in the presence of several factors: outdated positioning of NGOs; the change of general conditions; the low level of popularity of NGOs; the setting of new ambitious tasks; the proclamation of the principle of freedom and free choice.

Thus, in general, we suggest following the process through the prism of several important principles, namely of: perception of the political regime; legal regulation of activity; the nature of interethnic coexistence; and social role enhancement.

So, considering the first principle, it should be emphasized that the place of NGOs of national minorities in democratic political regimes, as well as their role in the development policy of the state and society, points to the wide possibilities of activity and their influence not only on the life of the ethnic community, but also on the course of state-building processes. The starting point in understanding the importance of the role of the state in promoting the development of NGOs is the understanding of their functional distance from the government, influence, and control (Suhenko 2015, 86). After all, the political regime, which dictates the conditions for the development of the state and society, is the source of peculiar “rules of the game” that are formed and operate in the co-operation with all existing institutions.

Taking into account the “control” of the state over public organizations of national minorities in a democratic regime, we proceed from the aspect of state national security. Rejecting the possibility of state’s interference in the routine work of public organizations of national minorities and the fulfillment of their statutory and programmatic tasks, there is a significant need to develop a monitoring mechanism for anti-state manifestations in their activities.

In some countries (for example, Hungary and Romania) there are some constraints (executed by the coordinating bodies), influencing public organizations, and reporting to the public authorities for adhering to the relevant boundaries of citizens’ associations. At the same time, the work experience in the sphere of cooperation between government institutions and public organizations has become a tradition. In this case, rebranding is an opportunity to self-present itself as a serious player in the public-state arena and to offer itself to the state as the main executor of social orders.

The second principle is the legal regulation of activity. Effective functioning of a safe distance between the government and non-governmental society is ensured by the relevant normative and legal norms operating in the country by constitutional norms, legal and subordinate acts, presidential and government decrees, resolutions, orders, as well as national and regional strategic programs, courses, etc. This is the first moment in recognizing the role of the state in the development of NGOs, clearly delineating their functional capacity

and the conditions of financing (Usachenko 2009). Therefore, in our opinion, it would not be fair to not recognize the role of the state in establishing a regulatory framework for the functioning of NGOs of national minorities.

Legislative documents legalize not only the structural and organizational parameters of NGOs of national minorities, but also determine the direct functional capabilities of relevant associations of citizens, indicate their place in the structure of non-governmental society in general and the interdependent role in public governance and the state-building process (Okuniovska 2018a, 76; 2018b, 49). In other words, it is typical and habitual not only for democratic countries of the political and public-legal nature of relations.

In this context, it is necessary to clearly delineate the concept of “management”. It regards the “influence” and “control” within the contact between the state and public organizations of national minorities, on the one hand, and determines how we can establish a fine line between the state and NGOs, in order not to violate the basic values of the latter, on the other.

Referring to the “management”, we should realize the necessity of this component in the process of carrying out certain actions by the state and social institutions; while integrating the state-building processes and executing certain requests of citizens are difficult, and sometimes even impossible to be resolved without the mutual participation of the parties. Recognizing the “autonomy” of the management of public organizations, the state should be represented by its inviolability. The managerial nature is ensured by democratic relations, mutual respect and mutual responsibility in the process of solving socially important tasks.

Under the democratic traditions of European countries, the legal framework was made to approach the requirements of the continental structure of the European Union. Therefore, the laws have been formed and approved by the relevant authorities in accordance with the basic requirements of the European Union. The key idea of the legal content-filling and their practical implementation was to increase the role of non-governmental society in the implementation of state policy. Rebranding, in this case, serves as a mechanism for adapting to the new legal standards of a democratic society.

The third principle of the nature of interethnic coexistence leads to understanding that national minorities in most European countries of the Central European region are autochthonous. They experienced

tolerant social conditions and did not feel the special harassment on the national ground (except for individual cases). Rebranding means a great opportunity to increase the popularity and recognition of public organizations of national minorities in the national environment and declare themselves as a full member of a society that is ready to participate in the processes of state building.

Globalization, decentralization and migration of the population in a special way increase the need for the integration of representatives of ethno-national communities with the conditions of state's development, while public organizations of national minorities can become an auxiliary tool in this process.

Nowadays, one should change the self-presentation of NGOs of national minorities as closed and localized unions of citizens experiencing the past. That is the demand of the present situation, and one should put away new national tasks, consolidating the society. The notions of tolerance and national tolerance, in particular, are also considered from a new perspective. Public organizations of national minorities should create information and educational platforms for preventing additional manifestations of racism, xenophobia and impatience in a variety of environments. Consequently, their rebranding contributes to the peaceful coexistence of the representatives of different nationalities.

Finally, considering the fourth principle, an important component of the policy of mutual actions of state institutions and NGOs of national minorities aiming at a dynamic development of democracy in Central Europe is the provision of advisory, social and other services, the support of legislative initiatives to improve the legal framework, to foster the development of NGOs, to preserve and to multiply the basic parameters of non-governmental society in general and its interaction with the state.

Getting the fact that European democratic states are directing their development towards achieving social justice, public organization should be treated as an institution of non-governmental society, which must fulfill key social roles in the public-state structure. Nowadays, public organizations of national minorities must perform an unlimited social function, because the democratic role of organized forms of social activity is increasing and this process will only deepen. Accordingly, the complication of socio-political processes, on the one hand, and the emergence of new forms and types of human interaction and management, on the other hand, will generate the emergence of



new structural entities serving as centers of accumulation and social protection of non-governmental interests.

Thus, the possibility of learning the social potential of NGOs in the context of their public management activities will be expanded, which, in its turn, will facilitate the implementation of a significant range of practical socially significant tasks. Rebranding should be aimed not only to increasing the social role of NGOs of national minorities but also at the constant change of the social brand and its constituent elements.

As for rating the group of Central European countries by the degree of rebranding of NGOs of national minorities, we propose that it should be ranked in the following way: Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine. The basic criteria we used are the information on the state of the development of NGOs of national minorities, the nature of their interaction with the authorities, and the focus on the provision of social services.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summarizing, we emphasize the positive aspects of the experience of European institutions in the socio-legal protection of the non-governmental engagement of ethno-national communities in Central European countries. The process of democratization of socio-political relations began almost simultaneously – on the verge of the 1980s and 1990s -, which contributed to overcoming the communal and Soviet heritage. The process has been carried out with different complexities, and the usage of Euro-Atlantic experience has greatly accelerated the democratic transformation of states and societies.

A peculiar indicator of positive changes was the nature of the interaction of state authorities with national non-governmental society institutions, legislative regulation of NGOs activity, as well as public access to information and the synergetic effect of the interaction between the institutions of the state and society. In our opinion, these criteria most successfully show a coherent picture of the synergetic structure in the process of improving the state policy, promoting the development of non-governmental society in Central European countries and focusing the society's attention on the brand positioning the associations of citizens of ethno-national communities. At the same time, we stress that the level of effective authority of the “third sector” in Central European countries is rather mediocre (except for Poland), and in the context of cooperation between governmental and non-

governmental institutions, the preference is for the formation of large corporate unions to provide citizens with the services of different kinds (in particular, in Hungary and Romania). Such corporations are stimulated both by state and non-state donors. It is also true, that in such a tandem, the state occupies the leading position, as it initiates selective cooperation to realize its own interest. Therefore, despite the effectiveness of democracy in these countries, the possibility of a real impact of the system of NGOs on the life of state and society is not decisive. There is a common European practice to brand non-governmental society organizations, which clearly distinguishes between ways of financing the corresponding associations with non-state funds. Central European countries, democratizing and integrating to European institutions over the past thirty years, have built up a new system of the “third sector” that immediately adapted to the standards of the European community by rebranding.

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