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“Entangled Histories:” Re-thinking the History of Central and Southeastern Europe from a Relational Perspective*

The collapse of the communist system in Central and Southeastern Europe has inaugurated sweeping economic and socio-political changes, marked by the conversion of state-economies into market economies, political liberalization and democratization, and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic security and political organizations. These changes have also affected the pattern of inter-state relations in these regions. Due to the strengthening of their political collaboration, countries in Central and Southeastern Europe are today linked by a dense network of inter-governmental agreements, which have worked for changing the nature of inter-state relations, by fostering co-operation rather than conflict.

An important part of the process of political transformation has been the recuperation of the historical memory, especially of those aspects censored under the communist regimes. This recuperation has taken place in the name of the “national identity” that had been suppressed for decades by the military and political hegemony of the Soviet Union. Starting in late 1980’s, one can identify a rising tide of a “new nationalism” in Central and Southeastern Europe, stimulated by novel factors such as: “demographic changes,” “the media revolution,” “the bankruptcy of supra-national authority,” and

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the “environmental threat.”¹ The process of national “revival” culminated during the 1989 revolutions, which were as much national as they were political. The upsurge of 1989 was seen by many scholars “as the victory of national identity against Marxism,”² “the finest hour of East European nationalism,”³ or the “Springtime of Nations.”⁴ At official level, the tendency of returning to the “national history” has been expressed by the restoration of traditional state symbols and monuments of national heroes, the establishment of new national holidays, rituals of remembrance and commemoration, and the re-writing of history textbooks.

As a result of this twofold development, one can identify an underlying tension between the “re-nationalization” of history in Central and Southeast Europe and the process of European integration. As Mary Fulbrook pertinently points out, the process of European integration calls for “the development of more adequate historical perspectives.”⁵ At the same time, the nation-state perspective continues to frame historical studies. This contradiction raises the challenging methodological question: Does “European history, far from being the sum of individual national histories, in fact constitute an alternative framework within which different kind of constituent parts may be identified and interpreted?”⁶

This article argues for the need to re-conceptualize the history of Central and Southeastern Europe by employing a relational and transnational approach, as part of a more general effort to re-write continental history from an integrated perspective. Central and Southeastern Europe countries share a common historical past that goes far back in time to enduring medieval and early modern imperial legacies, such as the Byzantine, the Hungarian, the Habsburg, and the Ottoman. After 1945, they experienced similar strategies of communist modernization, and a forceful integration into a common mili-

1 See Raymond Pearson: *The Making of '89: Nationalism and the Dissolution of Communist Eastern Europe*. *Nations and Nationalism*, Nr. 1, 1995. 69-79, here 69-70.

2 Anthony Smith: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

3 Misha Glenny: *The Rebirth of History: Eastern Europe in the Age of Democracy*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 294.

4 Zbigniew Brzezinski: Post Communist Nationalism. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 68, Nr. 5, Winter, 1989-1990. 2-3. For the link between ethnicity, nationhood and the 1989 socio-political change in the former Communist block, see also George Schöpflin: The Politics of Nationhood. *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 6, Nr. 2, 1996. 219-231.

5 Mary Fulbrook: Introduction: States, nations, and the development of Europe. In Mary Fulbrook (ed.): *National Histories and European History*. London: UCL Press, 1993. 3.

6 Fulbrook, Introduction In *National histories*, 3. For similar challenges in social sciences disciplines, see Peter Wagner et al. (ed.): *Social Sciences and Modern States: National Experiences and Theoretical Crossroads*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

tary and economic block. Post-communist countries in these regions are now facing similar socio-political challenges. Despite these similarities, historians in the regions seem “absorbed” by their own national histories, and have relatively limited knowledge of—or openness toward—the historical experience of their neighbors. The process of regional integration and the European Union’s Eastern enlargement calls for an incorporation of the Central and Southeast European Studies into the framework of European studies (thus breaking with the tradition of *Russian and East European Studies*, which is a legacy of the bipolar Cold War division of Europe). Historians in Central and Southeastern Europe are now challenged to place a greater emphasis on the “shared” and “entangled” history of the peoples in these regions, to assess international influences and transfers, and to account for the process of European integration and its impact on the development of their regions.⁷ They need to transcend the prevailing narrow national-based historiographic perspective and to redirect their research focus toward new areas of inquiry, such as physical and geographical mobility, transnational circulation of ideas, migration and the environment.

A recent theoretical and methodological tool for approaching regional history is provided by the paradigm of *histoire croisée*, which—although stemming from the tradition of comparative history—attempts to critically re-evaluate it and to shift the analytical emphasis on multiple levels of connectedness, examined through interdisciplinary lenses. While sharing numerous common features with other paradigms of relational history such as “shared” or “connected history,”⁸ *histoire croisée* also urges researchers to take into account their own ideological position and involvement in the process of knowledge, and to reflect on the plurality of viewpoints, differences of languages, terminologies, categorizations, conceptualizations.⁹ Although having at its core the French and German scholarship and historical experi-

⁷ On the new potential agenda of the transnational history, see Michael McGerr: The Price of the ‘New Transnational History’. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, Nr. 4, October, 1991. 1062–1063.

⁸ See Robert W. Strayer (ed.): *The Making of the Modern World. Connected Histories, Divergent Paths. 1500 to the Present*. New York: St. Martin Press, 1989; Sebastian Conrad, Shalini, Frandria (eds.): *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Frankfurt: Campus, 2002.

⁹ For the theoretical framework of *histoire croisée*, see Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann: Penser l’histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité. In Michael Werner – Bénédicte Zimmermann (eds.): *De la comparaison à l’histoire croisée*. Paris: Seuil, 2004. 15–52, here 16. See also Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann: Penser l’histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité. *Annales*, Vol. 58, Nr. 1, 2003. 7–36.

ences,¹⁰ the new “*paradigm de croisement*” also tries to bridge different historiographic traditions and to offer a “universally-valid” model of analysis, mediating between comparatists and historians studying the question of “transfers.”¹¹

In order to underscore the importance of relational approaches to the regional history of Central and Southeastern Europe, the current article explores recent historiographic debates pertaining to the overlapping history of Romania and Hungary. The article comprises three main parts. The first part exemplifies the arduous and protracted process of reforming history writing in Central and Southeastern Europe with the case of historiography in Romania. Special attention is paid to the recent public debates on alternative history textbooks. Part two looks at the intrinsic interdependence between the writing of history and the process of regional political reconciliation, by using the case study of the Romanian–Hungarian relations. The conclusions evaluate the potential impact the incorporation of the historical experience of Central and Southeastern Europe on building a new integrated perspective on European history.

Romanian Historiography: Legacy, Prospects, and Challenges

The evolution of the Romanian historiography is a relevant example of the challenges faced by historians in the post-communist Central and Southeastern Europe.¹² Historiography has a long and well-established tradition in

¹⁰ See the first application of the new method of *histoire croisée* in Bénédicte Zimmermann, Claude Didry, Michael Werner: *Histoire croisée de la France et de l'Allemagne*. Paris: Éd. de la MSH, 1999.

¹¹ For the history of “transfers” see mainly Johannes Paulmann: *Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts*. *Historische Zeitschrift*, Nr. 3, 1998. 649–685; Hartmut Kaelbe: *Der historische Vergleich. Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt: Campus, 1999.

¹² For general works on the history of Romanian historiography, see Pompiliu Teodor: *Die Entwicklung des historischen Denkens in der rumänischen Geschichtsschreibung*. Translated by Franz Killyen. Cluj: Dacia, 1972; and Frederick Kellogg: *A History of Romanian Historical Writing*. Bakersfield, Calif: Charles Slaches Jr., 1990. For general overviews of the post-1989 state of Romanian historiography, see Alexandru Zub: *Discurs istoric și tranziție* [Historical Discourse and Transition] Iași: Institutul European, 1998; Dennis Deletant: *Rewriting the Past: Trends in Contemporary Romanian Historiography*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 14, Nr. 1, 1991. 64–86; Keith Hitchins: *Historiography of the countries of Eastern Europe: Romania*. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, Nr. 4, 1992. 1064–1083; Catherine Durandin: *Roumanie, retour à l'histoire et revisions. Relations Internationales*, Vol. 67, 1991. 295–298; Paul E. Michelson: *Reshaping Romanian Historiography: Some Actonian Perspectives*. *Romanian Civilization*, Nr. 1, 1994. 3–23; Andrei Pippidi: *Une histoire en reconstruction*. In Antoine Marès (ed.): *Histoire et pouvoir en Europe médiane*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 1996. 239–262; Bogdan Murgescu: *A fi Istoric în anul 2000*. București: All Educational, 2000; Constantin

modern Romanian culture. We can identify several stages in its pre-1945 development, from the pre-Romantic school embodied mostly by Mihail Kogălniceanu and Nicolae Bălcescu, the Romantic school of A. Tocilescu, V.A. Urechia, and A. D. Xenopol, the "critical school" at the turn of the century personified by Nicolae Iorga and Dimitrie Onciul, and the "New Historical School" of the interwar period represented by prominent historians such as Constantin C. Giurescu and Gheorghe Brătianu. These schools greatly differed in the theoretical models they emulated and the historical methodology they utilized, but shared the main tenants of Romantic historiography, marked in the Romanian context by an ethnocentrist vision of national history stressing the ideas of nationality and fatherland, and the *risorgimento* ideal striving for the political unity of all ethnic Romanians living in various historical provinces.¹³

By and large, under Communism, Romanian historiography followed the dynamics of the complex relationship between the communism ideology and nationalism.¹⁴ The first period of Communist rule (1948–1958) was characterized by the destruction of the "bourgeois nationalist" legacy and the diminution of Romania's national sovereignty under a virtual Soviet occupation.¹⁵ The process is described by Kennet Jowitt as a "breakthrough," "the decisive alternation or destruction of values, structures, and behaviors which

Iordachi: Social History in Romanian Historiography: Legacy, Prospects, and Challenges. *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, Nr. 1, 2003. 233–248; Constantin Iordachi – Trencsényi Balázs: A megújulás esélyei: a román történetírás tíz éve (1989–1999) [Chances of Renewal: History Writing in Romania, 1989–1999] *Replika*, Nr. 40–41, November, 2000. 165–194; Constantin Iordachi – Trencsényi Balázs: In Search of a Usable Past: The Question of National Identity in Romanian Studies, 1990–2000. *East European Politics and Society*, Vol. 17, Nr. 3, Summer, 2003. 415–454.

¹³ On the continuities and discontinuities between the Romantic school of Tocilescu, Urechia, Xenopol, and the "critical school" at the turn of the century see Lucian Nastașă: *Generație și schimbare în istoriografia română – Sfârșitul secolului XIX și începutul secolului XX*. [Generation and Change in Romanian Historiography. The end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century] Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujană, 1999.

¹⁴ For the historiographical policies of the Romanian Communist Party, see Vlad Georgescu: *Politică și istorie. Cazul comuniștilor români, 1944–1977* [Politics and History: The Case of Romanian Communists]. München: Jon Dumitru Verlag, 1983. Second Edition: București: Humanitas, 1991; and Șerban Papacostea: *Captive Clio: Romanian Historiography Under Communist Rule*. *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 26, 1996. 181–209. For the most comprehensive treatment of Romanian historiography under communism, see Lucian Boia: *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*. București: Humanitas, 1997. Translated into English as *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*. Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2001.

¹⁵ Stephen Fischer-Galați: *The New Rumania. From People's Democracy to Socialist Republic*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969.

are perceived by a new elite as compromising or contributing to the actual or potential existence of alternative centers of power”,¹⁶ and by Michael Shafir as a “primitive accumulation of legitimacy.”¹⁷

In its attempt to establish and consolidate its control over society, the Romanian communist regime led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1948–1965) alternated periods of harsh repression (1948–1953 and 1958–1961) with period of economic growth and political relaxation (1954–1957 and 1961–1965). During the first period of repression (1948–1953), Communist elites championed proletarian internationalism, and purged the previous “bourgeois-nationalist” historiographical schools, irrespective of the sharp theoretical and political divisions among them. The transformation of history research in this first period of Communist take-over was coordinated by Mihail Roller, a vice-president of the Academy, also responsible for history research within the ideological section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party. Roller initiated and edited the first Marxist synthesis on the history of Romania, a secondary school textbook entitled *Istoria României: manual unic pentru clasa a VIII-a secundară*, first published in 1947.¹⁸ The textbook was instrumental in disseminating a new officially-endorsed vision of history.

The timid de-Stalinization that took place in mid-1950s was accompanied by a gradual relaxation of the political control over culture, and most of the surviving prominent pre-1945 historians could return to institutional positions. In addition, the growing tendency of cultural and political autarchy of the regime generated an innovative synthesis between Marxist ideology and the nationalist tradition of interwar historiography. This was best embodied by the work of Andrei I. Oțetea, a historian from Iași who gained his Ph.D. in Paris (1926). As the director of the Institute of History in the 1960’s, Oțetea supported a moderate nationalism turn of the Romanian historiography, but he also stimulated the study of socio-economic history, especially in the early modern period.¹⁹

¹⁶ Kenneth Jowitt: *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania, 1944–1965*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971. 7.

¹⁷ Michael Shafir: *Romania, Politics, Economy and Society*. Boulder Co: Rymme Rienner, 1985. 56.

¹⁸ Mihail Roller, coordinator: Gheorghe I. Georgescu, Dumitru Tudor, and Vasile Maciu, *Istoria României: manual unic pentru clasa a VIII-a secundară* [History of Romania. Unique Textbook for the VIIIth Grade] București: Editura de Stat, 1947. Republished as *Ministerul Învățământului Public. Istoria R. P. R. – manual pentru învățământul mediu* [The Ministry of the Public Education. History of the Romanian Popular Republic: Textbook for Gymnasium] București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1952.

¹⁹ See Petre Constantinescu-Iași, Andrei Oțetea, Emil Condurachi, Constantin Daicoviciu, et al.: *Istoria României*. (4 Parts). București: Editura Academiei R. P. Române, 1960–1964; Andrei

The deviation from the Soviet foreign policy that took place in the period 1958–1964 is generally regarded as the turning point in the development of the Romanian Communist regime. The outbreak of the diplomatic conflict with the Soviet Union had deep internal and external consequences. During the conflict, Romanian leaders de-emphasized Marxism in favor of a policy of national modernization, focusing on the creation of industry, especially heavy industry that allowed economic autarchy and a maximal central control over resources.²⁰ This policy led to the establishment of a *national-communist* regime, based on three main sources: the redefinition of the relationship between local Romanian elites and Moscow; the pursuing of an independent program of industrial development in view of the "national interest;" and a return to certain elements of the Romanian nationalist tradition of the interwar period.²¹

The policy of political separation from the URSS was continued and even amplified during the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965–1989). Domestically, the Romanian Communist regime underwent considerable changes under Ceaușescu's long rule. The first years witnessed a relative political liberalization, coupled with a rapid economic development. This liberal tendency persuaded numerous members of the intelligentsia who were educated in the cultural tradition of the interwar period to participate to a program of "restoring" the national culture and re-linking it with a "Western" system of references. As a result, important cultural figures reappeared on the cultural scene, while numerous emblematic historical works of the 1930s were republished.

At the beginning of the '70s, the Romanian communist regime was at a crossroads of two main options: continued modernization and liberalization, or an increasing political control over society. The solutions chose by the Romanian leader was to foster a cultural revolution following the Chinese model (1971), which resulted, into a total control of the Romanian Communist Party over intellectual life. Politically, the regime moved to an in-

Oțetea: *Istoria poporului român*. București: Editura Științifică, 1970; Andrei Oțetea (ed.): Ion Popescu-Puțuri, Ion Nestor, et al.: *The History of the Romanian People*. New York: Twayne Publisher, 1974.

²⁰ On this aspect, see mainly Katherine Verdery: *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, especially Chapter Two.

²¹ See Stelian Tănase: *Elite și societate. Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, 1948–1965*. București: Humanitas, 1998; see also Stelian Tănase: *Anatomia mistificării: 1944–1989*. București: Humanitas, 1997.

creasingly personalized power, while the cult of Ceaușescu's leadership reached unprecedented heights.²² The conservative attitude of the Romanian communist regime radicalized in the 1980's, when Romania experienced a generalized economic and socio-political crisis. The main characteristics of the nationalist-communist propaganda in the '80s were xenophobia, autarchy, isolationism, anti-Occidentalism, anti-intellectualism and protochronism.²³ In this way, as the political scientist Michael Shafir pointed out, "discontent and political dissent, instead of being channeled into the system, as inputs, were successfully deflected by the leadership towards external (Soviet and Hungarian) targets as outputs."²⁴ In order to explain this peculiar evolution of the Romanian communist regime in its last decade, Vladimir Tismăneanu coined the concept of "national Stalinism," a term that refers to regimes that instrumentalize a nationalist ideological framework, while opposing any significant political change.²⁵

History played a crucial role in the nationalist cultural offensive of the '80s.²⁶ The regime sponsored a huge production of officially inspired historical works, strengthened its control of all research and educational institutions, and used prominent historians to express its political view on various internal and external events, since the rules of the game in the socialist camp did not allow for open diplomatic conflicts among socialist countries. Moreover, the official propaganda of the regime recuperated and abused traditional themes of the Romanian historiography, such as the continuity of the Romanian people in the same territory, the emphasis on "autochthonous traditions" and ethno-centrist myths.²⁷

Romanian historiography under Communism was certainly not entirely monolithic. Among the few and largely isolated attempts to incorporate the Western theoretical and methodological gains, we can mention the studies on historiography authored by Alexandru Zub at the Institute of History and Ar-

²² For a comprehensive presentation of the cult of personality under Ceaușescu's Romania, see Anneli Ute Gabanyi: *The Ceaușescu Cult*. București: The Romanian Cultural Foundation, 2000.

²³ Vladimir Tismăneanu – Dan Pavel: Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries: The Generation of Angst and Adventure Revised. *East European Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, Nr. 3, 1994. 404. For the most authoritative analysis of protochronism, see Katherine Verdery: *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 167–214.

²⁴ Shafir, *Romania*, 51.

²⁵ Vladimir Tismăneanu: *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej*. București: Univers, 1995. 77.

²⁶ For a seminar analysis of cultural politics under the Ceaușescu regime, with a special focus on historiography, see Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*

²⁷ Tismăneanu – Pavel: Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries, 404.

cheology "A. D. Xenopol" in Iași, the research on the history of mentalities stimulated by Alexandru Duțu at the Institute of South-East European Studies in Bucharest, the studies on the history of the imaginary conducted by Lucian Boia at the University of Bucharest, or the work on social and intellectual history conducted by Pompiliu Teodor at the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj.²⁸ By and large, however, the historiographical discourse in the public sphere was monopolized by the official propaganda, historians who did not join the nationalist camp being marginalized as eccentric figures.

The political change that occurred in December 1989 liberalized the historical discourse and opened the door to competing ideological visions of Romanian history. In spite of the optimistic expectations, however, the fall of the Communist regime pushed Romanian historiography into the gray zone of "post-totalitarian spasms."²⁹ With the demise of Marxism as a dominant ideological model, Romanian historiography lacked authoritative theoretical and methodological paradigms. There were no alternative historical schools or dissident canons available. After decades of theoretical isolation and brutal political interference, and without available models at hand, Romanian historiography turned yet again towards its own pre-Marxist traditions, such as the "critical school" of the turn of the century, or the "new historical school" of the interwar period. The uncritical reliance on tradition reproduced numerous traditional drawbacks of history-writing in Romania, such as the absence of deep theoretical debates and of interdisciplinary dialogue, a primordialist perception of ethnicity, and a close relationship between historiography and the political power.

In this context, national ideology continued to serve as a "block culture" for historiographic production. Unlike the previous period, after 1989 the hegemonic discourse over national identity broke into a multitude of divergent and even contradictory narratives, ranging from "ethno-cultural" to "civic nationalist" and liberal perspectives. The institutional infrastructure of historical research has also undergone a profound transformation. New research institutes and journals have been established, with the aim of promoting a higher professional standard. It is undeniable that the writing and teaching of history in post-communist Romania has undergone considerable progress in the last

²⁸ See Alexandru Zub: *Mihail Kogălniceanu. Biobibliografie*. București: Editura Enciclopedică Română, Editura militară, 1971; Alexandru Dutu, especially his *Literatura comparată și istoria mentalităților* [Comparative literature and the history of mentalities] București: Univers, 1981; and Lucian Boia: *Jocul cu trecutul: istoria între adevăr și ficțiune*. București: Humanitas, 1998.

²⁹ Catherine Durandin, Roumanie, retour à l'histoire et révisions, 295.

decade and a half, mostly in university centers and non-governmental research institutes. Overall, the body of practitioners has become nevertheless very heterogeneous, with dissidents, former collaborators, and an emerging post-1989 generation of historians competing to carve out a space in the public sphere for their respective discourses.

As a result, after more than a decade of liberty, Romanian historiography remains a heterogeneous combination of several “strata”: a significant proportion of the professional body is still rooted in national romanticism; a dominant corpus of historians adhere to the precepts of the “critical school” existing at the turn of the century; a minority of circa 10%, work in the spirit of the French *Annales* school; and several isolated figures are trying to be open to the historiographical evolution of the post-*Annales* period.³⁰ Overall, the image of the Romanian historiography depicted by most Romanian scholars is that of a still dominant nationalist “canon” facing a sustained attack by an alternative liberal discourse.³¹ Although it managed to win significant “battles,” the “reformist” camp is far from being able to dominate the public discourse. Reinforced by the acute polarization of the political life, the institutional confrontation between the nationalist canon and reforming historians has been quite harsh, giving only recent signs of accommodation.

*Reforming the Post-Communist Historiography:
The Debate over Alternative History Textbooks*

An important *barometer* of the political problems involved in reforming the post-communist Romanian historiography was the tense public debate over alternative history textbooks that took place in October–November 1999. After decades of central monopoly, on 24 July 1998 the Ministry of National Education (MNE) decided to finally liberalize the textbook market, by allowing secondary schools to choose freely among officially-approved alternative history textbooks.³² The aim of the reform was to upgrade the Romanian educational system to the European standard, by applying the Council of Europe’s Recommendation 1283.³³

³⁰ Murgescu, *A fi Istoric în anul 2000*, 46.

³¹ Antohi, Sorin: Ieșirea din metatext: istorie și teorie în România postcomunistă. [Going out of the Metatext: History and Theory in Post-Communist Romania] *Sfêra Politicii*, Nr. 39, 1996. 19.

³² For an overview of the main features of the Romanian national curricula before and shortly after the 1989 revolution, see Robert D. Reisz: Curricular Patterns before and after the Romanian Revolution. *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 29, Nr. 3, 1994. 281–291.

³³ The Recommendation asserted that “the subject matter of history teaching should be very open. It should include all aspects of societies (social and cultural history as well as

This significant reform was followed by an open competition for the writing of new history textbooks on the basis of a revised national curriculum put forward by the MNE. At the end of this process, five different history textbooks offered by working teams located in various university centers in Romania reached the approval of the MNE and were published for being used starting in the 1999/2000 academic year.

Among the five new history textbooks for the twelfth grade, the one written by a group of young historians from the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj captured the attention of the media for many weeks.³⁴ In line with the recommendation of the MNE, the textbook stated the vital need to rethink Romanian history from a European relational perspective. In an introduction, suggestively entitled "The Romanians and Europe," the authors stated unequivocally "The history of the Romanians cannot be severed from that of Europe," since it encompasses, in a nutshell, "all the fundamental elements of the European civilization."³⁵ Once they emancipated themselves from the long domination of multinational empires, the Romanians opted firmly for synchronization with the European space and, today, for "integration into its structures."³⁶ Moreover, the authors pointed out that integration into Europe does not presuppose a renunciation of the country's national identity, since Europe "represents a unity in diversity," within which "each inhabitant of the continent who has a European identity, also has – at the same time – a national identity."³⁷

The authors also opted for a relational approach to history, by arguing that "there is no a separated history of the Romanians only, or of the Americans

political). The role of women should be given proper recognition. Local and national (but not nationalist) history should be taught as well as the history of minorities. Controversial, sensitive and tragic events should be balanced by positive mutual influences; the history of the whole of Europe, that of the main political and economic events, and the philosophical and cultural movements which have formed the European identity must be included in syllabuses." It also read that "Particular attention should be given to the problems in central and eastern Europe which has suffered from the manipulation of history up to recent times and continues in certain cases to be subject to political censorship." See the text of the "Recommendation 1283 of the Council of Europe on history and the learning of history in Europe" adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 22 January 1996, available at <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/ta96/crec1283.htm>, retrieved on 20 September 2003.

³⁴ Sorin Mitu (coord.), Virgil Țărau, Liviu Țărau, Ovidiu Pecican, Lucia Copoeru: *Istoria românilor. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a* [History of Romanians. Manual for the Twelfth Grade] București: Sigma, 1999.

³⁵ *Istoria românilor*, 5.

³⁶ *Istoria românilor*, 5.

³⁷ *Istoria românilor*, 5.

only, since close ties have always existed among all peoples and the fate of one cannot be understood without the fate of the others.³⁸ They also argued that, since “the history of Romanians is tightly linked to the history of ethnic minorities who are living together with them,” their shared history should be integrated under a common heading that of the *History of Romania*, instead of the *History of the Romanians* understood from an ethnic perspective.³⁹

The treatment of the national history put forward in the new textbook clashed with the conventional interpretation in the previous history textbooks on major points. In order to better understand their divergences, I briefly allude to the debates between the “primordialist” and the “modernist” or “instrumentalist” schools in the study of nationalism. Primordialists believe that nations are unitary and homogeneous entities, which have generally appeared in the early Middle Ages and whose features are given once and for ever. Modernists assert that nations are intellectual and socio-political constructions, forged by national movements in the early modern period, through mechanisms described as “the invention of tradition.”⁴⁰ More recently, various authors bridge the two perspectives, by highlighting the necessary ethnic prerequisites for constructing modern nations; they also point out the hybrid character of modern national identities and cultures.⁴¹

³⁸ *Istoria românilor*, 5.

³⁹ *Istoria românilor*, 5.

⁴⁰ The primordialist view is represented by such authors as Anthony Smith: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. The modernist view is represented by Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983; Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983; Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Eric Hobsbawm – Trevor Ranger (eds.): *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. For general overviews of theories of nationalism, see Umüt Özkirimli: *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000; Louis L. Snyder: *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*. Chicago: St. James Press, 1990; and Alexander J. Motyl, (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2000.

⁴¹ On the concept of hybridity and its relevance for understanding the composite nature of modern national identities and cultures, see Homi Bhabha: *DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation*. In Homi Bhabha (ed.): *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. 291–322. Bhabha points out that “[T]he nation, as a form of cultural elaboration (in the Gramscian sense), is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture as its most productive position.” See Homi Bhabha quoted in Anna Trindafyllidou: *Hybridity Theory of Nationalism (Homi Bhabha on Nationalism)*. In Louis L. Snyder (ed.): *The Encyclopedia of Nationalism*. Chicago: St. James Press, 1990. 131–134, here 132. On the concept of culture and its relation to nationalism, see Peter Burke, “Culture” in *History and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. 118–126; Ernest Gellner, “Definitions,” “The age of universal high culture,” and “What is a Nation?” in *Nations and Nationalism*, 1–7,

While the primordialist view has traditionally shaped the interpretation of history in Romania, the authors of the new textbook took a modernist stance and discussed the modern "invention" of the Romanian nation, mostly through the contribution of Greek-Catholic Transylvanian-Romanian intellectuals during the eighteenth century.⁴² On this basis, they offered an alternative view on the process of nation- and state-building in Romania. This process has been particularly complex. Greater Romania (1918–1940) was an aggregate of different historical provinces: the former Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (unified in 1859 to constitute the Old Kingdom of Romania), the former Ottoman province of Dobruđja (annexed in 1878), the former Russian province (1812–1918) of Bessarabia, the former Austrian province (1775–1918) of Bukovina, and territories that were part of the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, such as Transylvania, the Banat, Maramureş, and the Partium. As in other states in Central and Southeastern Europe, such as Greece and Serbia before World War I, or Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in the interwar period, the union of heterogeneous provinces occasioned an arduous process of elite bargaining, administrative unification, and a thrust for cultural homogenization. In order to defend the Romanians' legitimate right to independent statehood into a unified state, Romanian historians have generally written their work from the perspective of the nation-building center, and presupposed a historical teleology, which necessarily led to the creation of Greater Romania.⁴³ The new textbook deviated from this view. It devoted only limited attention to the fight for "political union" of Romanians from all historical provinces that constituted Greater Romania in 1918; instead, it focused on the regional history of various provinces.

The alternative view on the history of Romania proposed by the new textbook stirred an incendiary political debate. The textbook was denounced in the Romanian parliament as a threat to Romanian national identity. In the Senate, Sergiu Nicolaescu, a well-known Romanian film-director who

35–38, 53–62; and Eric Hobsbawm: "The Nation as Novelty: From Revolution to Liberalism" In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. 16–44.

⁴² For a relevant example, see the chapter "Ethno-genesis: How do Romanians *imagine* their origins", my emphasis.

⁴³ For a notable exception, see Irina Livezeanu: *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995; Cornell University Press, 2001, focusing on the process of cultural homogenization in Greater Romania, regarding mostly the expansion of the education system and the social and ideological roots of the fascist organization the Iron Guard.

played a central role in the ideological propaganda of the Ceaușescu regime, at the time an independent senator and a vice-president of the Committee of Culture, Arts and Mass Media, opened the attack. In a parliamentary intervention on 5 October 1999, Nicolaescu went as far as to propose that the new textbook “should be burned out in a public square.” The attack continued in the Chamber of Deputies, carried out by Petru Bejinariu, a deputy of the opposition Party of Social Democracy in Romania (starting in 2000 the ruling party under the name of the Romanian Social-Democratic Party). Their appeal triggered an immense public scandal which remained in the focus of the media for several weeks, by way of daily editorials in leading newspapers and cultural weeklies such as *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Cotidianul*, *Adevărul*, *Jurnalul Național*, *România Liberă*, *Revista “22”*, *Dilema*, and *România Literară*, talk-shows on popular TV channels, and contradictory public statements of politicians, state dignitaries, and historians. During the harsh public debates, nationalist politicians as „traitors of the nation” stigmatized reformist historians. Prominent journalists, conservative historians, and a strong segment of the public opinion joined their campaign.

Criticism of the textbook can be grouped into four categories, each employing a different version of the conspiracy theory. The first concerned the authors’ interpretation of the events that brought the collapse of the Communist regime in December 1989. The officially-endorsed version is that the regime was toppled by a spontaneous and unorganized popular revolt.⁴⁴ The National Salvation Front (NSF), a heterogeneous political body constituted during the revolutionary events, subsequently took power. In the following

⁴⁴ The Romanian revolution has remained an issue of deep controversy among scholars and politicians. For an attempt to reconstruct the events, see Nestor Ratches: *Romania: the Entangled Revolution*. New York: Praeger, 1991. For the arguments pro and against characterizing the 1989 popular uprising as a revolution or as a coup d’état, see Peter Siani-Davies: Romanian revolution or coup d’état? *Communist & Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 29, Nr. 4, 1996. 453–466. For arguments supporting a “theory of evolution” to explain the events, see Steven D. Roper: The Romanian revolution from a theoretical perspective. *Communist & Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 27, Nr. 4, 1994. 401–411. Finally, for the process of myth-making associated with the revolutionary events in political memoirs on the Romanian revolution, see Dennis Deletant’s review essay, “Myth-making and the Romanian revolution.” *Slavonic & East European Review*, Vol. 72, Nr. 3, 1994. 483–492. For the impact of the revolution on the Romanian politics and society, and a comparison with revolutionary changes in other East European countries, see Vladimir Tismăneanu: *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*. New York: Free Press, 1992; Vladimir Tismăneanu (ed.): *The Revolutions of 1989*. London: Routledge, 1999; and Sorin Antohi – Vladimir Tismăneanu (eds.): *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*. Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2000.

months, NSF reorganized itself as a political party, and won political power in two consecutive national elections (1990–1992 and 1992–1996, the second time reformed under the name of Party of Social Democracy in Romania). The leading politicians involved in the events promoted this version, most importantly Ion Iliescu, the leader of the NSF and the first elected president of Romania (1990–1992, 1992–1996, and again 2000–2004).

In order to undermine the political legitimacy of Iliescu and of the ruling NSF/PDSR, the political opposition, grouped in 1992–2000 under a coalition entitled the Democratic Convention, put forward an alternative view of the events, arguing that the popular revolt was in fact manipulated by a conspiracy of communist apparatchiks belonging to the second echelon of the party, who subsequently took power with foreign aid in order to deflect the process of revolutionary change. The history textbook favored the second view, arguing that the Communist regime in Romania collapsed under pressure from a popular revolt, speculated by a political conspiracy of Communist leaders inspired by foreign powers and supported by a military diversion. Since the revolution was central to the political legitimacy of the PDSR, Ion Iliescu, at the time the leader of the party, reacted virulently against the interpretation put forward in the textbook, blaming the ruling Democratic Convention (1996–2000) for this attempt “to falsify history.” In his own words:

“All the attempts to dispute and to denigrate the Romanian Revolution, all the fabrications on ‘coup d’état’ or on the ‘seizing’ of the revolution represent the expression of a political diversion conducted by a series of frustrated and inhibited forces and people, mere spectators of the revolutionary events, wishing to create their own legitimacy, based on forgery and slandering. [...] The fact that such nonsense and defrauding of the Romanian Revolution are consciously introduced in some of the history manuals, which have received the seal of approval of the Ministry of Education, is unforgivable and straight-out harming. Thus, history manuals, by encouraging the lack of respect towards the historical truth, are transformed into a perverse means aimed against the national interests and identity of Romania.”⁴⁵

Conservative historians attached to the PDSR and former members of the Communist establishment, who defended a „canonical” vision of Romanian history, soon endorsed Iliescu’s harsh criticism of the textbook.

⁴⁵ Ion Iliescu, President of the Social Democracy Party of Romania, Political Report Given by the National Council of the Social Democracy Party of Romania, “Pulling Romania from crisis, achieving economic and social rebirth” Bucharest, 9 October 1999.

The second type of criticism was put forward by Adrian Năstase, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1992–1996) and at the time a vice-president of the PSDR (in the period 2000–2004, Năstase was Prime Minister of Romania). While agreeing with Ion Iliescu’s arguments, Năstase wrote his own version of the conspiracy theory. In a detailed analysis of the historical information in the textbook, Năstase tried to demonstrate that it reflected an anti-Romanian and pro-Hungarian attitude. In his view, the textbook gave up on all the major points of the Romanian-Hungarian historiographical polemics (see below), a sure proof that the authors were financially and ideologically motivated by Budapest.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that, although Năstase is not trained in history but in law and sociology (Ph.D.), he did not refrain from making extensive value-judgments on the textbook, offering his own vision of historical events, and telling historians how national history should properly be interpreted.

A third type of criticism came from leading Romanian journalists, the most vehement and influential being Cristian Tudor Popescu, the editor-in-chief of the independent daily *Adevărul* (The Truth). Popescu put forward a third theory of conspiracy, this time attacking the European and multi-cultural orientation of the textbook. He argued that the textbook “is the fruit of the ideology of political correctness, of multi-culturalism, and of ways of controlling the majority by inciting the minorities against it. This ideology accompanies the American imperial ideology.”⁴⁷

Popescu accused the Romanian office of *The Project on Ethnic Relations* (PER), an American NGO located in Princeton, New Jersey, for being responsible for the dissemination of this ideology. In October 1998, in order to support the initiative of the MNE to reform the history textbooks, PER organized a seminar entitled “History Textbooks – Source of Knowledge or Generator of Stereotypes,” bringing together historians and state officials from the MNE.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See Adrian Năstase “Acestă lucrare este anti-națională, dezvoltând toate tezele istoriografiei maghiare” (This work is anti-national, developing all the thesis of the Hungarian historiography), *Timpu*, 26 October – 1 November 1999. 8–9. For a detailed analysis of Năstase’s view on the textbook in particular, and of the public debates over the textbook, in general, see Răzvan Păraianu: National Prejudices, Mass Media, and History Textbook: The Mitu Controversy. In Trencsényi Balázs, Dragoș Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi and Zoltán Kántor (eds.): *Nationalism and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*. Budapest: Regio Books; Iași: Polirom, 2001. 93–117.

⁴⁷ See Cristian Tudor Popescu: Manualul de Istorie Antinațională—crimă cu premeditare a Ministerului Educației Naționale. *Adevărul*, 8 October, 1999.

⁴⁸ On Popescu’s accusations against PER, and for a report on the Brașov Seminar, and – more generally – on the political connotations of the textbook controversy, see Dan Pavel,

Popescu judged the seminar to be a proof of the existence of a foreign conspiracy to replace "the old patriotic and mobilizing history, aimed at generating national loyalty," with "a European-type history, based on the understanding of political institutions, state, ideologies, and the role of ethnic and religious minorities."⁴⁹ He therefore initiated a sustained journalistic campaign meant to discredit the textbook in the eyes of the public.

This choir of criticism ultimately degenerated into an overt attack against the agenda of reforming the national educational system promoted by Andrei Marga, the Minister of National Education and the rector of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj. On 15 October 1999, facing harsh criticism within the *Parliamentary Commission for Education, Science, Youth and Sport* of the Chamber of Deputies, from the part of numerous opposition deputies, who accused the textbook of being "anti-Romanian," the Minister Marga reiterating the need to reform the national curricula.⁵⁰ He pointed out that it is a unique situation in Europe when a history textbook was debated in the parliament, and pointed out that the content of the textbook was not presented accurately in the media. Marga restated his conviction that the alternative textbooks were an important step in reforming the educational system, and that Romania must adopt European standards. He also pleaded for an "enlightened patriotism" and defended the professional autonomy of historians, who have a legitimate right to writing their views free of political interference.

Marga's arguments did not convince opposition parties. On 5 November 1999, 55 deputies filed a parliamentary motion asking for the withdrawal of the textbook from the market. Although the group won allies among politicians across the political spectrum, the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Parliament, ultimately rejected the motion. In the weeks that followed, the debate slowly faded away. With the discovery that the alternative textbooks' publication was in fact initiated by the former administration and was supported by a grant from the World Bank negotiated and signed by the former PDSR government and not by the Democratic Convention, the polit-

the director of the Romanian office of the PER: Rewriting History in Romania. *East European Politics and Society*, Vol. 15, Nr. 1, 2001. 179–189. For the website of the PER, see <http://www.per-usa.org/romania.htm>.

⁴⁹ Popescu, "Manualul de Istorie Antinațională." Pavel points out that the second part of the sentence was a quotation from the program of the seminar organized by PER. See Pavel, "Rewriting History in Romania," 181.

⁵⁰ On Marga's position, see *Parlamentul României, Camera Deputaților. Comisia pentru Învățământ, Știință, Tineret și Sport*, No. 487/XVII/9, Bucharest, 15 October 1999. 2–3.

ical connotations of the scandal fell into the background, and the media laid more emphasis on the financial aspects of the textbook controversy.⁵¹

Despite strong criticism, at the end of the day reformist historians have apparently won their case. Minister Marga refused to withdraw the authorization for the textbook, which continues to be used in secondary school classrooms, although in a slightly revised version published in 2000. Beyond immediate partisan political interests or financial implications, the textbook controversy was nevertheless a clear indication of the precarious position of the new reformist school, under joint crossfire from nationalist politicians, conservative historians, the mass media, and a larger nationalist consensus in public opinion. It was remarkable that the general public took an active part in the debate, a proof of the importance of history for constructing identity in the public sphere. But beyond this active public participation, it was puzzling to note the vehemence of the public opinion was in condemning reformist historians. It was also particularly striking that leading journalists joined politicians in stigmatizing the reformist historians. The debate pointed out to the fact that historians have lost the “monopoly” over historical writing in Romania, and they contribute to a modest degree to the formation of the public opinion.

Most importantly, the debate temporarily inhibited the process of reforming Romanian historiography. In the light of the incendiary public scandal stirred by the reformist textbook, numerous historians—even those from the younger generation—concluded that the general public was not yet ready for a radical reform of the Romanian historiography. Bogdan Murgescu, a Professor of History at the University of Bucharest, argued such a view. In a brochure entitled *A fi istoric in 2000* [Being a historian in the year 2000], Murgescu summarized the specific challenges and privations faced by historians in post-1989 Romania, and tried to suggest ways of professional rehabilitation of the social status of historians, and of history as a discipline. He pointed out that in countries such as Germany or Ireland, a radical reform of the historiography could only occur when it was accompanied by political democratization, economic prosperity and integration into European institutions, and concluded that in Romania “conditions are not yet ripen for a substantive renewal of the historical consciousness.”⁵² He advocated a strategy of gradual reform of the historiographical discourse, taking account of public expectation, and an avoidance of “terrible statements that

⁵¹ See Pavel, *Rewriting History in Romania*, 188.

⁵² Murgescu, *A fi Istorice in anul 2000*, 113.

shock the public and offer arguments to enemies of the historiographical renewal, thus proving more harmful than useful."⁵³ The stagnation that generally characterized economic and political reforms in post-communist Romania thus endangered the reform of the historiography, as well.

*Political Reconciliation vs. Historiography:
The Romanian-Hungarian Conflict*

The lack of thorough reforms in historiography hampered the general process of political reconciliation in Central Europe, a situation best exemplified by the diplomatic conflict between Romania and Hungary. The inter-state relationship between Romania and Hungary was one of the most disputed in Central Europe in the twentieth century. In analyzing the Romanian-Hungarian historical conflict, many scholars stressed the different historical experience of the two peoples.⁵⁴ In the process of nation- and state-building from the nineteenth century, the Transylvanian Hungarians participated as part of the Hungarian nation, whereas the Romanians from Transylvania participated, through their cultural movements, in the process of building the modern Romanian nation. As a result, the two peoples have had different political interests and cultural orientations, a situation that generated conflicting national mythologies in the long term.

The main ground of confrontation between Romanians and Hungarians has been the inter-ethnic and multicultural space of Transylvania, a province conceived as having made a crucial contribution to the survival of both nations. The Romanian historian Pompiliu Teodor suggestively highlighted Transylvania's importance for the national development of Romanians, Hungarians, and other ethnic groups living in the province:

"Through its past and present, Transylvania occupies a well-defined role in the Romanian, Hungarian, and German historical life, and in the history of Central and Eastern Europe as a historically individualized entity. For Romanians, Transylvania represents the cradle of the national movement in the 18th century, for Hungarians, Transylvania was the locus of development of the national awakening in the 17th and

⁵³ Murgescu, *A fi Istoric în anul 2000*, 113.

⁵⁴ See László Péter (ed.): *Historians and the History of Transylvania*. Boulder, Co., East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1992; Stephen Borsody (ed.): *The Hungarians: A Divided Nations*. New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988; and John F. Cadzow, Andrew Ludanyi, Laris J. Elteto (eds.): *Transylvania: The Roots of Ethnic Conflict*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1983.

the 18th centuries, and for Germans, it is the country where they could establish a historical, linguistic, cultural and constitutional community.⁵⁵

The Hungarian national ideology regards Transylvania as a core province of historical Hungary, in which the Hungarian political elite and national culture could survive and perpetuate during difficult periods, such as the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.⁵⁶ In a similar vein, the Romanian national ideology defines Transylvania as the core of the Romanian lands, the “cradle” of the Romanian civilization, and the demographic reservoir of the Romanian nation.⁵⁷ This “mythical” approach to the history of Transylvania coupled with conjectural political interests, generating many diplomatic and even military crises between Romania and Hungary over Transylvania (1916–1918, 1919–1920, 1940, 1944–1945).

The Romanian-Hungarian inter-state conflict continued and even amplified during the Communist period, when the growing concern for Hungarian minorities abroad that developed in Hungary starting in 1970’s interacted with the nationalizing policies conducted by the Romanian Communist regime under Nicolae Ceaușescu, putting the official and public political discourses in the two countries on the way to collision. The peak of this controversy occurred in the late 1980’s, when the Romanian-Hungarian legal and political debates over the status of the Hungarian national minority in Romania dominated the agenda of numerous international reunions, such as the CSCE meetings, being therefore regarded by numerous analysts as “one of the most dangerous interstate problems in Europe.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Pompiliu Teodor: Transilvania: spre un nou discurs istoriografic. [Transylvania: toward a new historiographical approach] *Xenopoliana*, Vol. 1, Nr 1–4, 1993. 59–63.

⁵⁶ For a hierarchical division among core, semi-peripheral and peripheral territories in the national ideology of Serbs, Romanians, and Hungarians, see George W. White: *Nationalism and Territory. Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. A comparative reading of the chapters on Romania and Hungary reveals the conflicting overlapping between the national ideologies of the two peoples. For the symbolic place of Transylvania in the Hungarian national ideology, see also László Kürti: *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

⁵⁷ See Ștefan Pascu: *Transilvania: Inimă a pământului românesc și leagăn al poporului român* [Transylvania: Heart of the Romanian Land and Cradle of the Romanian People] Cluj: Editura Vatra Românească, 1990; David Prodan: *Transilvania și iar Transilvania: Considerații istorice*. București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1992. Translated into English as *Transylvania and Again Transylvania: A Historical Exposé*. Cluj: Fundația Culturală Română, 1992; Titus Podea: *Transilvania*. București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1993.

⁵⁸ Alpo M. Rusi: *After the Cold War. Europe's New Political Architecture*. London: MacMillan and the Institute for East-West Security Studies, 1991. 66.

Despite optimistic expectations, the fall of communism did not foster a spectacular improvement of the Romanian-Hungarian relations. The link between the Hungarian minority in Romania and their "mother country" remained a very sensitive issue for the Romanian politicians and public opinion. In 1990, the Hungarian state's obligation to protect the interests of ethnic Hungarians abroad was introduced in an amendment to article six of the Hungarian Constitution. In order to provide an institutionalized framework for permanent political consultations with representatives of the Hungarian national minorities in neighboring countries, the Hungarian Government set up a special monitoring commission entitled "The Secretariat for Hungarians Abroad at the Office of the Prime Minister," reorganized in 1992 as the Governmental Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad (*Határon Túli Magyarok Hivatala*), and functioning under the supervision of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.⁵⁹ Romania, however, contested Hungary's right to grant political protection to its ethnic minorities abroad, denouncing it as a "self-appointed right."

Moreover, as Romania initiated the first phase of its transition to a democratic political system, the status of ethnic Hungarians became a main area of internal political debate.⁶⁰ The most pressing issues concerned the restoration of educational and language entitlements for ethnic Hungarians, which had been suspended during the last years of the communist regime, and their unrestricted access to state institutions. Hungarian civic groups also advocated various forms of collective and territorial autonomy for the Hungarian community, a demand largely opposed by Romanian public opinion. Bilateral misperceptions, coupled with political manipulations of ethnic nationalism by leading figures of the NSF led to a violent clash between ethnic

⁵⁹ See Government Decree No. 90/1992, "On the Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad" available at <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/CD0972C6-5D3D-40C7-97B6-98DCD09FE037/0/HTMHa.htm>, retrieved on 15 September 2003. For the website of the Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad, see <http://www.htmh.hu>.

⁶⁰ For authoritative analyses of the post-1989 inter-ethnic relations between Romanians and Hungarians, see Enikő Magyar-Vincze: *Antropologia politicii identitare naționaliste*. [The Anthropology of the Nationalist Identity-Politics] Cluj: EFES, 1997; and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi: *Transilvania subiectivă* [Subjective Transylvania] București: Humanitas, 1999. For debates on federalism and devolution in post-1989 Romania, with direct reference to Transylvania, see Gustav Molnár – Gabriel Andreescu (eds.): *Problema transilvană* [The Transylvanian Problem] București: Polirom, 1999. For the process of political reconciliation between the two countries, see Constantin Iordachi: *The Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation Process, 1994–2001: from Conflict to Co-operation*. *PolSci. Romanian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 1, Nr. 3–4, 2001. 88–134.

Romanians and Hungarians in March 1990 in Târgu Mureș, a multi-ethnic Transylvanian city.

The controversy acquired new domestic connotations with the creation, in December 1989, of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (the DAHR), as the main political representative of the interests of ethnic Hungarians. The DAHR defines Romania's ethnic Hungarians as an integral part of the Hungarian nation, and defines them as a "co-nation," or a "state building nation" in Romania.⁶¹ At international level, the DAHR demands to be considered as the official representative of the Hungarian community in Romania, and to be part of every bilateral agreement between Romania and Hungary over the status of the Hungarian minority. This request was considered legitimate by Hungary, but contested by Romania, which refused to recognize the DAHR as a negotiating partner at inter-state level, pointing out that the issues between Hungary and Romania should be solved only between the two governments.

*The Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation:
Genuine Agreement or a Foreign "Dictate"?*

Taking into account the effects of geographical proximity and geopolitics on relations between neighboring states, their power relations, and the interdependence of both state-rivalries and common interests, Romania and Hungary can be regarded as making up a "security complex," defined by Barry Buzan as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."⁶²

Given this conflicting historical legacy, the spectacular improvement in the Romanian-Hungarian relations starting in September 1996 has been generally perceived as "a divine surprise," "a model for Europe and for the whole world,"⁶³ and an example able to "put an end to a millennium of conflicts and tragedy in Central Europe."⁶⁴ Romania and Hungary have avoided a military

⁶¹ See the Program of the DAHR, available on-line on its official web-site at the address <http://www.rmndsz.ro>

⁶² Barry Buzan: *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991. 205.

⁶³ Bill Clinton: *Letter to Romanian President Emil Constantinescu*.

⁶⁴ Alfred Moses and Donald Blinken, the American ambassadors from Bucharest and, respectively, Budapest, "The New Treaty between Romania and Hungary Remove an Obstacle from their Way of Western Integration," *The Washington Post*, 19 September 1996.

confrontation that seemed a grim possibility in late 1980's, have ameliorated their tense diplomatic relations, and, more significantly, have managed to develop a close political collaboration. The two countries are more and more bound together by a network of formal and informal contacts, which have worked for changing the nature of their inter-state relations. Political elites in the two countries have made clear their intention to foster a long-lasting and constructive relationship toward their integration into NATO and the European Union, a process that "is not a competition, but an approach resting on collaboration."⁶⁵ This does not mean that conflicts are excluded in the future period, but it is more probably that they will take the form of legal controversies, and will be solved by a process of political bargaining.

How can we account for the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation? According to Buzan, four structural options are available in order to account for the changes suffered by a security complex, namely "external transformation," "internal transformation," "maintenance of the statue-quo," and "the overlay of the complex by an outside power."⁶⁶ Most of the explanations employed to account for the process of the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation assessed the bilateral treaty as "a new Dayton," due to "the extraordinary American pressure"⁶⁷ and the whole Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation as "a first forced step" which came "as a result of five years of negotiations and intense international pressure."⁶⁸ One can distinguish between a) 'conjunctural' and b) "structural" argumentation of this thesis. In spite of their differences, both positions attribute to the international community a decisive role in the outcome of the negotiation. Their common view is that the Romanian-Hungarian security complex was "overlaid" by an external interference that was so powerful as to suppress the bilateral conflict.

In contrast to these views, this article argues that the major change in the Romanian-Hungarian relationship was brought by an internal political transformation suffered by the components the security system. Romanian and Hungarian decision-makers have employed new, more compatible definitions of national security, and this accounts for the reconciliation reached. While the international community played an important role in the process

⁶⁵ Dinu, Marcel Romanian Deputy Foreign Ministry, in Simona-Mirela Miculescu, "Romania-Hungary Basic Treaty Ready For Official Signature," 08/21/96, at <http://www.embassy.org/press/romania/00000097.html>, 23 July 1996.

⁶⁶ Cf. Buzan, *People, States and Fear*

⁶⁷ See Cristoiu, Ion: Un imperativ național: semnarea cât mai grabnică a tratatului româno-maghiar. *Evenimentul Zilei*, 19 August 1997.

⁶⁸ "Romania and Hungary Reconcile," *Libération*, 18 September 1996.

of reconciliation, it did so not through a direct intervention and political pressure “à la Dayton,” but by devising a structural framework in which the negotiations took place, consisting of a standard for minority rights, a mechanism for implementing and monitoring these rights, a framework for confidence building measures, and a framework for bilateral Romanian-Hungarian negotiations, including the possibility of an external mediation.

At international level, the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation was occasioned by the “Balladour plan,” an initiative which aimed at stabilizing Central and Eastern Europe by backing the conclusion of bilateral treaties between states experiencing bilateral tensions related to minority or ethnic issues. Following the inaugural Conference for a Pact on Stability in Europe, held in May 1994, nine states aspiring for the EU membership in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia), were expected, within a grace period of one year, to conclude bilateral or regional treaties regulating their inter-state relations with the neighboring countries, including issues questions pertaining to frontiers and minorities.

Following Balladour’s initiative, Romania and Hungary resumed negotiations toward a bilateral treaty that had been pending for a long period. The first political breakthrough in the relations between Romania and Hungary took place in November 1994: the new Hungarian government led by Gyula Horn set as its major foreign policy task the reconciliation with its neighbors, mostly with Romania and Slovakia. The second major political breakthrough took place in August 1995 when President Iliescu proposed a detailed plan of a historical reconciliation between the two countries. The third breakthrough in the bilateral reconciliation process was the signing of “The Treaty of Understanding, Co-operation and Good Neighborliness,” on 16 September 1996, which included the provision that both countries will support their efforts for NATO and European Integration.⁶⁹ A „Joint Romanian-Hungarian Political Statement” and an Agreement of Reconciliation and Partnership also accompanied the treaty.

While the mediation of the international community was an important stimulus behind the reconciliation, it is important to note that Romania and Hungary managed to shape the content of their bilateral treaty. Far from being a dictate, the mediation of the international community can thus be regarded as a proof of the interactive way in which states can use and shape in-

⁶⁹ *Romania and Minorities. Collection of Documents.* Târgu Mureș: Pro Europa, 1997. 162.

ternational institutions, as well as of the way in which institutions can influence the behavior of states.

In the next years, the diplomatic collaboration between the two countries has continued to improve, transforming itself into a "partnership for the whole region."⁷⁰ Romania and Hungary have developed an active regional partnership, having bilateral agreements in almost all fields of activity, exceeding the relations they have with the other neighbors. Implemented in January 1997, the Mixed Intergovernmental Commission for Collaboration and Active Partnership between Romanian and Hungary set up a permanent framework of dialogue and collaboration, Having as model the French-German reconciliation, this comprehensive framework of collaboration instituted a permanent dialogue between Romania and Hungary.

Despite these major successes, in order to prove durable, the process of political reconciliation between Romania and Hungary needs to be accompanied by a cultural reconciliation between the two countries. The following section points out to the powerful impact of symbolic politics on the bilateral relations between Romania and Hungary.

*Political Reconciliation vs. Conflicting Historical Memory:
The Statue of Liberty from Arad*

The territorial conflict between Romanians and Hungarians over Transylvania has been greatly exacerbated by an accompanying historiographical dispute over all the important moments in the history of the province, such as the question of the "chronological pre-eminence" of Romanians or Hungarians in Transylvania, the place of Transylvania within the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, the legal status of Romanians under the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy, or that of the Hungarians in Romania.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Adrian Severin, Romanian Foreign Ministry, quoted in *Evenimentul Zilei*, 15 January 1996.

⁷¹ See Dennis Deletant: *Ethnos and Mythos in the History of Transylvania: the Case of the Chronicler Anonymus, and Martyn Rady: Voievode and Regnum: Transylvania's Place in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*. In László Péter (ed.): *Historians and the History of Transylvania* 67–87, and 88–103; and Sándor Biró (ed.): *The Nationalities Problem in Transylvania, 1867–1940. A Social History of the Romanian Minority under Hungarian rule, 1867–1918 and of the Hungarian Minority under Romanian Rule, 1918–1940*. Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1988. The main Romanian-Hungarian historiographical controversy surrounded the publication of Béla Köpeczi (ed.): *Erdély Története* [History of Transylvania] 3 Vols. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985, a work considered by the Romanian side as having irredentist overtones. A shorter version of the book was translated in German and French, while the full edition was translated in English: Béla Köpeczi (ed.): *Kurze Geschichte Siebenbürgens* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990. Translation of: *Erdély rövid története*; Béla Köpeczi (ed.): *Histoire de la Transylvanie*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó,

Although in modern times Romanian and Hungarian historians have debated the overlapping history of their countries with considerable passion, these polemics have not always led Romanians and Hungarians scholars to an understanding of each other's history and culture. Instead of initiating fruitful scholarly debates over the common aspects of their history, Romanian and Hungarian historians have too often perpetuated their competing national "cannons," veritable "self-fulfilling mythologies" of their historical writing. As a result, ethnic stereotypes and hostile perspectives have survived unchanged in history textbooks and in historiographical works, undermining the process of political reconciliation.⁷²

The historiographical narratives of the 1848 revolution best illustrate this conflicting and ethnocentric approach. The revolution was a pan-European event, national movements in various European countries being animated by liberal principles and having as a common goal the fight against absolutism. Both Romanians and Hungarians fought in the revolution, as the most advanced bastions against absolutism in East-Central Europe. Despite the transnational character of the revolution, national historiographies in Romania, Hungary, and more generally in Central Europe, have generally (although not exclusively) taken a narrow, nation-based perspective, considering national rivalries and conflicts as the main features of the revolution, and asserting that only their own national and territorial claims were just and legitimate.

In Hungary, the 1848–1849 revolution is regarded as a central event in the crystallization of the Hungarian national consciousness, giving birth to the modern Hungarian nation. Its commemoration has been a central political act for the Hungarian political elites, and has always enjoyed a large popu-

1992; Béla Köpeczi (ed.): *History of Transylvania*, 3 Vols. Boulder, Colo. New York: Social Science Monographs, 2002. For the Romanian reaction, see Florin Constantiniu, Ștefan Pascu, Mircea Mușat: A Conscious Forgery of History under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In László Péter (ed.): *Historians and the History of Transylvania*

⁷² For historical works on the Romanian-Hungarian relations published after 1989, see Constantin Iordachi, Bárdi Nándor: The History of the Romanian-Hungarian Inter-Ethnic, Cultural and Political Relations. Selected Bibliography, 1990–2000. In *Nationalism and Contested Identities*, 315–375. For a comprehensive overview of the image of Hungary in the post-1989 Romanian historiography and its relationship to the Romanian-Hungarian political reconciliation, including an extensive bibliography, see Constantin Iordachi, Marius Turda: Politikai megbékélés versus történelmi diskurzus: az 1989–1999 közötti román történetírás Magyarország-percepciója [Political Reconciliation versus Historical Discourse: The Image of Hungarians in Romanian Historiography, 1989–1999] *Regio*, Nr. 2, 2000. 129–159.

lar participation.⁷³ The two main aspects of the revolution are regarded as being the fight against the Habsburg oppression in order to achieve the self-determination of historical Hungary, and the decision regarding political union between Hungary and the autonomous multi-ethnic principality of Transylvania. Hungarian historiography devotes less attention to the relationship between the Hungarian national movement and the fight for self-determination of the Serbs, Slovaks, Croats, and Transylvanian Romanians, the “non-historical peoples” living within the symbolic borders of the historical state of medieval Hungary that the Hungarian revolutionaries fought to revive. During the 1848–1849 revolution, Hungarian leaders believed that the rights of all peoples living within the historical Hungary would be secured by liberal legal reforms guaranteeing individual rights and the abolition of feudal privileges.

At the time of the 1848 revolution, Romanians were divided among three historical provinces. The principalities of Moldova and Wallachia had internal autonomy under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire and the diplomatic “protection” of Russia. The national movements in these two provinces fought to abolish feudal privileges and to consolidate their internal autonomy. While in Moldova the revolutionary movement was defeated in an incipient phase, revolutionaries in Wallachia succeeded in gaining and exercising political power for three months (June–September), until their regime collapsed under the joint attack of the Ottoman and Russian armies.

In Transylvania, most Romanians and Hungarians fought on different sides. A majority of the Romanian leaders contested the union of Transylvania with Hungary, and fought for the national self-determination of their ethnic group, in alliance with the Habsburg army. The attitude toward the Hungarian revolution differed, therefore, in the various historical provinces. Romanian revolutionaries in Wallachia admired Hungarian liberals for their military force and political cohesion, and

⁷³ The historiography on the 1848 revolution in Hungary is immense. I mention here, selectively, only general works in English. On the revolutionary events in the Habsburg Empire, see Robin Okey: “1848–1849” in *The Habsburg Monarchy: From Enlightenment to Eclipse*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001. 127–156. On the Hungarian revolution, see mainly András Gerő: Politics and National Minorities, 1848–9. In *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience*. Translated by James Patterson and Enikő Koncz. Budapest: CEU Press, 1995. 92–105; György Spira: *The Nationality Issue in the Hungary of 1848–49*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992; Kosáry Domokos: *The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 in the Context of European History*. Budapest: Collegium Budapest, 2000; István Deák: *Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.

sought to forge a political alliance with them against imperial absolutism. To this end, the Wallachia Nicolae Bălcescu mediated a late reconciliation between the Hungarian leader Lajos Kossuth and the Transylvanian-Romanian leader Avram Iancu. In Transylvania, only a minority of Romanians opted for an alliance with the Hungarian revolutionaries against Habsburg absolutism, Bălcescu's mediation coming too late to change the military balance on the field.

In Romania, the 1848 revolution is celebrated as a major historical event, but it is not regarded as the founding act of the Romanian nation. The Romanian national holiday celebrates the union of Transylvania with Romania on the 1st of December 1918. Moreover, the commemoration of the revolution had two main components: the Wallachian, insisting on the fight for the abolition of feudal privileges and for political emancipation, and the Transylvanian, underlying the fight for national self-determination, and taking strong anti-Hungarian overtones. The commemoration of the revolution in Transylvania stresses Romanian military action against the Hungarian revolutionary army, and glorifies the mythical figure of Avram Iancu, the leader of the rebellious army. Nationalist historians lay all the blame for atrocities against the Romanian population on the Hungarian army, holding it responsible for the death of up to 40,000 people.⁷⁴

The recent diplomatic tension between Romania and Hungary over the rehabilitation of the "Statue of Liberty" in Arad illustrates the importance of historical memory of the 1848 revolution in the process of reconciliation between the two peoples. The Statue of Liberty was unveiled in September 1890, under the Austro-Hungarian Dualism, in the "Szabadság tér" (Freedom Square) of Arad, in the historical Banat. It was erected in order to commemorate the execution, on 6 October 1849, of thirteen generals who fought in the Hungarian revolutionary army by the Habsburg imperial army, following Hungary's defeat in the War of Independence waged against the Habsburgs. Designed by Adolf Huszár and finished by György Zala, the stat-

⁷⁴ For this claim, see the massive work of Anton Dragoescu (coord.), Liviu Maior, Gelu Neamțu and Serban Polverejan: *Istoria României. Transilvania* [History of Romania. Transylvania], 2 Vols. Cluj: Geroge Barițiu, 1997, 1999, sponsored by the former nationalist mayor of Cluj, Gheorghe Funar. For similar works, see Ioan Chindriș, Gelu Neamțu: *Procese politice antiromânești care au zguduît Transilvania în toamna anului 1848* [Anti-Romanian political trials that shook Transylvania in the autumn of 1848]. București: Viitorul Românesc, 1995; and Ioan N. Ciolan, Valentin Borda, Ioan Lacatușu: *Transilvania prigonită de unguri* [Transylvania oppressed by the Hungarians] Târgu Mureș: Casa de Editură "Petru Maior" 1997.

uary group is an allegory of liberty, having in the center a symbolic representation of "Liberty," holding a wreath in her right hand and a sword in the left. On the lower level, there are four allegorical statues, while in front there is the "waking liberty," symbolizing "Hungaria." The two side figures symbolize the "battle ready" and "sacrifice-ready," while the back figure represents the dying fighter (see below).

Due to radical territorial changes, the presence of the statue was discontinued after 34 years. Following World War One, under the Treaty of Trianon (1920), the Banat, together with Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia, joined Romania, as part of the radical post-World War I geo-political reorganization. This territorial change was contested by Hungary, so that in 1924 the Romanian government, led by the Liberal Ion I. C. Brătianu, decided to remove the Statue of Liberty, arguing that it was as a symbol of Hungarian irredentism. Subsequently, the Freedom Square was renamed "Avram Iancu," in honor of the Transylvanian Romanian leader who fought for national self-determination during the 1848–1849 revolution.

In 1999, in a gesture of political reconciliation, the Romanian government promised to rehabilitate the statue and to place it at the center of a "Park of Romanian–Hungarian Reconciliation" to be inaugurated on 6 October, at the hundred-fiftieth commemoration of the execution of the thirteenth generals (1849–1999). This decision was welcomed by Hungary, but met with stiff resistance in Romania, from the part of ultra-nationalist Greater Romanian Party, led by Corneliu Vadim-Tudor, and from the center-left political opposition, led by Ion Iliescu and Adrian Năstase.

The different significance and patterns of commemoration of the 1848 revolution in Romania and Hungary gave a window of opportunity for these nationalist politicians to manipulate the Romanian–Hungarian conflicting historical legacy in order to oppose the rehabilitation of the Statue of Arad. While in Hungary the Statue of Liberty is seen as a symbol of the fight against absolutism, in Romania the statue was presented by the media and by nationalist politicians as an irredentist symbol of the "Millenarian Hungary," with an implicit anti-Romanian message. Facing a choir of vehement protests, and in the eve of national elections planned for November 2000, the Romanian government abandoned its promise to rehabilitate the statue. Prime Minister Radu Vasile cancelled his participation to the commemoration in Arad in October 1999, delegating instead the Ministry of Justice, Virgil Stoica. Due to the absence of his official counterpart, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán shortened his trip to Romania, which took place on 5th of October. In-



The Statue of Liberty, Arad (1900): A symbol of historical reconciliation or a reminder of national rivalries?

stead of being erected in its original location, or alternatively in a new “Park of Reconciliation,” the monument was entrusted to the care of the Catholic Diocese in Arad. At the execution site, an obelisk commemorated the memory of the thirteen generals.⁷⁵

The rehabilitation of the Statue of Liberty has remained a contentious issue on the Romanian-Hungarian agenda since 1999, stretching the bilateral relations between the two countries. Invoking the resistance of the public opinion, Romanian authorities delayed the rehabilitation, arguing that its symbolism divides Romanians and Hungarians, instead of uniting them. Their position triggered criticism from Hungarian diplomats, who repeatedly asked the Romanian part to keep its promise. Ultimately, after harsh negotiations between the Romanian President Ion Iliescu and the Hungarian President Ferenc Mádl in October 2003, the Romanian government has confirmed yet again that it will re-erect the Statue of Liberty in a “Park of Reconciliation,” but no deadline has been set for this action. On its part, Hungary made several compensatory gestures toward Romania, by agreeing to revive

⁷⁵ For an thorough analysis of official commemorations of the 1848 revolution in Central Europe, see Rogers W. Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt: 1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44, Nr. 4, 2002. 700–744. The article focuses on talks, practices and celebrations occasioned by the 150th anniversary of the revolutions of 1848 in the three countries.

and co-finance the Gozdsdu Foundation, established at the end of the 19th century to assist the cultural emancipation of Romanians within Austria-Hungary, but nationalized by the Hungarian communists. This political outcome has failed to satisfy ethnic Hungarians in Romania. The leaders of the DAHR felt "deeply offended" by the attitude of the Romanian authorities in denying them the legitimate right to erect statues in their historic homeland.

Following this bilateral agreement, in 2004 the Statue of Liberty has been finally displayed in a public square in Arad. Contrary to the somber prophecies of nationalist politicians, this event passed uncontested by Romanian city-dwellers, the statue soon becoming an integral part of Arad's urban landscape. In retrospect, the tolerant attitude of the public opinion exposes the political manipulation of the issue by certain politicians interested in escalating inter-ethnic tensions for transient political gains. The controversy surrounding the rehabilitation of the Statue of Liberty also highlights the problems raised by the failure to fulfill bilateral commitments in a political partnership. It points out to the need to deepen the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation from a political agreement reached between political elites in the two countries to the level of public opinion and scholarly communities.

More recently, numerous works of political science, sociology, and anthropology have contributed to deepening the political reconciliation between Romania and Hungary. They have deconstructed nationalist ideologies, exposed intolerant attitudes at the level of Romanian and Hungarian communities, analyzed the political identities of Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania and the image of the other in the media, and proposed practical solution for a societal reconciliation.⁷⁶ Although to a more limited

⁷⁶ For a synthesis of Romanian history published in Hungarian, see Zoltán Szász: *A románok története* [History of the Romanians] Budapest: Bereményi, 1993. For attempts of relational history, see Liviu Maior: *1848–1849. Románii și Ungurii în revoluție*. București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998; Lucian Nastasă (ed.): *Studii Istorice Româno-Ungare*. Iași: Fundația Academică "A. D. Xenopol", 1999; and the collective volume written by a new generation of Romanian and Hungarian historians, Trencsényi Balázs, et. al, (eds.): *Nationalism and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*. For works on the "image of the other," see selectively, the following works: Ildiko Melinda Mitu, Sorin Mitu: *Románii văzuți de maghiari—geneza unei imagini etnice moderne* [Romanians seen by the Hungarian—the genesis of a modern ethnic image] In Nicolae Bocșan, Valeriu Leu (eds.): *Identitate și alteritate: Studii de imagologie* [Identity and alterity: Studies of imagology] Reșița: Editura Banatica, 1996. 52–63; Borsi-Kálmán, Béla: *Les Roumains aux yeux Hongrois. Stéréotypes et lieux communs "hongrois" sur les "Roumains": Bétises, généralités, sémi-vérités par rapports á la conscience et la stratégie nationale*. In Alexandru Zub, Gabriel Bădărău, Leonid Boicu, Lucian Nastasă (eds.): *Istoria ca lectură a lumii: Profesorului Alexandru Zub la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani* [History as a reading of the

extent, historiography has also participated only to a limited extent in this process of reconciliation. In the past years, a new generation of historians in Romania and Hungary have exposed the limitation of the nationalist canon of history-writing and have proposed a pluralist view, focusing on the interaction of all ethnic groups living in Transylvania, and favoring common elements of their shared history. They have approached the problematic of nation- and state-building with the specific tools and methods of social history, by concentrating on the study of local history and regional patterns of elite formation, the history of multiculturalism, and the image of the “other.”⁷⁷ These works do not propose an artificial reinterpretation of common historical events, as official attempts of reconciliation did during the communist periods, but search for a common methodological and theoretical ground on which to conceptualize the history of the region.

The benefits of this new orientation are perceivable in the attitude of the public opinion, as well. Romanians and Hungarians do not have a preponderantly negative opinion of each-other anymore, as surveys conducted in 1980’s had indicated. Nationalist politicians advocating the existence of a Hungarian danger to Romania’s security seem to have almost completely lost their capacity of manipulating or mobilizing parts of the electorate. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, which took part in three consecutive ruling coalitions, is perceived nowadays as a factor of stability and not instability. Recent gains in historiography and the tolerant attitude of the public opinion can serve as a basis of a Romanian-Hungarian unified his-

world: To Professor Alexandru Zub for his 60’s anniversary] Iași: Fundația Academică “A.D. Xenopol”, 1994. 453–482; Dan Horia Mazilu: *Noi despre ceilalți: Fals tratat de imagologie*. [We about the others: False treaty of imagology] Iași: Polirom, 1999.

⁷⁷ Among these works, see Sorin Mitu: *Geneza identității naționale la românii ardeleni*. București: Humanitas, 1997. Translated into English as *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001; Florin Gogâlțan, Sorin Mitu (eds.): *Studii de istorie a Transilvaniei. Specific regional și deschidere europeană* [Studies on the history of Transylvania: Regional Character and European Openness] Cluj: Asociația istoricilor din Transilvania și Banat, 1994; Florin Gogâlțan, Sorin Mitu: *Viața privată, mentalități colective și imaginar social în Transilvania* [Private life, collective mentalities, and social imaginary in Transylvania] Cluj: Asociația istoricilor din Transilvania și Banat, 1995–1996; Victor Neumann: *Tentația lui Homo-Europaeus. Geneza spiritului modern în Europa centrală și de sud-est* [The Temptation of Homo-Europaeus: The Genesis of the Modern Spirit in Central and Southeastern Europe] București: Editura Științifică, 1991; and Valeriu Leu: *Modernizare și imobilism. Sate și oameni din Banat la începutul veacului XX în documente memorialistice* [Modernization and Immobilism: Villages and People of the Banat at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century in Memorial Documents] Reșița: Banatica, 1998.

tory textbook, which to be taught in secondary schools in Romania and Hungary, following the example of the French-German historical reconciliation.

Conclusions

The radical socio-political changes that have occurred in Central and South-eastern Europe after 1989 have affected the status of history as a discipline and the societal status of historians.⁷⁸ National historiographies have been challenged to overcome "parochialism," to internalize the theoretical and methodological achievements that marked the development of Western social sciences, and to open up to comparative regional and global perspectives. This process has been nevertheless hindered by numerous factors.

First, the institutionalization of the study of history as a profession in the modern period has been traditionally closely linked with the rise of nationalism and with the development and consolidation of nation-states. The connection between the writing of history and the institutional infrastructure of the nation-state has been even stronger in Central and Southeastern Europe, where historiography played an important role in the process of nation- and state-building. Local historians have therefore focused almost unilaterally on the "validity" of their country's historical rights to self-determination and territorial statehood, often ignoring wider regional processes.⁷⁹

Second, history served as a tool of political legitimization for political elites, providing the cement for forging paradigms of collective identity. This feature conferred an important political influence to historians, giving birth to a type of "historian-politician" best epitomized by František Palacky and J. Rački in the Czech lands, Slobodan Jovanović in Serbia, Mihály Horváth in Hungary, and Nicolae Bălcescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, and Nicolae Iorga in Romania, the latter being celebrated as "the historian-politician 'par excellence.'"⁸⁰ The strong link between politics and the writing of history was preserved and even consolidated during the communism regime, the official propaganda being based on

⁷⁸ See Lucian Boia, Marie-Karine Schaub, Alexandru Duțu: *Le métier d'historien dans l'est de l'Europe: enjeux des discours historiques depuis la chute du mur*. Paris: Association "Histoire au présent," 1994.

⁷⁹ For the role played by historiography in the process of nation-state building in East-Central Europe, see R. W. Seton-Watson: *The Historian as a Political Force in Central Europe*. London: University of London, 1922.

⁸⁰ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera: *Nicolae Iorga. A Biography*. Iași: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998. 26. On the political activity and socio-political thought of Iorga, see also William Oldson: *The Historical and Nationalistic Thought of Nicolae Iorga*. Boulder Colo.: East European Quarterly, 1973; and Constantin Iordachi: Nicolae Iorga and the Paradigm of Cultural Nationalism. *Balkanistica*, Vol. 13, Nr. 1, 2000. 167–174.

a new vision of national history, which gradually suppressed in importance the ideological discourse on proletarian internationalism.

Third, one can identify a rising tide of “nationalism” in the late 1980s. Despite policies intended to weaken or subvert national identities and loyalties, the communist regime was in fact “conflictogenic,” or conflict producing, and reinforced rather than suppressed ethnicity.⁸¹ Faced with economic grievances, people tended to channel economic grievances against “outside” or “internal enemies,” further aggravating inter-ethnic conflicts. The crisis in the inter-ethnic relations in the last stage of the communist rule was thus yet another manifestation of the broader socio-economic and political crisis facing communist societies.

Due to this combination of factors, national historiographies in Central and Southeastern Europe have been generally characterized by modest regional scholarly interaction. Surely, there have occurred during the time numerous and passionate polemics among historians in the region, but they have been too often politically driven and have concentrated on the question of historical rights. As a result, the inter-regional dialogue on historical studies has been rather limited, often lacking a genuine openness to cultural differences. Nowadays, the collapse of communism and the process of European integration provide a unique opportunity for historians in East-Central Europe to combine the heritage of their national scholarly institutions and patterns of research with an emerging European historiographical discourse. They are challenged to expose inter-ethnic stereotypes and to relate to a broader historical discourse that transcends national lines of reference, by integrating new regional, continental and global perspectives.

A transnational and relational re-conceptualization of the history of Central and Southeastern Europe would have a refreshing impact on the writing of European history, as well. Currently, European history-writing is in a process of transformation, moving away from its concentration on the historical experience of Western Europe and toward considering the history of peripheral areas and the status of various types of excluded minorities. Countries in Central and Southeastern Europe can actively contribute to enhancing the plurality of historical and cultural experiences defying “Europeanness” and European values. They can expose the tendency of essentializing the experience of European historical regions such as “the West” or “the Balkans,” by

⁸¹ Gail Lapidus: Gorbachev and the ‘National Question’. In Edward A. Hawett and Victor H. Winston (eds.): *Milestones in Glasnost and Perestroika. Politics and People*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991. 197.

promoting a more integrative perspective.⁸² On the long run, the fruitful cross-fertilization between Western scholarship and historians in Central and Southeastern Europe might lead to the re-thematization of the European history.

⁸² For a discussion of the implications of the transnational history on national ideologies and the profound changes it entails, see Michael McGerr: The Prince of the 'New Transnational History.' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, Nr. 4, 1991. 1056–1067. The author argues that in the American context, transnational history means to relativize American "exceptionalism" and American "distinctiveness," and to de-emphasize comparative history and the "practice of nation-centered history writing." See also Laurence Veysey: The Autonomy of American History Reconsidered. *American Quarterly*, Vol. 31, Nr. 4, 1979. 455–477.