



Talk of the Nation: Language and Conflict in Romania and Slovakia

By Zsuzsa Csergo

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How can democratization, coupled with transnational integration, resolve conflicts over cultural difference in places that are marked by legacies of nationalist competition? This book explores that question through a comparative study of contestations over language use in the heart of the post-Communist region. Zsuzsa Csergo notes that newly independent governments looked to "rejoin" the West, in particular the European Union, while at the same time asserting control over the institutions they considered key to the reproduction of national cultures. These national projects resulted in renewed salience for minority language rights and a complicated politics triggering EU concerns about the treatment of regional/cultural minorities. Csergo's field research in Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia leads her to make a bold claim about the primacy of domestic politics in the construction of democratic solutions to the conundrum of nation building and minority rights. *Talk of the Nation* breaks new ground by focusing on both majority and minority political elites and parties in interethnic relations. Csergo challenges arguments about the overwhelming importance of international influence. Her book demonstrates that the role of domestic political actors in interethnic reconciliation is not merely that of "compliance" with international requirements or "effectiveness" in responding to external pressure?they are largely guided by the internal democratic process.

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Review

"This is an original, well-written, and thoroughly researched book on the language politics of post-Communist Europe. Zsuzsa Csergo addresses the broad question of why language politics matters for understanding high politics in a European context. While remaining fair in her treatment of controversial topics, Csergo shows why key decisions by majority and minority elites in Romania and Slovakia helped keep their disputes from becoming sources of widespread social mobilization and even violence."?Charles King, Chair of the Faculty and Ion Ratiu Associate Professor in the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

"Talk of the Nation presents an empirically rich, well-conceptualized, thoroughly analyzed, and logically organized study of the role of domestic political actors in the democratic transition processes in Romania and Slovakia and the way in which they dealt with the challenges arising from the multiethnic/multilingual nature of the two states."?Stefan Wolff, University of Nottingham

"This is an elegant and empirically rich comparative study of how domestic and international politics shaped both debates about the nation and democratization in Slovakia and Romania. Zsuzsa Csergo turns much of the common wisdom about nationalism, democratization, and the impact of the European Union on its head. Perhaps her most important argument is that struggles between elites and parties representing the majority versus the minority kept the national question alive, while contributing in the process to democratic development."?Valerie Bunce, Aaron Binenkorb Chair of International Studies and Chair of the Government Department, Cornell University

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About the Author

Zsuzsa Csergo is Assistant Professor of Political Science at The George Washington University.

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