INTRODUCTION

The key aspects of this thesis are the concept of cultural diversity and the manifold pattern of existing ethnic and linguistic minorities in Europe. The study tries in two parts to outline recent and future developments in the cultural domain pertaining to the promotion of cultural diversity and the protection of national minorities along national lines as well as at the transnational and international level relevant for the multicultural situation present in Europe. It furthermore analyses the concept of culture, cultural diversity and minorities from the perspective of the most important European organizations focusing on their various political and legal frameworks.

The first part deals with the concepts of culture, cultural diversity and cultural policies taking as a starting point that every human being has a right to culture as it is outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts that “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community.”

The concept of culture is mainly defined on how we see and interpret other habits in relation to our own cultural behaviour. Who is the diverse and how do we perceive other cultures? In which ways do diverse socio-cultural groups relate to each other and how do individuals act within a social group? Culture is a complex pattern of heterogeneous elements, which include knowledge, beliefs, art, moral law, costumes and all other capabilities human beings have acknowledged and made part of their cultural sphere as being member of a socio-cultural system. Culture can therefore be defined as the result of multiple influences every single person consciously and sub-consciously absorbs and develops. Influences that are the consequence of an evolving historical socio-cultural and linguistic parcours. The dynamic nature of culture and all cultural differences has to be interpreted in a constructive way that leads to a process of intercultural communication and re-negotiation to avoid any strumentalization or politicisation of culture, which would escort in an endless cultural struggle for the more powerful. Cultural policies should therefore incorporate simple values and principles, which guide any social entity in cultural affairs, determine common features and emphasize differences as a precious contribute for everybody. The concept of a socio-cultural and linguistic responsibility in relation to cultural diversity is a relatively new one. The idea of cultural policy as such came into currency after World War II due to the arising awareness of different ethnic and linguistic groups and minorities and since then cultural policy is playing an increasingly decisive role.
in the re-thinking and re-shaping of Europe. The challenges to democratic cultural development are global, but they manifest in different ways from place to place, depending on local social, political and linguistic conditions. If we have a look at very recent European history we realize that intercultural encounters take place more frequently and faster than ever before; free mobility, globalization processes, migration, new technologies, etc., transform Europe in a constantly changing and developing patchwork of multicultural societies. The role of ethnic minorities and the individual choice in determining its cultural affiliation play a fundamental role in establishing future socio-economical, socio-cultural, socio-linguistic and political relationships, which get more and more interwoven. Compared to the past, the daily challenges of interculturalism and multiculturalism are characterized by increasing complexity and cannot be tackled by just a simple model of intercultural understanding but demand intercultural communication and a constructive dialogue between all cultures. In this context national minorities and their cultural claims play an important role and thus, I decided to focus the second part of the thesis on the concept of minority and the political and legal framework of minority governance in Europe.

Ethnic and linguistic minorities incorporate the concept of cultural diversity and their growing visibility and claim for rights due to major political changes in the last years demand a deep analysis and comparative study on how problems could be solved. Nowadays we have to be aware of manifold cultural habits and different costumes, which might be grounded on complete diverse backgrounds but might in a different manner represent the same values and enrich our routine. In the end, otherness as the human history is the history of cultures; the history of diverse ethnic and linguistic socio-cultural contexts in which all cultures coexist. The fall of the Iron Curtain, the Enlargement Process and many other changes emphasized the importance of cultural diversity and gave persons belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities a chance to make their voices heard even though in many parts of Europe minority questions are far from being settled in an adequate way. The interrelations between the concepts minority, nation and state are of such a complex nature that single minority rights are often left outside or stop at the mere recognition of their status without the implementation of their rights at a practical level. Lots of answers have to be found to an endless series of questions. How can ethnic and linguistic minorities who have, for example, been struggling to overcome a long history of cultural colonization or discrimination claim their rights and ask for special rights to safeguard their particularities within a nation-state model? How can institutional
frameworks guarantee the plurality of cultures and foster participatory and efficient cultural and political involvement of minority groups? What can the EU, the CoE and other organizations do to promote cultural diversity and to give discriminated minorities a voice? How can traditions that root socio-cultural groups strongly in the past be preserved in front of the new tendencies (globalization, media, new technologies, etc.)? How can we facilitate cross-cultural communication and cooperation at local, regional, national and international level? These are some of the infinite questions Europe, its nation-states and the European peoples have to face when thinking of how to shape the future. Alongside the attempt to give some answers to these and other questions by following a comparative research method and focusing on examples of best practices throughout Europe, I concluded my thesis by the insertion of three case studies in the appendix. The analysis of minority questions and governance in Finland focuses on the Swedish-speaking Finns in Finland, the special status of the Åland Islands and the Sámi population in Lapland. The second case study presents an overview of Italy’s minority protection taking its Constitution as a starting point and analysing in a more deeply way the case of South Tyrol/Südtirol/Alto Adige and its autonomy. The last case study is on Romania, a country that is far from seeing implemented any minority rights or autonomy systems as in Finland or Italy. I have chosen Romania to show how problematic interethnic tensions can be and how many discrepancies can result from them. Romania, made out of more than 17 diverse ethnic groups, shows through its multicultural nature what it means to live cultural diversity and govern the many problems interlinked with it.