



2.8 • Nacionalismos e separatismos

The Hungarian minority in post-Communist Romania: political activity and claims for autonomy

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THE MAIN POLITICAL PLAYER to support the autonomy for Hungarians in Romania is the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (*Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, RMDSz* in Hungarian, in Romanian *Uniunea Democrat Maghiar din România, UDMR*) (Stein, 2010).

The Hungarian party vs. Romanian nationalists

Founded by Hungarian leaders of December Revolution, as László Tökés, at the end of 1989, this party was protagonist in the ethnic clash of Târgu Mure “Black March” 1990, target of the Romanian nationalist attacks. The first congress of the party elected his political elite: at the general elections of May, the UDMR collected all the Hungarian votes of Romania (6-7%), meanwhile the majority of former Socialist political elite contributed to the victory of National Salvation Front (receiving two thirds of the votes), with Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman. The collaboration of the Hungarian Union with the historical democratic parties (National-Liberals, National-Peasants, Social-Democrats) allowed to launch a national Convention for the instauration of democracy. In May 1991 the UDMR’s congress elected president László Tökés and the Union formed, with other opposition parties, the Democratic Convention of Romania: in this period (June 1991) the coagulation of nationalist environments gave the opportunity for the constitution of the “Great Romania” Party (*Partidul România Mare*, PRM, originated by the nationalist newspaper with the same name), whose leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor marked the political discourse with “anti” keywords (against Hungarian, Hebrews, Gypsies). With the affirmation of the Iliescu’s Democratic Salvation Front (against the Roman’s one), in the elections of September 1992, all these nationalist parties (the Party for Romanian National Unity, rooted in Transylvania and in the nationalist associations protagonist of the ethnic clashes in March ’90, the recently founded Great Romania Party, and the former Communists of Socialist Labour Party) governed together in a so called “red quadrilateral”, red four-sided (G. Andreescu, 2003).

In June 1995, however, the statement of Snagov – signed by almost all Romanian parties – indicated the main goal of adhesion to the European Union, and in October Romania was accepted within the Central European Initiative: but the simultaneous opening for a friendship treaty with Hungary was stopped by the nationalist parties of government. Finally, only in September 1996, before the general elections, Romania signed with Hungary the Timișoara agreement “of under-

standing, cooperation and good neighbourhood”, which involved the governments to keep the boundaries and to protect respective minorities in their own countries.

Hungarians in the Romanian government

The three November 1996 elections meant a historical turning point for political parties, marked by the opposition victory (Biagini, 2005). The former rector of the Bucharest University, Emil Constantinescu, became head of the State and the Romanian Democratic Convention, in coalition with Social-Democrats and the Hungarian Union, launched the government of Victor Ciorbea. Together with the priority of Euro-Atlantic integration process, the new government tried to work for distension in the international relations of Romania with bordering countries. In May 1997 the State visit in Romania of the Hungarian president, Árpád Göncz, was the historical opportunity to consolidate the bilateral relationship: but the government action about the Hungarian autonomy did not change the centralist approach.

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During 1997, several issues were pointed out by Hungarian party: minority laws for language in education and re-constitution of the Hungarian university in Transylvania caused debates and tensions inside the Parliament, in the Romanian society and in the Hungarian Union too. The main result was the provision (in fact, not everywhere respected) for bilingual public inscription in localities with at least 20% of minority population: but the refusal of an autonomous Hungarian university in Cluj (that was the “Bolyai” University, unified in the Communist period within the Romanian “Babeş-Bolyai” State University) and later of the “multicultural” definition too for the same Babeş-Bolyai University, and the stop of all the Hungarian parliamentary initiatives to maintain their own language in schools and education (in teaching plans of history and geography) meant disappointment and frustration within

Hungarian environments and inside the UDMR: only the radical criticism of László Tökés faced to moderate approach of Béla Markó. This first phase at government is considered a “lost round” by UDMR (Stroschein, 2012).

A general weakness of government political action caused the change of prime minister, at the beginning of 1998: Radu Vasile re-launched the privatization processes and policies for containing inflations of the “Lei” national currency. Against the government action the miners, from the Jiu valley, called to the general strike and to march to Bucharest: in January 1999 this last “minerade” (as called, like the previous manifestations and clashes of these workers against governments), with ten thousands of participants, revealed a country in transition still on the edge of a *coup d’état*, in this occasion organized by former Communists and Nationalists (as those of Great Romania Party). The collapse of the government parties, mainly of Christian Democratic National Peasants, was expected for the next elections: on 26th November 2000 the 65% of citizens expressed disaffection to the political action of government in the first presidential round, giving 28% of the votes to the Great Romania’s nationalist leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, at the ballot behind the former president, Ion Iliescu: after two weeks, facing the risk of a nationalist statement in the second round, Iliescu collected the not enthusiastic support of Liberals, Democrats and Hungarians too. The new leftist prime minister, Adrian Năstase, opened to the collaboration with other parties, firstly the Hungarian one. This new phase of UDMR’s involvement in the government was marked by a soft approach to the most important targets and a step-by-step strategy with a permanent presence in the cabinet and local administration: under the strong leadership of Markó Béla (deputy prime minister in the government), the Hungarian Union was accused to become a sort of the Hungarian “section of the former Communist party” (so called the Social-Democratic party of Iliescu and N stase) (Carteny, 2007).

About the initiative for the Hungarian university in Romania, between 1999 and 2000 the support of Hungarian government and the coordination of Hungarian churches in Romania (Catholic, Calvinist, Unitarian and Evangelical Lutheran one) allowed to launch the Sapientia Foundation and the Hungarian “Sapientia” University in Transylvania, from 2001 in function in three cities (Miercurea Ciuc/Csíksereda, Târgu Mure/Marosvásárhely, Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár) and the Partium Christian University (in Oradea/Nagyvárad). The Hungarian Churches and respective confessional communities (mainly Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans and Unitarians) are considered the pillars of solidarity and identity of minorities life,

Hungarian parties in local elections - 2008	Votes (%) for Presidents of district (jude)	Votes (%) for Mayors	Votes (%) for Municipal Council	Votes (%) for Council of district (jude)
UDMR	419.028 (5,26)	378.413 (4,28)	404.657 (4,75)	429.329 (5,13)
PCM	79.135 (0,99)	61.282 (0,69)	79.238 (0,93)	84.620 (1,01)

Trends and comparison of Hungarian parties.

Source: <http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro>.

UDMR trends in national elections	Chamber of Deputies votes (%)	Senate votes (%)
1990	991.601 (7,23%)	1.004.353 (7,2%)
1992	811.290 (7,46%)	831.469 (7,58%)
1996	812.628 (6,64%)	837.760 (6,82%)
2000	736.863 (6,8%)	751.310 (6,9%)
2004	638.125 (6,2%)	637.109 (6,2%)
2008	425.008 (6,17%)	440.449 (6,39%)

Trends and comparison of Hungarian parties.

Source: http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rom%C3%A2nii_Magyar_Demokrata_Sz%C3%B6vets%C3%A9g.

Hungarian parties in national elections - 2012	Chamber of Deputies votes (%)	Senate votes (%)
UDMR	380.656 (5,14)	388.528 (5,24)
PPMT	47.955 (0,65)	58.765 (0,79)

Trends and comparison of Hungarian parties.

Source: <http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro>.

also for Germans (Lutherans and Catholics): these institutions are still claiming back all the properties expropriated and nationalized by the Communist regime (Doe, 2011).

Strategies of Viktor Orbán for Transylvania

In Hungary, in 1998 the 35 years old Viktor Orbán, leader of FIDESZ (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, the Alliance of Young Democrats), was the winner at the elections and the new Hungarian prime minister of a center-right coalition government. His policy towards Hungarian communities outside Hungary was to protect strongly the Hungarian identity and language: the main tool launched was the Hungarian Status Law, whose debate began in 2000 and whose final draft was approved in June 2001. This provision aimed to state a kind of “cultural federation” between motherland and Hungarian minority’s communities out of Hungary, mainly from bordering countries as Romania, Slovakia, former Yugoslavia States, Ukraine, Austria (Kántor *et alii*, 2004): the Status law recognized as ethnic Hungarian many citizens of other countries, but it encountered their criticism because of the ingerence in their domestic affairs (Bauböck-Faist, 2010). With Romania, after the December meeting of Orbán with Romanian prime minister Adrian Năstase, Hungary reached an agreement. However, the process to recognize ethnic Hungarians among Romanian citizens was put in doubt by the following events: in 2002, Hungarian Socialists gained the government and changed the Hungary’s approach to this issue. In December 2004, at the referendum called to give the Hungarian nationality as second citizenship for ethnic Hungarians, few voters to support the initiative meant the end of this first wave of a wider Hungarian citizenship for diaspora (Waterbury, 2010).

In this same period in Transylvania, while UDMR was more and more involved in the Romanian government strategy and action, different organizations emerged among Hungarians, mainly in Szeklers’ counties, to mark stronger claims for autonomy and independence of Hungarians in Romania. In July 2003, the Hungarian Civic Alliance was founded and began a process to be recognized as Hungarian party with the political project of territorial autonomy: this process finalized in 2008, with the participation of Hungarian Civic Party to the local elections in Transylvania in opposition to UDMR, under the leadership of Jenő Szász (mayor of Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely). In October 2003 a Szekler National Council was launched in Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy, as a civic organization representing the national interests of Hungarian Szeklers, with the main goal of the Szeklerland autonomy; in December of the same year the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania was established as civic organization that represents the project for the Hungarian autonomy in Transylvania, under the leadership of László Tőkés (who in 2003 left the UDMR).

From one to many Hungarian parties

In the political life of Romania’s Hungarians, UDMR practically gained more right for minorities in the language’s administration of some fields (mainly education and justice) being well integrated in the power, but nothing about territorial autonomy: UDMR was with N stase government until his presidential campaign in 2004, and after the victory of his antagonist with the new coalition government of center-right “Justice and Truth”, with some ministers and the deputy prime minister in the Romanian cabinet. From February 2005, by UDMR initiative, a new draft law on national minorities was debated in the public opinion and in the parliament: this project prospected the status of “cultural autonomy” (in the sphere of education, religion, language, media, etc.) only for the historical minority’s communities living in Romania more than one hundred years ago (and not for emigrants and refugees) (Decker-McGarry, 2005). For so-recognized national minorities, this proposal previewed that the management of the autonomy was carried out by minority’s councils organized by the minority’s parties, which was strongly criticized by minorities’ civic organizations. Although the debate was long and complex, this draft law was refused, as other projects for territorial autonomy, by the Romanian parliament: even comparative perspective, as the model of French-German reconciliation, resulted very hard to realize (Salat-Enache, 2004). In all the cases, UDMR – with both center-right government, from 2008, and from 2012 Social-Democrat government – passed to the opposition and re-entered in the government majority, but without big results for a greater autonomy and always with occasion for old and new civic conflict: as

in the case of the Romanian ban for the display of the regional Szekler flag on the local administrative buildings. For this reason, recently re-claimed forms of territorial autonomy disassociated themselves from the government.

In this last period and in the present time, in Romania among main Hungarian politicians again László Tőkés has to be mentioned, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) designed in 2007 and elected in 2009 with the support both of UDMR and Hungarian National Council of Transylvania. The strong feeling with Viktor Orbán makes him the most important Hungarian leader from Romania, until his re-election as MEP in 2014 for Orbán’s political party, FIDESZ – *Magyar Polgári Szövetség*, in the European People’s Party-Christian Democrats group. Tőkés is actually considered even the “mentor” of another active political formation, the Hungarian People’s Party of Transylvania, launched in December 2010 by the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania: the PPMT, led by Tibor Törő, presented a platform of Transylvanian autonomy based on the Swiss model, and in the presidential election of 2014 candidate his young leader Zolt Szilágyi, with a federalist program for Romania and the Hungarian regional autonomy for Szeklerland and Partium.

But the absolute protagonist for Hungarians, even in Romania, is again Viktor Orbán, from 2010, when the elections in Hungary consigned a two-third majority in the Budapest parliament to Orbán party: the new Hungarian Constitution, approved in April 2011, supports the Hungarian nationality for Hungarians outside Hungary (Tóth, 2012): more than six hundred thousands Romanian citizens (till September 2014) are granted Hungarian citizenship. The dual citizenship actually is a successful strategy in certain conditions (Dumbrava, 2014): undoubtedly it has many results among ethnic Hungarians of Carpathian basin, mainly in countries, as Romania, where the claims for cultural and territorial autonomy are until now unsuccessful. ■

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