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A Story of Survival: the Hungarians of Romania, 1919-1989

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The story of the Hungarian minority of Romania during the seven decades covered in this study is a sad one. It is a tale of uncertainties, mistreatment, deprivations of rights, and in general, a seemingly hopeless struggle for cultural survival. During these seventy years there had been few periods that gave cause for optimism. The strategic goal of successive Romanian regimes — whether ostensibly democratic or blatantly authoritarian — had always been the establishment of a homogeneous Romanian nation state. Nevertheless, the prolonged struggle of the Hungarians for the preservation of their ethnic identity cannot be considered to have been in vain. There had been setbacks for them, especially as a consequence of a population explosion in Romania combined with the forced resettlement policies of the country's immediate pre-1989 regime, but they had survived what will hopefully be the worst of the periods of mistreatment since they had come under Romanian rule nearly nine decades ago.

True, from 1919 to 1989 there had been a decline in the proportion of Hungarians in the population in Romania, in particular in Transylvania. In absolute terms, however, their numbers increased. This development is noteworthy in view of the fact that elsewhere in the post-1919 history of the Hungarian diaspora of the Carpathian Basin there has been a regrettable decline not only in ratios but in absolute numbers as well. It is also important that the decrease in the proportion of the Hungarian population in Romania did not translate into a commensurate decline in their influence in cultural and political life. The results of the recent national elections in Romania — from the point of view of Hungarian political parties in the country — repeated the electoral patterns that had been established in the interwar period, and gave the Hungarians of Transylvania a stable representation in the Parliament in

Bucharest. The past several decades have witnessed partial successes even though the general trends — and unfortunately this is undisputable — are unfavourable from the point of view of demographics as well as social, economic, and cultural developments.

The Demographic Situation

The vast majority of Hungarians in Romania became Romanian citizens as a result of the boundary changes imposed by the Peace Treaty of Trianon (June 4, 1920). The Hungarian census of 1910 listed 1,661,805 citizens whose mother tongue was Hungarian in the regions that the peace settlement transferred to Romania. These regions included historic Transylvania and the Bánát, i.e. the districts of Körös and Mármaros, a geographic area that in time acquired the name Transylvania in popular parlance.[1]

Among the Magyar-speaking citizens of post-1918 "Greater" Romania, the number of Hungarians living outside of Transylvania was also signifycant. In this connection we can rely only on estimated figures because of the incompleteness of statistical data. According to these, in 1920 about 150 thousand Hungarian residents of Romania lived outside of Transylvania. These people had settled, in the distant or not-so-distant past, in Bukovina, Moldova, and in the cities of the Regat (Wallachia), mainly Bucharest.

According to the Romanian census of 1930, the population of Transylvania was 5,548,363. This particular figure can be considered fairly realistic. The Romanian ethnic group had increased by 400,000 compared to the census of 1910 and constituted the majority in Transylvania with a population of 3,207,880. The census recorded a total of 1,353,276, Hungarians, a figure which indicated a decrease of almost 200,000. This finding can not be considered realistic even when one considers the fact that 197,000 Hungarians had left Transylvania between 1919-1927.[2] The Romanian census was manipulated for political reasons. The number of those whose mother tongue was Hungarian had decreased as a result of the classification of the Jewish, Gypsy, Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox population as Romanian. In reality there can be little doubt that there were at least 1,600,000 Hungarian-speaking persons living in Transylvania in the interwar period.

The third largest ethnic group in Transylvania was the German. In the interwar years it numbered about 500,000. From the point of view of their political, economic and cultural situation, the Germans were the natural allies of the Hungarians. However, this alliance was rarely realized because of the two groups' often differing political outlook and perceived interests.

The ethnic map of Transylvania was very varied. The Hungarian administrative map of 1910 indicated that there was only one county in which an ethnic group made up more than 90 percent of the population — the County of Udvarhely (Odorhei), where the Hungarians made up 95 percent of the population. In four counties Rumanians made up the majority with population ratios between 75 and 90 percent, and in two counties the same was true for Hungarians. Rumanians were the majority in nine counties with populations making up 50-75 percent of the total, while Hungarians had such majorities in two counties. In the five remaining counties there was no clear-cut majority for either of these ethnic groups. As far as the geographic regions are concerned, Hungarians were significant in Székelyföld (south-eastern Transylvania), in the borderland between Hungary and Romania, and in the central Transylvanian regions of the Szilágyság and the Kalotaszeg. In addition, there were several smaller "ethnic islands" with Hungarian majorities. Many of Transylvania's urban centres used to be such places.

Two v-shaped areas, with their base on the northeastern and southern frontierlands of Transylvania and their apex in the Bihar or Apuseni mountains, had Romanian majorities. Both of these regions were forested and mountainous where a relatively low number of people lived on a relatively large area, with 75-85 percent of them being Rumanians — the predominant majority of them being shepherds and peasants. There were significant areas of mixed population, where none of the nationalities formed a majority. Transylvania's Germans lived mostly in such areas. The most important area of mixed Hungarian-Romanian population was the large Transylvanian basin, and a belt near the western border, behind a zone with Hungarian majorities.

An examination of the distribution and settlement pattern of the Hungarians in Transylvania reveals striking anomalies and abnormalities. While the predominant majority of the Rumanians lived in small villages spreading over huge areas, about 30 percent of the Hungarians lived in towns located in areas populated mainly by other nationalities. The statistics show that in 1910 there were 28 — and in 1930, still 19 — Transylvanian urban centres where the proportion of the Hungarian population was over 50 percent (Arad [Arad], Bánffyhunyad [Huedin], Csíkszereda [Miercurea-Ciuc], Dicsőszentmárton [Tirnaveni], Felsőbánya [Baia Sprie], Gyergyószentmiklós [Gheorgheni], Kézdivásárhely [Târgu Secuiesc], Kolozsvár [Cluj], Marosvásárhely [Tîrgu-Mures], Nagyenyed [Aiud], Nagykároly [Carei], Nagyszalonta [Salonta], Nagyvárad [Oradea], Sepsiszentgyörgy [Sfîntu-Gheorghe], Szatmárnémeti [Satu-Mare], Székelyudvarhely [Odorheiu], Szilágysomlyó [Simleu], Torda [Turda], Zilah [Zalâu]).

This pattern of settlement would heavily influence the future of Transylvania's Hungarian community. The fact is that urban populations were far more susceptible to assimilative pressures and the manipulation of their ethnic identity by the authorities. In towns with predominantly non-Hungarian hinterlands the Magyar communities were culturally isolated and soon underwent the processes which in the long run resulted in the erosion of the Hungarian character of these places.

The religious make-up of post-1920 Transylvania was even more complex than its ethnic composition. As a result of the centuries long co-existence of ethnic groups there had developed some overlaps, but in general it can be stated that the region's Unitarians and Calvinists were Hungarian, whereas the majority of its Greek Catholics and almost all the Orthodox Christians were Romanian — while the Lutherans were all German.[3] The majority of Roman Catholics were also Hungarian — most of them lived on the eastern territory of Székelyland, in Csík (Ciuc) county, but there was also a significant number of German Catholics who lived in the Bánát. The pre-dominantly Romanian population of the above-mentioned north-eastern triangle was Greek Catholic, whereas that of the southern Romanian-populated region war Orthodox.

Statistics on the migrations of Romania's Hungarian community are scarce. Romanian demographers, working with incomplete data, have arrived at the conclusion that the population growth of Transylvania's Romanian population exceeded that of the Hungarian by such margin that a fundamental change in the region's ethnic balance was inevitable. This suggestion, which was widely advertised, was posed not only as a question of demography but also a scientific theory. Later on, Romanian propagandists attributed changes in Transylvania's ethnic balance to this discrepancy in natural population growth. In reality, the difference between the rate of increase of Transylvania's Romanian and Hungarian populations was not so much the result of varying rates of demographic growth but of the Bucharest government's policies of forced assimilation and large-scale resettlement.

The Legal Situation

The Greater Romania that emerged from the First World War was highly centralized state whose administration was patterned on that of the pre-war Romanian Kingdom. Nothing came of the promises that had been made regarding autonomy for the country's newly-gained territories: Transylvania and Bessarabia. The protection of the new Romania's minorities was supposed

to have been guaranteed by the resolutions of Gyulafehérvár (today's Alba Julia)[4] and the minority protection clauses of the post-World War I peace treaties, but these national and international agreements were, more often than not, disregarded. The Gyulafehérvár resolutions in particular, offered extensive guarantees to all of Romania's minorities in religious, economic and political affairs and in the realm of education. The Romanian constitution of March 29, 1923, however, guaranteed only the civic rights of individual citizens. The new constitution that was proclaimed after the establishment royal dictatorship by King Carol in February, 1938, went no further. These constitutions proclaimed the equality of Rumanians (but not of the citizens of Romania) in the realm of race, language, religion; the freedom of assembly and association as well as of the press; and the right to education. Neither of these constitutions guaranteed any collective rights to the national minorities.

On August 4, 1938, King Carol's regime, in its desire to gain wider support both domestically and internationally, passed a new nationalities statute which gave national minorities equal rights with Rumanians in matters of race, religion and language. The new Minority Statute, however, was limited in its effect by the fact that its provisions were not reinforced by other legislation. Furthermore, the High Commission on Minority Affairs established by this statute did not possess powers to enforce its provisions.

The legal regime for the protection of minorities in interwar Romania was in practice circumscribed and provided limited benefits. Nevertheless the very existence of minority protection provisions gave comfort to minorities and encouraged them in their struggle to obtain at least partial protection for their cultures.

The fundamental issue determining the fate of the Hungarians in Romania was their right to citizenship. The Romanian state, in its quest for the creation of a homogeneous nation state, tried to decrease the number of minorities through denying citizenship to their members, or making it difficult for them to attain the status of citizens. Accordingly, even though the minority protection agreements signed by Romania called for the granting of citizen status to all people born in the country as well as those who were permanent residents there, the statute of February 24, 1924, made the right to residency status — and not the place of residence — a condition of citizenship.[5] The right to citizenship, specified in the minority protection agreement signed by Romania after the war, was eventually implemented in October of 1939 through an amendment to the legislation dealing with citizenship rights. During the intervening two decades huge number of Hungarians had been forced to leave the country.[6]

As far as the rights of the minorities were concerned, the constitution of 1923 endorsed the idea of the equality of all citizens. Nevertheless, Romania's Parliament passed many laws that violated the rights of minorities. Among these was Bank Act of 8 May 1934, and the Act of 16 July 1934, which specified that 80 percent of the employees, and 50 percent of the directors of banks had to be Romanians.[7]

The situation was similar in regard to the use of minority languages. The constitutions of 1923 and 1938 — despite the provisions of the minority protection treaties — did not address the issue of the rights of the minorities to the use of their mother tongue. Furthermore, Romania's Parliament passed numerous acts that restricted the use of the Hungarian language. In the courts, for example, lawyers were not allowed to use any other language but Romanian, and accountants had to do their book-keeping also in Romanian.

Education

In the focus of political struggle of Transylvania's Hungarians between the two world wars stood education which was of fundamental importance from the point of view of the survival of their culture.

The right of minorities to education in their own language was proclaimed by the Gyulafehérvár declarations as well as the Minority Protection provisions of the post-war peace settlement. At the beginning of the 1919-1920 school-year, the Romanian authorities in charge of education tried to delegate authority over the teaching of minorities to church-run schools. As a result of this policy, the Hungarian language lost ground in the state schools, whereas the number of Hungarian denominational schools increased rapidly.

The restriction of the mother tongue education of minorities living in Romania began in 1921 after the ratification of the peace treaties. The authorities in charge of education, under the leadership of Minister of Education Constantin Anghelescu, strove to reduce the influence of the still rather powerful network of denominational schools. Romania's land reform, implemented through the legislation of 30 July 1921, deprived the Hungarian churches of their basic income and precipitated a crisis that threatened the existence of their schools.[8] The functioning of these beleaguered church-operated schools was exacerbated by a series of discriminative measures. With the deprival of the right to publicize themselves and their activities, a great many long-established Hungarian schools had to close.[9]

Greater Romania's primary level state schools were first regulated by the act of 26 July 1924. The legislation stipulated that elementary schooling

had to be uniform in the whole country, that its direction and control was the function of the state, and that no school could be established without the prior approval of the Ministry of Public Education. The act also specified that the language of education had to be Romanian, except in communities where the language was non-Romanian. In these, the Ministry of Education could establish primary schools to function in the language of the minority, to the same extent as those in Romanian communities.

When it came to the implementation of this act, the provisions regarding these ratios were not realized. The proportion of Hungarian elementary schools was much below what it should have been according to the results of the 1930 Romanian census — and the situation was even worse in the case of kindergartens. According to the calculations of Árpád Kiss, at the end of the 1934-35 school year there were a total of only 112 Hungarian-language state elementary schools in Romania, and by the 1936-37 school year this number had decreased to 44, that is, to one percent of the total number of schools in the country. This meant that, out of the total of about 96,809 Hungarian pupils registered in state elementary schools, in 1934-35 there were only 11,485, and in 1936-37 only 4,527 who could study in their own language.[10]

In the Romanianization of the state schools prominent role was played by the provisions of article 159 of the law of July 26, 1924. These provisions provided any teacher who moved to a county with a large non-Romanian population with a 50 percent pay bonus, a parcel of land of 10 hectares, as well as improved pension benefits. Counties in which teachers were qualified for these incentives included Csík (Ciuc) with 85.7 percent Hungarian population, Háromszék (Trei Scaune) with 86.6%, Udvarhely (Odorhei) with 95.1%, Maros-Torda (Mures-Turda) with 45.9%, Bihar (Bihor) with 33.8%, Szatmár (Satu-Mare) with 31.9%, Szilágy (S□laj) with 36.6%, Kolozs (Cluj) with 32.6%, Szolnok-Doboka (in east-central Transylvania) with 15.8%, Torda-Aranyos (Turda) with 22.2%.

Minorities were further burdened by the fact that the state expected the local communities to shoulder all the costs of maintaining the elementary schools (school construction, maintenance, the upkeep of the headmaster's residence, etc.) except for the wages of the teachers. Considering the fact that, contrary to the provisions of the law, minority denominational schools did not enjoy any state support, it becomes obvious that the communities of Romania's minorities were burdened with a double than the normal share of education costs. They had to pay for the denominational schools that taught in the minority's language, and they also had to pay most of the costs for the

maintenance of the state schools that were increasingly Romanianized — the latter amounted to 14 percent of the taxes collected in a particular settlement.[11]

The decrease of the number of state schools that taught in Hungarian had a very negative impact on Transylvania's Hungarian community. The threat existed that the implementation of the regulations of the law governing denominational schools (which barred students with Romanian family names or ancestry from attending), and the closing of more and more of these schools, would force an increasing number of Hungarian students to attend state schools that were gradually becoming Romanianized.

As far as the legal status of denominational schools was concerned, the framers of minority protection treaties had not been aware how important Hungarian denominational education had been in the past in Transylvania. Because of this these treaties did not include any provisions for the protection of denominational schools from state regulations, Romania's legislators could classify the denominational minority schools into the same category as private schools that were operated for profit.[12] The exceptions to this were the schools of the Orthodox Church which enjoyed all the benefits extended to state schools.

Many of the regulations governing education in Romania of the 1920s had a negative impact on the country's minorities. Although these measures caused concerns and difficulties for the Hungarian community, they failed to disrupt the Hungarian elementary school system. In 1931 for example, nearly 75 percent of Hungarian children were still receiving education in their mother tongue. Almost 62 percent of these students attended church-affiliated schools where they received a high-quality education and one that was Hungarian in spirit.

The restriction of such education began in earnest in the early 1930s. Between 1931 and 1937 the number of Hungarian public schools declined from 427 to 44. This meant that a very large percentage of Transylvania's Hungarian pupils, that is close to hundred thousand students, no longer received their education in the mother tongue.[13] Statistical data of the Hungarian denominational education reveal that after 1932, negative tendencies occurred there as well. This was manifested above all by the fact that instead of experiencing growing enrolment as had been the case previously, from this time on these schools faced a decline.[14]

The combined enrolment of the Hungarian religious and public schools in 1935 was 77,346 — two years later it was down to 62,000. By that time in the state-supported schools only 4,527 students received education in their Hungarian mother tongue. With nearly 93 percent of Transylvania's Hungarian students receiving their education in the Magyar minority's church-

affiliated schools, the burden of culture maintenance had shifted overwhelmingly to this sector of the minority educational network.

The Churches

The Churches play a fundamental role in the preservation of ethnic identity and culture in minority populations. This was especially the case in Transylvania where the Churches had for many centuries played an important role in education and culture maintenance. Such long-standing traditions of freedom of religion and equality among the denominations helped Transylvania's churches to serve the interests of minorities without which their survival could have been jeopardized.

The tradition of religious freedom in Transylvania included the right for denominations to maintain their religious and cultural institutions. After the acquisition of the region by Romania, that country's government undertook to respect the religious autonomy of the Székely (Hungarian) and Saxon (German) minorities, and to support their institutions financially. At first, the country's constitution even guaranteed the equality of religions in Transylvania. A revision of the constitution in 1923 however, declared the Orthodox Church to be supreme in the country and accorded preferred status to the Greek Catholic Church.[15]

In the meantime the process of depriving Transylvania's Hungarian minority churches of their assets continued. Romania's Land Reform Act of 30 June 1921 violated the concept of equality of religion proclaimed by the country's first post-World War I constitution. Pursuant to this law, the Hungarian churches were deprived of most of their landholdings. The Roman Catholic dioceses of Nagyvárad (Oradea), Gyulafehérvár (Alba Julia), Temesvár (Timişoara), and Szatmár (Satu-Mare) lost 95 percent of their holdings, while the Reformed Church elsewhere had to part with 45 percent of its lands. All-in-all, Romania's Hungarian churches lost a total of 84.5 percent of their estates.[16]

The loss of these lands, and the income from them, confronted these Churches with grave difficulties. From this time on the churches had to maintain their religious services and support their schools from their much decreased incomes, just when state support for minority education was also reduced.

The Political Situation

Confronted by such difficulties the leaders of Transylvania's Hungarian minority tried to organize themselves politically. After several failed attempts, in December of 1922 they established the National Hungarian Party (Országos Magyar Párt, hereafter NHP). The party accepted as member every citizen of Romania over the age of 20 who considered himself Hungarian by descent, mother tongue or cultural background. This party represented the interests of Transylvania's Hungarians in Romania's Parliament until its dissolution at the time of the establishment of a royal dictatorship in Romania in 1938. It fought a continuous struggle for the maintenance of Hungarian schools. On fifteen different occasions it registered its complaints in this matter with the League of Nations. Though it functioned as a political party, the NHP tried to represent the collective interests of the Hungarian minority. After its dissolution in 1938, the Hungarians of Transylvania tried to voice their concerns through the organization known as the Front for National Re-birth (Nemzeti Újjászületés Frontja). The effectiveness of the Front was limited by the fact that during King Carol's dictatorship the role of Parliament was severely restricted. According to the country's new constitution, the government became responsible to Parliament but to the King, and most legislation was promulgated not by Parliament but by a cabinet appointed by Carol.

The Second Vienna Award of 30 August, 1940, brought dramatic changes in the life of the Hungarian community in Transylvania. The award returned the northern and eastern parts of Transylvania, an area of 43,104 square kilometres, to Hungary. In devising the new frontiers between Hungary and Romania the arbitrators tried to implement the principle of nationality. As a result, in the new "Hungarian" half of Transylvania, Hungarians (numbering 1,380,507) became a majority; at the same time, a sizeable Romanian minority, 1,029,469 inhabitants, found themselves included in the newly-enlarged Hungary. In southern, "Romanian" Transylvania, the Romanian majority became more predominant (with 2,274,569 individuals) while the Hungarian and German minority population amounted to "only" 363,206 and 490,640 respectively.

Transylvania's August, 1940 partition better reflected the region's ethnic realities than did the post-World War I settlement, but it did not solve its accumulated problems — nor did it resolve the fundamental issue of intolerant nationalism. Problems were not resolved, only modified. Before the Second Vienna Award, Europe was faced the explosive dilemma of a 1.6 million-strong Hungarian minority in Romania; after it there was the equally acute problem of a million-strong Romanian minority in Hungary. At the

same time, the issue of nearly a million Germans, Hungarians, South Slavs, Gypsies etc. remaining in Romanian Transylvania, persisted.

In reflecting upon the experience of the Hungarian minority in Romania in the interwar period we can conclude that Romanian policy toward minorities was characterized by an impatient and aggressive nationalism that permeated all of East Central Europe at the time. Throughout these two decades the situation of Romania's minorities kept worsening. The maintenance of minority culture and identity was becoming more and more difficult. The contradictions of Romania's parliamentary system, the restrictions on minority political organizations, the expropriation of much of the minority Churches' estates, the systematic Romanization of the educational system all threatened the long-term survival of the country's minorities. Yet, this period was also characterized by the minorities' struggle for their survival and by their faith in the positive outcome of this struggle. The minorities couldn't hope to win the contest against the Romanian state, but on occasion they managed to wring some concessions from Bucharest that gave them hope for the future.

With World War II everything changed. At war's end, the provisions of the Second Vienna Award were annulled: Transylvania was reunited under Romanian rule. Furthermore, the whole region, with its myriad problems, became a part of the Soviet sphere of interest. The arrival of communism didn't improve the prospects of Transylvania's minorities. The maintenance of national or ethnic identity was not a priority according to communist ideology. At the same time, the new communist state began to deal with nationality problems with little understanding but strident determination. Especially threatening was the attitude of Romania's communists toward private property. As has been pointed out above, land ownership had been the financial underpinning of Transylvania's minority Churches and their schools. The total expropriation of these assets meant that the Romanian state gained a complete monopoly over all aspects of education and could promote the interest of the country's majority without any restrictions. Romania's socialist transformation had negative effects on the whole Romanian population, but the country's majority disadvantaged less than its minorities.

Post-World War II Demographics

Obtaining reliable data on the demographic evolution of Transylvania's minority populations in the period surveyed in this study is made difficult by the fact that during Romania's age of communism statistics were manipulated

with impunity. Even the terminology used to determine the inhabitants' minority status kept changing. The term "minorities" first became "nationalities" then "citizens of the homeland," and finally in the case of Hungarians, "Rumanians of the Hungarian nationality." The manipulation of the data reinforced certain natural tendencies such as the high birth-rates among the country's Romanian population. Not surprisingly under the circumstances, the demographic data reveal the ever increasing predominance of the Romanian population in Transylvania, and the corresponding relative and sometimes absolute decline of the minorities.

Especially remarkable is the decline of Transylvania's Jewish population. In 1930 3.2 percent of the region's inhabitants declared themselves to be Jewish, while in 1977 only 0.1 percent did. The Holocaust during World War II and the post-war mass emigration of Jews meant that this minority had virtually disappeared from Transylvania despite the fact that, from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th, this ethnic/religious group had played a influential role in the region's cultural and economic evolution. This development had a serious impact on Transylvania's Hungarian minority as the Jews, especially the intelligentsia, had often made substantial contributions to Hungarian community and cultural advancement.

From the point of view of the Hungarian minority, the Romanian authorities' manipulation of demographic data regarding Transylvania's Gypsies was also disadvantageous. Romania's Gypsy population has always been one of the largest in Europe, numbering over a million. Despite this, Romania's communist governments, taking advantage of the Gypsies' ambiguous cultural status, often determined their numbers ridiculously low, in 1966 at 49,000 for example. In most cases Gypsies were listed as Rumanians, even those who lived in Hungarian communities and considered themselves Hungarian Gypsies.

Very dramatic was the decline of Transylvania's German minority. In 1930 this ethnic group numbered 544,000. By 1966 its numbers had declined to 372,000. This largest of German communities in Eastern Europe experienced a further drastic decline following a deal between Romania's Ceauşescu's regime and West Germany, as a consequence of which, by the end of the 1980s, Transylvania's German minority had declined to under 200,000.[17]

The decline, more precisely the relative decline of the Hungarian minority was continuous throughout these decades, though it was not nearly as dramatic as that of the German. In 1930 there were 1,353,000 Hungarians in Transylvania, making up 24.4 percent of the region's total population. In 1966 this number had grown to 1,597,000 and in 1977 to 1,651,000, but these

numbers represented only 23.8 percent and 22 percent of the total population respectively. Other unfavourable tendencies were also apparent. In regions of formerly mixed (Romanian-German-Hungarian or Romanian-Hungarian-German) populations, Hungarians began to assimilate to the Romanian majority. The emigration of Germans also had a negative consequence. They were replaced mainly by Romanian immigrants from southern Romania (the former Wallachia) — people who had no experience in co-existing with people of other ethnicities. Similar trend prevailed in Transylvania's cities. The influx into such urban centres of masses of Romanian and other non-Hungarian workers inevitably altered their ethnic makeup. Even cities that had been traditionally Hungarian lost their Magyar character in the course of a few decades. Cities such as Arad (Arad), Brassó (Braşov), Kolozsvár (Cluj), Nagybánya (Baia-Mare), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Szatmárnémeti (Satu-Mare) Temesvár (Timişoara) and other historic centres lost their Hungarian majority and Hungarian character.

The Post-1945 Political and Legal Situation

Throughout the period surveyed in this study Romania's policies regarding the political activities and legal rights of minorities have been characterized by the increasing limitation of their opportunities and the encouragement of their assimilation to the country's Romanian majority. Occasionally such policies were interrupted by a tactical retreat in the quest for assimilation, only to be followed by renewed efforts in this direction.

Such tactical retreats were often caused by internal and/or external political considerations. In the elections of November 1946, for example, the Communists in Romania needed the support of the Hungarian People's League (Magyar Népi Szövetség, hereafter HPL). Until the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty of February 1947, the government in Bucharest was anxious to prove its "accommodating" attitude towards the minorities, mainly to make sure that the peacemakers would legalize the restoration of Romania's pre-1940 western borders. Later concessions made to the minorities were proclaimed not "rights" but "privileges" and gradually many of them were withdrawn.

In a similar manner, some concessions were made by the Ceauşescu regime in the spring of 1968 when it feared Soviet intervention and needed the support of all of the country's peoples. As communist Romania became more and more isolated within the Soviet empire, it avoided the political thaw that was experienced by some of the Soviet satellites. In an increasingly

totalitarian atmosphere there were fewer and fewer occasions when the regime tried to solve the country's problems through the building of consensus as opposed to dictatorial decrees.

During Romania's evolution since the end of World War II, for Transylvania's Hungarian minority a memorable period was the time of the leadership of Petru Groza that commenced in March of 1945. Many Hungarians look back on this early post-war era with some nostalgia. First of all, Groza, a Transylvanian by birth and upbringing, spoke fluent Hungarian. His government made many concessions to the region's minorities. This was the time of the restoration of many of Transylvania's minority theatres. The small Turkish and Tatar minorities received their own schools, for the first time in their evolution. It was in this period that the Hungarian university of Kolozsvár (Cluj) reopened, and the Hungarian-speaking Csángós of Moldavia received their own schools.[18] Unfortunately for the Hungarians, these concessions proved ephemeral.

We may ask the question whether there is real ground for a positive assessment the Groza government's deeds. Indeed, the above-mentioned concessions certainly indicate some empathy with the minorities, empathy that has been usually lacking in Romanian policy throughout the decades. But we have to keep in mind the other developments that had taken place in this period that had a negative impact on the Hungarian community. During the late 1940s and the early 1950s there had been a purge conducted by the government in the ranks of the HPL, as well as among Hungarian intellectuals and educators. It was in this period that numerous community leaders were imprisoned, among them Edgar Balogh, Márton Áron, Kurkó Gyárfás, József Meliusz, Ede Korparics, Lajos Csőgör, Lajos Jordáky and János Demeter. This was the beginning of the abolition of the independent Hungarian economic institutions and the disruption of the Hungarian co-operatives. The forced Romanization of Transylvania's Hungarian cities also accelerated. The edict of 9 May, 1947, restricted the right of Transylvania's inhabitants to change the place of their habitation, a restriction was abolished only in 1989 with the fall of the Ceauşescu regime. Communication with Hungary was made more and more difficult. For travel abroad special permits became compulsory and the number of border-crossing points was drastically reduced.

These measures had a very negative impact on Hungarians. To be fair, however, it is important to note that the developments of the 1950s afflicted all inhabitants of Romania regardless of nationality. The nationalization of private enterprises, the arbitrary arrests, the fear of imprisonment did impact every citizen of the country. For Hungarians however, these losses came on

top of those suffered between the two world wars, and the new hardships had more serious consequences.

The establishment of the Maros Hungarian Autonomous Area can be deemed to have been a continuation of the Groza government's policy of pretending accommodation with the country's minorities. The events of the 1980s suggest that this indeed had also been an empty gesture. In fact, it can be argued that this development had a negative effect on Transylvania's Hungarian community. First of all, it coincided with what might be called the "decapitation" of the region's Hungarian intelligentsia. No Magyar intellectual critical of the regime was safe from imprisonment, whether he or she was a liberal, a social-democrat or a communist. The establishment of the "autonomous region" gave the government an excuse to abolish the HPL. The regime argued that where such "enlightened concessions" had been made to the minorities, there was no need for an organization to speak on their behalf.

The creation of the "autonomous region" also served as the starting point of the isolation or ghettoization of Transylvania's Székely region. The region's existence gave an excuse to Romanian authorities to transfer here certain educational institutions from such cities as Kolozsvár (Cluj) thereby reducing the chances of Hungarian culture maintenance in those mainly mixed-population cities. Certain rights that the Hungarian minority had enjoyed (such as the right to bilingual traffic signs, and the right to public services in Magyar) outside of the region were also abandoned with the excuse that these rights or services existed in the autonomous region. These losses were not counterbalanced by any advantages, since as far as administrative self-government was concerned, the autonomous region had no more autonomy than any other local jurisdiction in the country.

The 1956 anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary was deemed an extremely dangerous development by Romania's authorities. The political thaw that preceded the revolution had certain reverberations in Transylvania especially among the Hungarian intellectuals who hoped that a similar thaw might come to Romania. The authorities in Bucharest took steps to intimidate the openly defiant intelligentsia of Kolozsvár (Cluj). The large party delegation that appeared in the city in August, found such a defiant atmosphere that it felt best to offer some concessions, including the launching of two new Hungarian papers the *Korunk* (Our Age) and *Napsugár* (the Sun's Ray).

The suppression of the revolution in Hungary was followed by reprisals against Hungarians in Rumania as well. No exact statistics exist regarding the proportions of the retributions, but anecdotal evidence suggests that thousands and even perhaps tens of thousands were persecuted. Taking advantage of the anti-Hungarian sentiments in the communist party and the

country, the authorities abolished many of the Hungarians' existing rights. In the country's communist party the new view was that the previous "lenient" policies toward the Hungarian minority had been mistaken and the toleration of Hungarian schools had been a mistake.

In the 1960s the processes of de-Stalinization and economic decentralization became more marked in some of Eastern Europe's Soviet satellites. Romania's Hungarian intelligentsia kept hoping that the same might happen in their country too. In particular, they expected the government of Nicolae Ceauşescu, which had just replaced that of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, to embrace the idea of de-Stalinization and abandon the ultra-nationalistic minority policies of its predecessor. Ceauşescu's first pronouncements quickly dashed these expectations. The new leader promised change and a new ideology but his statements offered no ground for hope on the part of Romania's minorities. Indeed it was under the new leader that the concept of the socialist national state became prevalent. Already in these early speeches Ceauşescu proclaimed that the problem of the minorities in Romania had been solved implying that the process of the Romanization of Romania's nationalities had been completed.

Of course in Bucharest the "project" of the assimilation of the nationalities was not considered completed. In the records of the Communist Party of Romania the idea of the "homogenization" of the country's population crops up repeatedly. In this process there were only temporary, tactical retreats in the process, the ultimate goal remained the same.

In the increasingly dictatorial times of the 1980s, Ceauşescu, who now called himself Romania's "Conducator", didn't even make any tactical retreats any more. Under him began a campaign of hate mongering against Hungarians.[19] This came on top of increasing economic disorder and a worsening of food distribution in the country. In the media, the crisis was blamed on the Hungarians. Soon they became seen as a threat to Romania's unity. These accusations allowed the problem of the minorities to become a problem for the country's security and police agencies, in particular for the much-feared Securitate.

The prime target of the new anti-Hungarian campaign became the minority schools. This was the time that the process of the "relocation" of Hungarian intellectuals. Hungarian educators (as well as members of the professions) were assigned jobs in non-Hungarian communities outside of Transylvania, while Rumanians were offered positions in Hungarian communities. These measures resulted in the dramatic decline of Hungarian-language education and the complete eradication of Hungarian secondary schools — and, within secondary schools, of courses offered in Hungarian. In

certain parts of Transylvania, such as Mezőség and the Bánát, by the mid-1980s all Hungarian secondary schools had been closed. In the predominantly Magyar-speaking counties of Hargita (Harghita) and Kovászna (Covasna), students found it nearly impossible to get a secondary education in Hungarian. What courses remained offered in Hungarian were often assigned Rumanian-speaking teachers making minority-language instruction impossible.

During the second half of the 1980s Bucharest became more an more intolerant in its dealings with the Hungarian intelligentsia. After all, a minority deprived of its educated leaders became much weaker and could offer far less resistance to the authorities. All this was done under the direction of the communist party leadership in Bucharest. The number of Hungarian students allowed to proceed to Romania's colleges and universities was increasingly curtailed. At the same time, many of Transylvania's Hungarian intellectuals were offered exit-visas and were blatantly admonished to emigrate to Hungary.[20]

As a symbolic part of these processes, the name of the National Council of Hungarian Workers (Magyar Dolgozók Országos Tanácsa) was changed to the Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality (Magyar Nemzetiségü Dolgozók Tanácsa).

To the planned elimination of the Hungarian presence and future in Transylvania came the diabolical plan for the destruction of the Hungarian past. The government talked of the need for agricultural reform, of the need for an increase in the acreage cultivated, about industrialization and the systematization of settlements, but the actual aim was the destruction of non-Romanian villages, all in the name of progress. Members of minorities moved out of their villages, settled among people of other ethnicities in the newly-established, large agro-settlements, would have had no chance of hanging on to their ancestral cultures. With the elimination of the traditional village network came the abandonment of cemeteries and the destruction of monuments reminding people of their ancestral culture. Romania's "Conducator" could not complete the last of his plans for the total Romanization of Romania. It was not international protest against his ideas that stopped him but the revolutionary process that began in East Central Europe in 1989. It spread to Bucharest and swept Ceauşescu from power.

Conclusions

In summing up the fate of Romania's Hungarians in the twentieth century, let me make a few observations with the unavoidable bias of my own experi-

ences. Transylvania used to be the most beautiful and brightest pearl of the Hungarian Crown. This phrase does not simply represent the great power pretensions of some Hungary's past governments as Transylvania has a special place in the hearts of Hungarians even today. One explanation is the fact that, during the times of the Ottoman occupation of much of Hungary, Transylvania was basically independent and assumed the role of the guardian of Hungarian culture and even of the concept of a continuing Hungarian state. We should also keep in mind that many of Hungary's leading intellectuals, scientists and politicians hailed from Transylvania. Many elements and components of Hungarian culture, in particular of literature, are also of Transylvanian origin.

What is the situation today? The Hungarian factor in Transylvania has for all intents and purposes been restricted to the land of the Székelys. The Hungarian word is rarely heard in such cities as Nagyszeben (Sibiu), Déva (Deva), Segesvár (Sigishoara) and Brassó (Braşov). At the same time places such as Nagyvárad (Oradea), Bánffyhunyad (Huedin) and Beszterce (Bistriţa) have also become romanized. The vast number of monuments commemorating the Hungarian reformation, the last battered towers of the depopulated villages of the Szilágyság and Mezőség in the Transylvanian Basin, are only dilapidated ruins.

The Hungarian community in Transylvania had suffered great losses in the last decades of the twentieth century. Apart from the attacks on the intelligentsia and the mass emigration, one sore spot is the fact that the generations Hungarians who had grown up in Transylvania's Romanian age, keep getting closer and closer in mentality to that prevailing in Bucharest since — being Romanian citizens — this is the only way for them to become equal partners — or adversaries — of the members of the country's majority.

Is this really the destiny of Transylvania's Hungarians? Despite the sad facts, we may safely state that it is not. The Hungarian community of nearly two million will stay a mass that is too big to assimilate, even if the potential partners in minority existence, such as the Germans and the Jews have virtually disappeared from the nationality map of Romania. The events in December, 1989 opened up new opportunities for Transylvania's Hungarians, despite their contradictions. The restoration of private property offers the prospect of the Hungarian Churches regaining at least some of the assets they had owned during the interwar years. The re-establishment of the cultural, academic and communal institutions of the pre-communist era has also started. Contacts with Hungary have also improved. Many predominantly Hungarian-speaking villages have been paired with communities in Hungary which has helped them culturally and even in the realm of economics.

The prospects of Transylvania's minorities are further improved by the fact that international public opinion nowadays has a greater influence on policy-making in Romania. In Bucharest there is an increased understanding that continued good relations with the members of the European union is predicated on Romania's acceptance of European norms and values. Nevertheless, a marked decline of strident nationalism in the country, and a rapprochement between Hungary and Romania on the pattern of Franco-German friendship in recent times, is still far in the future.

In the struggle of Transylvania's Hungarian minority for cultural survival, Hungary once again can play a role. Alas, the much desired cooperation between Budapest and Bucharest is still plagued by old suspicions and attitudes. In dealing with the Romania however, Hungary might be able to use her somewhat greater economic prosperity and closer links to Europe to her — and the Hungarian minority's — advantage.

NOTES

Since this paper was written primarily for Hungarian audiences it uses Hungarian place names. Their closest Romanian equivalents, where such exist, are given in parentheses. County names are often only approximate as county boundaries have changed a few times since 1919. In accordance with general usage nowadays, the term "Transylvania" in this paper refers to the area of the historic Kingdom of Hungary annexed to Romania after World War I. An earlier version of this study was read at the conference "Hungary Through the Centuries: A Millennial Retrospection" held at the University of Toronto in September of 2000.

[1] András Rónai, *Erdély népességi viszonyai* [Population circumstances of Transylvania], based on the 1910 census of the lands of the Hungarian Holy Crown (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1920).

[2] István Sulyok and László Fritz, eds., *Erdélyi magyar évkönyv, 1918-1929* [Hungarian Annual Review of Transylvania, 1918-1929] (Kolozsvár, 1930).

[3] Alajos Kovács, "Erdély népmozgalma vallásfelekezetek szerint az 1921-27. években" [Population Migrations in Transylvania According to Religious Affiliation in 1921-27], *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle* 7, 11 (1929).

[4] On December 1, 1918, delegates of the Rumanians of Transylvania, the Bánát and Hungary, gathered at Gyulafehérvár (Alba Julia) and proclaimed the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Rumania. On December 24 this union was put into effect by a royal proclamation issued by King Ferdinand of Rumania, signifying the birth of Greater Rumania.

[5] Lajos Nagy, *A kisebbségek alkotmányjogi helyzete Nagyomániában* [The legal situation of the minorities in Greater Romania according to the constitution] (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Tudományos Intézet, 1944), 78.

[6] In the period from 30 October 1918 to 30 June 1924 alone, the number of Hungarians who left the country approached 200,000. Sulyok and Fritz, *Erdélyi magyar évkönyv*, p. 2.

[7] Nagy, *op. cit*., p. 166.

[8] Table no. 28, "A magyar egyházak földbirtok vagyona..." [The land-holding of Hungarian Churches...] in *A román agrárreform és az erdélyi magyar egyházak* [Rumania's Agrarian Reform and the Hungarian Churches] ed. Zoltán Darkó, vol. 1 (Nagyvárad, 1927), p. 912.

[9] Sulyok and Fritz, *op. cit.,* p. 7.

[10] Árpád Kiss, "Az állami magyar tannyelvű elemi iskolák és a magyar tagozatok" [The Hungarian-Language State Elementary Schools and School Divisions], *Magyar kisebbség* (1936): 205.

[11] Nagy, p. 140.

[12] Artur Balogh, *A kisebbségek nemzetközi védelme* [The International Protection of Minorities] (Berlin, 1928), 159.

[13] Kiss, *op. cit.*

[14] Official enrolment decreased from 75,037 to 57,473 in the matter of a few years.

[15] "...being a religion of the overwhelming majority of Romanians, the Orthodoz Church if the ruling church in the state of Romania; the Greek Catholic Church is preferred to other confessions." Nagy, p. 229. See also the text of the Constitution, paragraph 19.

[16] Imre Mikó, *Huszonkét év. Az erdélyi magyarság története 1918 december 1-jétöl 1940 augusztus 30-ig* [Twenty-two years. The history of the Hungarians of Transylvania from 1 Dec. 1918 to 30 Aug. 1940] (Budapest: Studium, 1941), 77-78.

[17] As a condition of this agreement the Bonn government paid Bucharest a large sum for every German who was allowed to emigrate to West Germany.

[18] [Editor's note:] For a report on the Csángós in the popular media see Frank Viviano, "In the Shadow of Attila," *National Geographic* (June 2005): 67-83; http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0506/gights_n_sounds/index.html1

[19] [Editor's note:] On this subject see Moses M. Nagy, "Emile M. Cioran Looks at Rumanians and Hungarians: Characterization or Caricature?" *Hungarian Studies Review,* 19, (1992): 69-75.

[20] Among them Zoltán Kallós, a researcher of folk-music.