

THE ROLE OF ETHNIC PARTIES IN THE EUROPEANIZATION PROCESS - The Romanian Experience

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Abstract. *This paper aims to show how ethnic parties can become influential actors in the process of Europeanization of post-Communist countries, by conducting a case-study of Romania. We consider Europeanization of Romania as the dependent variable of the two hypotheses we put forward. First, we test if the presence of ethnic parties in government led to an acceleration of the Europeanization process. Second, we are interested in seeing if the European dimension of ethnic parties' political activity led to additional challenges for domestic governments in the Europeanization process. Thus, we show that the moderation of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) had both positive and negative consequences for the process of Europeanization in Romania.*

Key words: *ethnic parties, DAHR, Europeanization, transition, democratization*

The fall of the Communist regimes in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) states marked the beginning of transition periods from centralized planned economies to capitalism, but also from political dictatorship to a multi-party system with free competitive elections. For the new political forces that took over the power in these states, establishing economic and political relations with Western European states and institutions was a logical step, since there were two dominant alternatives, discussed within the Round Table Talks¹: to turn West or to remain a part

of the Eastern, pro-Russian bloc. The results of these constitutional discussions on the eve of the transition show that throughout the region adopting/copying Western institutional models, laws, and standards was preferred.²

The transitions to democracy and capitalism faced numerous challenges. One of them was the re-emergence of ethnic identities. During Communism, the CEE nations were united by one single identity, imposed and maintained through propaganda and repressive means. After the fall of Communism, people sought to rediscover themselves and to find new ideas and values to shape their identity. This is why ethnic feelings re-emerged in the

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¹ Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuss, 1998, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies. Rebuilding the Ship at Sea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² This is what Grabbe calls "mimetism in institutional and law models". See Heather Grabbe, 2003. "Europeanization Goes East: Power and Uncertainty in the EU accession process". In *The Politics of Europeanization*, eds. Featherstone and Radaelli, Oxford University Press, pp. 312-314. See also Wade Jacoby, 2004. "Introduction: Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe" (1-19) and "Emulation as Embedded Rationalism" (20-40). In *The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO: Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

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beginning of the 1990's, together with all the remnants of the conflicts and territorial disputes that took place in the decades and centuries before Communism. This raised great problems to many CEE states, because in most of them significant ethnic minorities were present. The most relevant cases that were seen as potential sources of conflict in the region and, implicitly, as challenges to democracy, were the Hungarians in Romania, the Turks in Bulgaria, the Hungarians in Slovakia, the Russians in the Baltic states, and the complex ethnic puzzle in Yugoslavia. However, with the significant exception of the war in Yugoslavia, in none of these states did ethnic relations turn violent on a significant and persistent scale.³

By using a single-case study approach, a particular focus on Romania, this paper aims to provide a new and challenging answer to the following research question: *Why did post-Communist states in the CEE succeed on their way to democracy, managing to integrate ethnic minorities on their territories and to prevent the outburst of ethnic conflicts?* The existing literature provides several answers to this question. The most common emphasize the positive role of European institutions' leverage over CEE states trying to become members of these institutions.⁴ We provide an in-state perspective over the relation among national minorities, home states, kin states and European institutions,⁵ bringing into

discussion what have been seen so far as secondary actors in the processes of transition: ethnic parties. In this respect, we test two hypotheses. The main one is that *the presence of ethnic parties in government led to an acceleration of the Europeanization process*. The secondary hypothesis is that *the European dimension of ethnic parties' political activity led to additional challenges for domestic governments in the Europeanization process*. Thus, by using process-tracing, we show that the moderation of the DAHR had both positive and negative consequences for the process of Europeanization in Romania. We do not show that ethnic parties might be a solution in all states with ethnic minorities on their territory or that the accommodation of ethnic minorities and the inclusion of ethnic parties in the higher levels of the decision making process are specific means to ensure Europeanization and integration in the European institutions. We emphasize that ethnic parties are meaningful actors that have a significant influence, combined with other actions of governments, over the Europeanization efforts.

We proceed by presenting an encompassing theoretical framework touching upon the main concepts and issues that are taken into consideration in the literature. Also, we present the case selection criteria. Then, we present the internal and international context which shaped the inter-ethnic relations in Romania during the 1990s and, consequently, the actions of the ethnic party discussed in the paper. We then go into detail in presenting the internal and external actions of the DAHR, permanently referring to the issue of Europeanization, as it is defined in the theoretical framework. Finally, we draw

national minority, the home state and the kin state. See Rogers Brubaker, 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. University of California: Los Angeles.

³ There have been clashes between rival ethnic groups, such as the street clashes between Hungarian and Romanian groups in March 1990, in the Transylvanian town of Targu-Mures.

⁴ For instance see Grabbe, "Europeanization Goes East..." or Milada Anna Vachudova, 2001. "The Leverage of International Institutions on Democratizing States: Eastern Europe and the European Union". European University Institute, Working Paper No. 2001/33.

⁵ Rogers Brubaker proposed the "triadic nexus" model for the analysis of inter-ethnic relations, formed by the

conclusions and present the possibilities of further research opened by this study.

Theoretical and methodological framework

Democracy and the State

The variation in the achieved outcomes of the post-Communist transitions illustrate that some regimes have chosen and completed a transition to democracy, others have been “arrested” at some point on their path to democracy and regressed to the authoritarian type they had before or chose a different type of authoritarianism, while others still fight between democracy and their Communist past. In the attempt to narrow down the concept of democracy, we should bear in mind that it is a form of governance where the *demos* has to be involved and no modern polity can become a democracy unless it is first a state.⁶ When speaking about state, we target the three basic elements highlighted in the Weber’s definition: population, territory, and legitimate use of force. In this respect one should avoid the confusion with *Rechtsstaat*, based on limitation of power, rule of law, the prevalence of authorities and norms and respect for procedures. When the latter concept is achieved, a relatively high degree of democracy is present. Lipset defines democracy “as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism that permits the largest possible part of the population to influence

major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office”.⁷ Dahl approaches the concept by emphasizing its main features and, thus, providing dimensions on which measurement can be conducted. At a general level, he sees as a main characteristic of a democracy the “continuous responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals”.⁸ In order to stress more the necessity of government’s receptiveness and the equal possibility of the people to formulate their preferences, Dahl proposes a model with two axes (public contestation and participation). By establishing four ideal-types of political systems – competitive oligarchies, closed hegemonies, inclusive hegemonies, and polyarchy – Dahl enumerates the necessary attributes for a political system to become polyarchic: freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, right to vote, eligibility for public office, right to candidacy; alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, and institutions for ensuring responsiveness.⁹ Adding to Dahl’s work, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1990, 6–7) use the term “democracy” to define a system of government where three conditions are essential: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals in organized groups at regular intervals and excluding the rule of force, inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, as well as a level of civil and political liberties sufficient to insure the integrity of political competition and participation.

⁶ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 7.

⁷ Seymour-Martin Lipset, 1960, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, New York: Doubleday, p. 45.

⁸ Robert Dahl, 1971, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

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All these definitions emphasize basic features of democracy that provide the useful ground for an appropriate conceptualization of democratization. By studying transition countries, Linz and Stepan provide a useful differentiation and a definition of the democratization process. Building on the idea that democracy should be seen as “the only game in town”, they consider it to be composed by behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional features. The first tackles the non-existence of a significant political group in the state to overthrow the democratic regime, whereas the second assumes that even when facing severe crises, the vast majority of the people consider further changes to emerge still within the democratic framework created. At a constitutional level, the conflict has to be solved according to the norms and regulations already established, their violation being costly and inefficient.¹⁰ In this respect, democratization is considered to be the process in which agreement is reached about political procedures that lead to an elected government, wherein the government comes to power as a result of a free and popular vote, when the government has *de facto* power to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power do not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*.¹¹ All these procedural aspects imply the substantive elements of civil liberties and political rights of the citizens that have the power to determine the representatives meant to govern them. As a result of all these definitions and conceptualizations, democratization is the transformation process of authoritarian (including totalitarian and semi-authoritarian) regimes to democracy, being both a matter of existence or non-existence, and one of speed.

¹⁰ Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 5.

¹¹ Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 3.

Ethnicity and ethnic groups

The usual definitions given to ethnicity refers to the common features defining a group of people, whether they refer to religion, language, culture, mythology, physical resemblance, or combinations of the above. Closely tied to ethnicity is the concept of nation, defined by Kymlicka as “a historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture.”¹² Ethnic minorities are sometimes also referred to as “sub-nations.”¹³

An ethnic group is, according to Weber, a group that has a shared collective identity, built on the features of ethnicity.¹⁴ Kymlicka, on the other hand, sees this as a more appropriate definition for (ethnic) national minorities, usually associated with the existence of a kin-nation, while ethnic groups do not have this sense of common identity, being formed usually of immigrants or their descendants.¹⁵ However, Kymlicka’s definition does not accurately capture the phenomenon of re-emerging identities in second or third generation immigrant communities, a good example in this respect being the Turkish community in Germany. Gurr defines ethnic groups as “people who share a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on a belief in common descent and on shared

¹² Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 11.

¹³ Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989), 133.

¹⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

¹⁵ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 30.

experiences and cultural traits.”¹⁶ Also, he views ethnic identities as “enduring social constructions that matter to people who share them.”¹⁷ Thus, Gurr also shares a constructivist approach to ethnicity and emphasizes, as Weber does, the importance of shared beliefs. Moreover, Gurr sees ethnicity as a developmental process. He also introduces the term “ethno-nationalist groups,” which are politically mobilized groups, seeking to improve their social status. Schermerhorn regards ethnic groups from two perspectives: size and power,¹⁸ while Chandra focuses on membership, defining ethnic identity as “nominal membership in an ascriptive category, including race, language, caste, or religion.”¹⁹ Offe defines the ethnic minority as “a group that, due to its «constitutive characteristics» and «shared identity», will always remain a minority, although its members used their «individual rights to a maximum extent» and which is also treated in an unjust manner by the majority.”²⁰ Therefore, we are dealing with a structural identity of the minority, based on features acquired at birth and that cannot be changed, with the exception of forced assimilation.²¹

¹⁶ Ted Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 5.

¹⁷ *Idem*.

¹⁸ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

¹⁹ Chandra, “Ethnic Parties...”, 236.

²⁰ Claus Offe, “Ethno-Nationalized States of Eastern Europe: Is There a Constitutional Alternative?”, *Studies in East Europe Thought*, No. 54 (1998), 126.

²¹ This is what distinguishes collective rights, and minority rights in particular, and social rights. We are not dealing with a structural identity when it comes to social rights, because there rights are given to individuals only temporarily, each individual being a potential right bearer of a social right during his lifetime. For instance, the right

In post-Communist states, nations were defined primarily in primordial terms and this view was imposed by the constitutions, as Dimitrijevic points out.²² Thus, the supreme laws “nailed” the supremacy of the titular nation over the territory, while minorities were either not mentioned at all or specifically excluded, as in Latvia or Estonia. In other cases, ethnic minorities were recognized only as part of the titular nation.

Territorial concentration has an important impact on the behavior of ethnic minorities. Territorially concentrated minorities are usually the traditional inhabitants of a particular territory and their identity is organically tied to it. The members of the minority, as well as the nation to which it belongs, claim primordial feelings and try to justify their “ownership” over the territory, as Geertz underlines.²³

While for territorially dispersed minorities it is rather difficult to claim more than cultural autonomy, territorially concentration brings with itself territory-related claims as well.

The triadic nexus – the importance of the kin-state

An important tool in analyzing inter-ethnic relations is Brubaker’s triadic nexus,²⁴ which captures the importance of kin-states in the mobilization of an ethnic minority. The triadic nexus is formed of the home-state, the ethnic

to healthcare. No one enjoys this right permanently, but only when s/he is ill.

²² Nenad Dimitrijevic, “Ethno-Nationalized States of Eastern Europe: Is There a Constitutional Alternative?” *Studies in East Europe Thought*, No. 54 (2002).

²³ Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*. (New York: Free Press, 1963).

²⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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minority and the kin-state of the minority. The essence of this tool is the interdependency existing between the three actors; if one of them acts, the others will react. The intervention of a kin-state to help its co-nationals abroad is considered an incentive for the political mobilization of the minority. Besides official declarations of support, the most effective way for the government of a kin-state to help its co-nationals is by funding. Funding is much easier to absorb if there is a strong organization, with a solid infrastructure. Also, the kin-state and the ethnic party of the minority might effectively act as partners to determine the government of the homeland to improve its policies regarding the minority.

The concept of *ethnic parties* has been repeatedly tackled at the theoretical level by many authors. As a definition of parties is necessary before providing a conceptual framework for analysis, we rely on Sartori's minimalist definition according to which "A party is any political group that presents at elections and is capable of placing through elections candidates for public office".²⁵ Horowitz defines an ethnic party as "a party that derives its overwhelming support from an identifiable ethnic group and serves the interests of that group".²⁶ Moreover, he sees ethnic parties as a danger for the good governance of a country.²⁷ Bugajski considers ethnic parties to be "parties [that] act as

special interest groups, which focus on issues of direct and often exclusive concern to a distinct segment in society".²⁸

Several works also look at the role of ethnicity in the beginning of transition. If Toka and Pasquino argue that political parties (including ethnic parties) play a minimal role in the post-communist transitions,²⁹ Lewis sees the ethnic cleavage in the CEE states as the only one that emerges and persists during the transition processes, together with the ethnic parties forming along it.³⁰ Bugajski identifies five possible tendencies in ethnic politics in CEE states after the fall of Communism, depending on the size of the ethnic group and on its level of political mobilization: *cultural revivalism* (for small groups), *political autonomy* (for former majorities in former states), *territorial self-determination* (large, well-organized, territorially compact groups, majoritarian in certain regions), *separatism* (where large compact groups have a history of statehood), and *irredentism*.³¹ He also differentiates between *political* and *cultural autonomism*.³² This differentiation is particularly significant for the situation in the three cases taken into discussion in this paper, because cultural autonomy is one of the main demands of minorities in CEE states, as we point out in this paper.

The role of ethnic parties in the Europeanization process is approached by Kelly, but they are not at the center of her study, which focuses mainly on the role of

²⁵ Giovanni Sartori. 2005. *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*. Colchester: ECPR Press, p. 57.

²⁶ See Donald Horowitz, 2000. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. University of California Press, p. 291. This definition has its own shortcomings. "Overwhelming" is a vague term, while the expression "serves the interests of that group" is too idealistic. Nevertheless, it is a good working definition for the purpose of this paper.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁸ See Janusz Bugajski, 1994. *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe: A Guide to Nationality Policies, Organizations, and Parties*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, p. li.

²⁹ Quoted in Paul Lewis, 2001. *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*. Routledge, p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³¹ See Bugajski, *Ethnic Politics...*, pp. li-iii.

³² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

international institutions.³³ However, this is an important step in acknowledging the role of ethnic parties in the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in CEE states. Europeanization is defined by Grabbe as “the processes (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub-national) discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies”.³⁴ When we speak about the Europeanization of a CEE state, we mean the process of integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions, such as NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE.

An important tool in analyzing inter-ethnic relations is Brubaker’s triadic nexus,³⁵ which captures the importance of kin-states in the mobilization of an ethnic minority. The triadic nexus is formed of the home-state, the ethnic minority and the kin-state of the minority. The essence of this tool is the interdependency existing between the three actors; if one of them acts, the others will react. The intervention of a kin-state to help its co-nationals abroad is considered an incentive for the political mobilization of the minority. Besides official declarations of support, the most effective way for the government of a kin-state to help its co-nationals is by funding. Funding is much easier to be absorbed if there is a strong organization, with a solid

infrastructure. Also, the kin-state and the ethnic party of the minority might effectively act as partners to determine the government of the homeland to improve its policies regarding the minority.

Case selection

In order to test these hypotheses, we use a qualitative approach, conducting an in-depth case analysis on Romania. There are two arguments to be brought in favor of Romania being a representative case for other states in the Central and Eastern European region. First, it was ruled by a Communist dictatorship (“sultanistic” in the words of Linz and Stepan) from the end of the World War II until the end of 1989.³⁶ Second, its population is not heterogeneous: while Romanians form the largest ethnic group in the country, with a proportion of almost 90%, there is a significant Hungarian community living on its territory.³⁷ According to the 2002 census,³⁸ Hungarians had a proportion of 6.6% (about 1.5 million people) within the population of Romania, whereas the Roma community represented 2.46%.³⁹ The very large majority of

³⁶ The Communist regime was thrown out of power following a bloody revolution, unlike the other states in the region, where the Communist rulers and the opposition reached agreements in a peaceful manner.

³⁷ Another important community in all the three states, besides those mentioned in the analysis, is the Roma community. However, we leave it out because the level of political mobilization within this community is usually low. There are Roma parties in these states, but they are not successful, not even among the members of the communities.

³⁸ All the data on the ethnic structure of the Romanian population is based on the 2002 census. Its results can be found at [<http://www.edrc.ro/recensamant.jsp?language=0>], accessed on December 24th, 2006.

³⁹ There is a wide acceptance of the fact that this is not an accurate measurement of the Roma community and that it is very difficult to find out precisely how many Roma people are actually living in Romania. There are

³³ See Judith Kelly, 2004. *Ethnic Politics in Europe: the Power of Norms and Incentives*. Princeton University Press.

³⁴ See Grabbe, “Europeanization Goes East...”, p. 309.

³⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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Hungarians live in the center of Romania, where they form the largest ethnic group in three counties (Mureș, Harghita and Covasna), in the Western regions on the border with Hungary and in the large Transylvanian towns, such as Oradea, Cluj-Napoca or Satu Mare. Taken together, they form about 20% of the population of Transylvania.

Following the fall of the Communist regime, Romania started the transition to democracy and a free market economy, staging the first free elections in May 1990. However, in the first six years of transition it was ruled only by successors of the former Communist Party, with limited reforms taking place within the circle of people which ensured the transition from the formal regime to the post-Revolution one and which adopted a pronounced nationalistic discourse. This has been seen as one of the reasons for the delay in the economic and democratic reforms, which placed Romania at the bottom of the list of potential members of Euro-Atlantic institutions, such as NATO or the EU.⁴⁰

The issue of minorities and the Euro-Atlantic institutions

Western states and institutions saw the issue of national minorities in CEE as a

two main reasons for this. First, many of them are not registered at birth and therefore so not have any official ID from the Romanian authorities; they do not exist legally. Second, when asked about their nationality, many of them declare themselves to be Romanian (or Hungarian, if they live in regions where Hungarians predominate), because of the negative feelings of the majority towards Roma people.

⁴⁰ Bunce, for instance, underlines the impact of the first elections over the speed of transition. See Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience". *World Politics*, Volume 55, Number 2, January 2003, pp. 167-192.

potential source of conflict in the beginning of the 1990's. For all major institutions (i.e. the EU, NATO and the Council of Europe) rights for minorities was set as a basic criterion for accession. The EU did not include minority protection as a criterion for accession in the *acquis*. Nevertheless, it was among the first conditions that states had to fulfill, in order to begin negotiations.⁴¹ The Council of Europe followed a maximal approach, issuing several Recommendations or drafting Conventions that urged member states to give extensive rights to national minorities on their territories. NATO had an intermediary approach; although it is a military organization, it combined criteria related to the military with political criteria for candidate countries, such as good relations with neighboring states and the absence of any cause of conflict within the state. Therefore, the issue of minorities, especially in the context of the war in former Yugoslavia, was very significant, though not explicitly pursued as a criterion for accession.⁴² The positions of these institutions with respect to minorities are relevant, because, in its bid for membership in all three of them, Romania had to change its attitude towards minorities, due in part to these very criteria. Moreover, we show later in the paper that the Hungarian ethnic party used the standards set by the Council of Europe and the EU to promote and internationalize their policies, as well as to force the hand of the Romanian government.

⁴¹ It was included in the Copenhagen criteria, adopted in 1993.

⁴² Johns argues that these international institutions have double standards with respect to minority protection. See Michael Johns, 2003. "Due as I Say, Not as I Do? The European Union, Eastern Europe and Minority Rights". *East European Politics and Societies* 17:682-689.

The inter-ethnic context in the first years of transition

The evolution of ethnic relations in Romania can be divided into two periods: 1990-1996 and 1996 onwards. The first period was the most tensioned period for ethnic relations after the fall of Communism. In this section, we emphasize the two main challenges that aroused during this period: the violent clashes between Romanian and Hungarians in March 1990 and the drafting of the first post-Communist constitution.

During the Romanian revolution, in December 1989, the Hungarians formed their own political movement – the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR).⁴³ Together with the social democrats, they have been the only ones that gained seats in every parliamentary election since 1990.

Right after the National Salvation Front (NSF) took over power in December 1989, the DAHR was included in the National Unity Committee, formed in January 1990. Several decrees were issued by the new government, granting minimal facilities for the minorities in Romania, regarding education in their own languages. However, more radical demands of the DAHR were rejected; for instance, the recognition of Hungarian language as the second official language in the Romanian state.

Despite these early signs of cooperation, the inter-ethnic relations in Romania soon turned violent. Following the celebrations of a Hungarian national holiday on March 15th in several Transylvanian towns and villages,

Romanian ultranationalist organizations staged counter-manifestations, claiming that Hungarians, led by the DAHR, are acting to break away Transylvania and to re-unite it with Hungary. These slogans were fuelled by the nationalistic rhetoric of the new democratic government in Hungary, which immediately adopted a protective attitude towards Hungarian communities across its borders. Violent clashes between Romanian nationalists and Hungarian groups led by prominent DAHR leaders left behind numerous dead and wounded people. However, with the exception of the 10 days in which these clashes broke out, there has been no sign of other significant violence in any town or village with mixed population, even though the relations between Romanian and Hungarian communities and between their elites remained tense at that time.

Drafting the new Constitution was another challenging moment from the perspective of the inter-ethnic relations in Romania. In May 1990, the first free elections were held. The new Parliament had as its main goal the drafting of the new Constitution. The DAHR was the second party in Parliament, with over 7% of the seats, while over 70% were held by the NSF.⁴⁴ In the context of the above mentioned violence and what was perceived as an aggressive attitude of the government of Hungary,⁴⁵ the NSF, which gathered many former communists and ultranationalists, managed to introduce in the first article of the

⁴³ The DAHR is not a political party, according to the Romanian law, but an organization representing the Hungarian minority. Similar organizations exist for the other minorities as well – Italians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Bulgarians etc. From the perspective of this paper, we will consider DAHR to be a regular party. It behaves as one: it runs in elections, it is part of governing coalitions, it has a political program, and appoints people for offices at the national and local level.

⁴⁴ See [http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/electer/ro_er_nl.htm], accessed at December 26th, 2006.

⁴⁵ The first right-wing Hungarian government passed a Constitution in which the Hungarian state declares itself responsible for the faith of Hungarian communities living across the borders. Moreover, important politicians at that time asked for the annulment of the Trianon Treaty, signed after World War One, which led to massive territorial losses for Hungary, including Transylvania, parts of Vojvodina (in Serbia) and what is today Southern Slovakia.

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new Constitution provisions that were clearly aimed to deny any kind of autonomist or secessionist intention of the Hungarian minority,⁴⁶ despite the opposition of the DAHR, which rejected the Constitution in Parliament and asked the Hungarian minority to vote against it in the referendum.

The violent clashes from 1990 and the drafting a “nationalist” constitution shaped the actions and strategy of the DAHR and were one of the reasons that sent Romania to the bottom of the list of potential members in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The evolution of the DAHR in domestic politics

Between 1990 and 1992, Romania was ruled by a NSF-led government, while between 1992 and 1996 the NSF formed a coalition with three nationalist parties: the Greater Romania Party (GRP), the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and the Party of Romanian National Unity (PRNU). All these parties, especially the GRP and the PRNU, had strong ties with ultranationalist movements involved in the March 1990 violence in Transylvania (especially the “Romanian Cradle” – *Vatra Romaneasca*). These were single-issue parties,⁴⁷ which frequently appealed to anti-Hungarian and anti-Roma slogans, calling the DAHR “an extremist organization” and accusing it of “genocide” against the Romanians in the regions where Hungarians are the majority. Consequently, the rhetoric of the NSF (renamed PDSR) also became anti-

Hungarian, in order to satisfy its allies, which ensured its support in Parliament. Meanwhile, the discourse of the DAHR was also perceived as extremist. The broad alliance of the opposition forces, called the Democratic Convention, rejected the inclusion of the DAHR candidates in 1995, because of the radical positions adopted by the Hungarian party.⁴⁸ Despite the signing of the bilateral treaty between Romania and Hungary in 1996, Romania was left out of the first group that joined NATO in 1997 and its chances of rapidly opening negotiations with the EU, as most of the other CEE countries had, were slim. The troubled relation of the Romanian state with the minorities living on its territory was one of the reasons frequently mentioned by these bodies. Moreover, Hungary now had the upper hand, with respect to Romania, in relation with both the EU and NATO and could easily point their attention to the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania.

The turning point in the evolution of inter-ethnic relations in Romania was 1996. The Democratic Convention won the elections, committing to a more vigorous effort towards joining the EU and NATO. As a sign of reformist intentions, the Convention and its social-democratic allies⁴⁹ formed a government together with the DAHR, although they already had a majority in Parliament. This signal was very important for Romania's Western ambitions. In July 1997, the US President Bill Clinton visited Bucharest, to re-assure Romania that NATO enlargement will go on, despite not including it in the first wave of new member states. Clinton gave a clear sign that the inclusion of the DAHR in the governing coalition was a wise move, calling

⁴⁶ The first article of the Romanian Constitution is “Romania is a *nation state*, sovereign and independent, *unitary* and *indivisible*”. The italics are not employed in the original text.

⁴⁷ A single-issue party is a party that approaches one central subject in its political program, often representing the interests of one single group in the society. A good example in this respect is the Green parties.

⁴⁸ See See Janusz Bugajski, 2002. *Political parties of Eastern Europe: a guide to politics in the post-Communist era*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, p. 848.

⁴⁹ It was an alliance formed by two smaller leftist parties, not the NSF (FDSN, PDSR, PSD).

Romania “a model of minority accommodation in CEE”.⁵⁰ In 1999, the EU opened their negotiations with Romania. This signified that Romania now fulfilled all the political criteria included established in 1993, including those related to minority protection.

From 1996 the DAHR was permanently an ally of the governing parties. The Democratic Convention lost the elections in 2000, in favour of PDSR.⁵¹ The discourse of this party with respect to the Hungarians had changed, together with adopting a more pro-European attitude. Because PDSR did not have majority on its own, it formed a parliamentary alliance with the DAHR; the Hungarian party opted to stay out of government. However, PDSR was opened to compromise with the DAHR, not only on issues related to minority protection, but also on regular pieces of legislation.

After the 2000 elections, PDSR had the option of forming a governing coalition with its old ally, the GRP. However, the context was very different from that of 1992-1996. Romania received a clear commitment from NATO that it would be in the next wave of enlargement. In 1999, the EU began negotiations with Romania, on the basis that all the afore-mentioned political criteria, including good inter-ethnic relations and satisfactory rights for minorities, had been fulfilled. Meanwhile, the president of the GRP had reached the second round of presidential elections in 2000, causing major concerns among Western states. Allying with the GRP would have been a disastrous step of the new social-democratic government, which had the difficult task of carrying-on the

negotiations with the EU. An alliance with the DAHR was a much wiser move. In the 2000-2004 period there has been no significant complaint regarding the issue of minorities coming from Euro-Atlantic institutions. Moreover, Romania was invited to join NATO in 2002 and it was again referred to as an example for minority accommodation, relevant for a region facing the crisis in Kosovo and in Macedonia at that time.

However, this alliance of former Communists and Hungarian parties would not have been possible without a change in discourse from the DAHR as well. This party should be regarded as an umbrella for several Hungarian movements. From the beginning, it was meant to unite various political streams, both left and right, with the goal of representing the interests of the Hungarians both from the perspective of their particular ethnic background, as well as from an ideological perspective.⁵² The result was a formation that defines itself as a center-right party. But more important, it should also be regarded as a mix of radicals and moderates, with respect to the interests of the Hungarian minority. In the beginning of the transition period, the DAHR was dominated by radicals. One of its most prominent figures was bishop Tokes Laszlo, which was acting as honorary president of the party and had a radical approach, frequently calling for territorial and political autonomy for the regions where Hungarians were the majority.⁵³

⁵⁰ Bill Clinton's speech, given on July 11th, 1997, in the University Square in Bucharest.

⁵¹ The NSF broke into two – PD and FDSN. The latter then changed its name into PDSR and was again renamed PSD in 2001, following several mergers with smaller parties. Throughout the paper, NSF, FDSN, PDSR and PSD stand for the same party.

⁵² See Bugajski, *Ethnic Politics...*, p. 218.

⁵³ Tokes was very popular in Romania, even within the Romanian majority, as he was the center of the outbreak of the 1989 Revolution. He lived in Timisoara and was placed under house arrest in the fall of 1989, for preaching against Ceausescu. Both Romanian and Hungarians came at his residence and shouted anti-Ceausescu slogans, which led to the mobilization of army troops on December 16th. That was the beginning of the Romanian revolution.

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This attitude served the interests of Romanian ultranationalists and was one of the arguments of those who supported the drafting of the first article of the Constitution in its mentioned form. A change in the discourse of the DAHR was noticed in 1993, when moderate Marko Bela became president of the party. Under his leadership, the calls for autonomy were toned down. Instead, the DAHR started to call for greater administrative decentralization, although self-determination on an ethnic basis, as a political objective, was not taken out of the political program. The DAHR's new attitude made it possible for it to be considered as a potential partner for the Democratic Convention in 1996.

The European dimension of the DAHR's political actions

The DAHR gained an important European voice after its successful bid to become a member of the European People's Party (EPP). It applied for membership in 1998 and it received the statute of Associate Member in 1999.⁵⁴ In Bulgaria, the Turkish MRF joined the European Liberal party, while in Slovakia the Hungarian SMK is also a member of the EPP.

The European dimension of the DAHR's political activity has been very significant. In its demands for greater rights, it constantly appealed to European bodies, such as the Council of Europe or the OSCE. In trying to convince the Romanian authorities of the need to grant further rights for minorities, the DAHR constantly appealed to "European norms and standards", pointing out the different models of minority accommodation

⁵⁴ See [<http://www.epp.eu/memberdetail.php?partielD=27&landID=31>], accessed on December 27th, 2006. Associate Membership is the statute given to parties from countries outside the European Union. When Romania becomes member of the EU, the DAHR, as the other two Romanian parties affiliated to EPP, will automatically become full members.

across Western states. The most frequently used examples were the Southern Tyrol region in Italy, the Aaland Islands in Finland or the type of territorial decentralization employed in the UK.

The DAHR was very active also within the Council of Europe. Romania joined this organization in 1993. Since then, it is represented in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) by a delegation, consisting of members of the Romanian Parliament. The DAHR representatives, who currently lead the delegation, have been very active in drafting recommendations and conventions issued by the PACE, with respect to national minorities. Two examples stand out. In 1995, the Framework Convention for National Minorities was adopted, asking member states to give both individual and collective rights to national minorities.⁵⁵ The DAHR representatives were active in drafting the Convention and then used it as an argument in Romanian domestic politics to ask for more rights. In the same time, the Convention and the DAHR involvement in drafting it fuelled anti-Hungarian feelings among the nationalist coalition that was leading Romania at that time.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ For instance, article 3, paragraph 2, says that "[p]ersons belonging to national minorities may exercise the rights and enjoy the freedoms flowing from the principles enshrined in the present framework Convention individually as well as in community with others". See [<http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/157.htm>], accessed on December 28th, 2006.

⁵⁶ To make the Convention, the government of a member state had to sign it and ratify it. Although numerous states in CEE had objections with respect to the provisions of the Convention, most European states signed and ratified the Convention, taking advantage of ambiguous expressions such as "where it is possible" or "where this is the case," which left room for interpretation. However, France and Turkey did not sign and did not ratify the Convention, while Belgium and Greece signed it, but did not ratify it.

The second example is a more recent one. On the 26th of January, 2006, the PACE adopted Recommendation 1735,⁵⁷ which refers to the concept of “nation”. The text of the Recommendation was drafted by the sub-committees for Human Rights and National Minorities, under the supervision of Frunda Gyorgy, a DAHR senator and the current president of the Romanian delegation at the PACE. The Recommendation defines nations on ethnic basis and “invites” all member states to modify their constitutions to include clear references to minorities living on their territories. In this way, every state that defines itself as a “nation state,” like Romania, should remove this expression from its constitution. The adoption of the Recommendation sparked many protests in Romania from several parties, not only nationalistic ones, but also from the parties that are allied with the DAHR in the governing coalition. They accused Frunda Gyorgy of betrayal and asked him to resign from the PACE delegation.

The Romanian Parliament has had on their agenda for two years now a controversial law regarding the statute of national minorities. In 2006, the DAHR persuaded the government to include in the law project provisions, which granted the national minorities “cultural autonomy”.⁵⁸ While the criticism was scarce at the time of the debates in government, in Parliament two of the governing parties disagreed regarding this measure. They argued that giving cultural

autonomy to minorities is against the Constitution, because the state would lose control over some aspects concerning the minorities and, implicitly, part of its sovereignty. The DAHR had a strong lobbying activity within the EPP, counting on the support of the right-wing nationalistic Hungarian party FIDESZ, which is also a member of this European party. In the context of the vivid debates in Romania, FIDESZ MEP Gyorgy Schopflin argued in the European Parliament that the Romanian authorities are willingly assimilating the *ceangai* population, which has a Hungarian ethnic background, bringing with him a short movie as evidence. Furthermore, in the country report on Romania issued by the European Parliament in the spring of 2006, the EPP MEP’s managed to impose an amendment urging Romania to take concrete action in order to protect and extend the rights of minorities, explicitly mentioning the need to grant them cultural autonomy. The DAHR immediately took advantage of this amendment to put pressure on the Romanian Parliament in the phase of final efforts to finish the necessary preparations for the EU accession in 2007.

Conclusions on the first hypothesis

The existence of ethnic parties and their involvement in governing coalitions has had a positive influence. The evolution of the DAHR on the Romanian political stage can be divided in two periods: 1990-1996 (the “radical” years) and from the elections of 1996 onwards (the “moderate” years). The first period overlaps with Romania’s efforts to enter the Council of Europe, which was successful in 1993, and its efforts to join NATO, which failed. The second period coincides with Romania’s successful –

⁵⁷ The recommendations issued by the PACE are not obligatory for member states, unless they are adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

⁵⁸ “Cultural autonomy” is also requested by the MRF in Bulgaria and has been asked by the Hungarian parties when the Slovakian Constitution in 1992. This would mean, in essence, self-governing only on issues related to education or cultural activities in the language of minorities.

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although slower – bid to join the EU and with the successful admission into NATO. In the first period, Romania was ruled by nationalists, experienced inter-ethnic violence, while the DAHR was isolated, even by the opposition parties. In the second period, the relations between Hungarians and Romanians were considerably improved and the DAHR was part of all three government coalitions formed since then. The only tensed moment from the 1996 was witnessed in 2006, following the debates on the law regarding the statute of minorities, the demand of Hungarian professors in the mixed Transylvanian town of Cluj-Napoca to have a state university in Hungarian,⁵⁹ the call for administrative autonomy of DAHR leader Marko Bela for territorial and administrative autonomy of the regions where Hungarians are the majority and the protests of Romanian parties over the DAHR's involvement in the adoption of Recommendation 1735 by the PACE.

This article does not show nor does it try to prove the existence of causal relationships between the presence of the Hungarian ethnic party in government and the fulfilment of Romania's strategic goals, set from the beginning of the 1990's. Causality is hard to be assessed in the conditions of multiple endogenous and exogenous variables that

can lead to an increased level of "Europeanization" in Romania: the democratic performances, the elites' status, the solving of the simultaneity dilemma or the connections established at international level. However, it is obvious that there is association between the presence of the DAHR in governing coalitions and the "Europeanization" of Romania. This is not a coincidence. Western leaders, such as US President Bill Clinton, sent clear signals that the presence of the DAHR in government proves Romania's commitment to reforms and minority protection. Moreover, the Euro-Atlantic institutions, whose membership Romania was aiming to attain – the EU and NATO – no longer used the issue of minorities to justify a reserved approach towards Romania's bid for membership. Moreover, the presence of minorities in the decision-making process and the joint efforts of majority and minority populations toward EU accession provided a solid basis for fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria with respect to minorities' rights. Furthermore, a high degree of DAHR involvement in the government after 1996 coincides with the modification of the Hungarian government and officials' positions towards Romania at the international level, declarations such as that of Tom Lantos (where he blamed Romania in 1996 for problems regarding minority rights being heard little -if any- afterwards). Therefore, our main hypothesis finds support in the Romanian case.

Conclusions on the second hypothesis

However, the influence of ethnic parties was not always positive. This relates to our second hypothesis, concerning the European dimension of the DAHR's political activity. The

⁵⁹ In Cluj-Napoca, before the Communist period, there was a Romanian University, "Victor Babeş", and a Hungarian University, "Bolyai Janos". The Communists merged the two universities, and the new university was named "Babeş-Bolyai" that exists today, with three lines of teaching: Romanian, Hungarian and German. A group of Hungarian professors within this university have asked for its division, according to the pre-communist models, while others have asked for the maintenance of the current arrangement, as a positive sign of a multi-cultural university, but also for the creation of a new state university for Hungarians. Both demands have been rejected by the government and by the heads of the Babes-Bolyai University.

DAHR became active within European organizations following the accession of Romania in the Council of Europe in 1993, but became a more significant actor after its accession in the EPP, in 1999. Within the PACE, the DAHR representatives had a significant role in the drafting of Recommendation 1735 by the PACE.⁶⁰ As a result, Romania was put on the spot by Western politicians, especially within the EPP, although the EU as a whole did not get involved in the debate. The DAHR was also very active in persuading EPP MEP's to ask the Romanian authorities to grant cultural autonomy for Hungarians and other national minorities.⁶¹ Romania was often put on the spot within the EU and had to give explanations regarding the issue of their minorities, although it was caught in crucial negotiations which initially did not include this problem. This evidence supports our secondary hypothesis.

The evidence brought in favour of the two hypotheses shows that the role of ethnic parties in the transition process has been primarily a positive one, but also had negative consequences. During the "radical" years, the DAHR, rather than being a credible partner for discussion as a representative of the Hungarian community, contributed to the continuous inter-ethnic

tensions that dominated the Romanian political life in the first years of the transition. The moderation of the DAHR's discourse led to its being co-opted by the Romanian reformist governments, which hastened the Europeanization of Romania. However, moderation on the domestic political scene coincided with continuous efforts of the DAHR on the international scene to pressure the Romanian government, with the help of international organizations, to implement more pro-minority legislation.

Further research

Romania is one of the cases that can be used to test this hypothesis. There are two other similar cases in CEE: Slovakia and Bulgaria. There is solid ground for conducting a comparative study in a "most similar systems design" on these three states. Both of them are former communist states. In Bulgaria, there is a wide Turkish minority, representing 9.4% of the population, concentrated in Western Bulgaria,⁶² while in Slovakia there is a Hungarian minority of 9.7%, concentrated in the South of the country, along the border with Hungary.⁶³

They both faced difficult beginnings in their transitions. Bulgaria faced political and economical instability, while in Slovakia the beginning of transition was dominated by the disputes that led to the separation of Czechoslovakia and started its evolution as an independent state only in 1993, under the rule of left-wing ultranationalist Vladimir Meciar. In comparison with what Vachudova and Hooge

⁶⁰ The recommendations of the PACE regarding fields such as minority protection, the environment or human rights usually become minimal criteria to be fulfilled by candidate countries.

⁶¹ One should not overlook the importance of signals coming from the EPP. Leaving aside extremist parties across Europe, the most vocal opponents with respect to the admission of Romania and Bulgaria in the EU in 2007 came from within the EPP and the affiliated parties in member states. The German Christian-Democrats or the British Conservatives are the most prominent examples. Moreover, the EPP is currently forming the largest group in the European Parliament.

⁶² These data is based on the 2002 census in Bulgaria. See [https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bu.html#People], accessed at December 24th, 2006.

⁶³ These data is based on the 2001 census in Slovakia. See [https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/lo.html#People], accessed on December 24th, 2006.

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call the “frontrunners” in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration – Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic⁶⁴ – Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia have experienced in the beginning of their transitions a combination of challenges posed by the existence of minorities on their territories and political domination of nationalist and former communist parties.

In both Bulgaria and Slovakia, minorities formed their own political movements. In Bulgaria, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) was formed in January 1990 and is representing the Turkish minority.⁶⁵ In Slovakia, there have been four Hungarian parties forming after the fall of the communist regime: the Co-existence, the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (HCDM), the Hungarian Civic Party (HCP) and the Hungarian People’s Party. They united into a one single movement in 1994, called the Hungarian Coalition in Slovakia (SMK).⁶⁶

As in Romania, the ethnic parties in Bulgaria and Slovakia were not present in governing coalitions in the early years of transition. However, the presence of the SMK in the Slovakian government from 1998 to 2006 and the presence of the MRF in the Bulgarian government from 2001 to 2005 coincide with the most successful periods of

these two states, with respect to their Europeanization. Such a comparative study, after taking into consideration other variables, could go as far as establishing if there is a causal link between the presence of ethnic parties in government and the speeding up of the Europeanization processes, by using the QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis) methodology.

One very important aspect that should not be overlooked in future research is that the position of the “traditional” ethnic parties, such as the DAHR in Romania and the MRF in Bulgaria, is now challenged from within their own communities. New ethnic parties try to form in each state. This leads to a paradox. If the number of parties representing the minority increases, they could actually end up with no representation at all. The DAHR constantly scored around 7%, always gaining the votes of the Hungarian electorate. As the threshold for gaining seats in Parliament is 5%, a division within the minority could mean the absence of any Hungarian party in the legislative body and, consequently, in governing coalitions.

Although the conclusions of this case-study are particular, it provides two advantages. On the one hand, being the first to establish the relationship between Europeanization and ethnic parties, this article can be used as a documentation basis for further research. On the other hand, its scope can be broadened to other states in the new EU-27, especially to those who have joined recently. Besides Bulgaria, with explicit references within our text, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovakia are also relevant cases for analysis due to the existence of ethnic parties.

⁶⁴ See Milada Anna Vachudova and Liesbet Hooghe. “Post-Communist Politics in a Magnetic Field. How Transition and EU Accession Structure Party Competition on European Integration”. Vienna, May 2005. Available at [www.unc.edu/~hooghe/downloads/Vachudova%20+%20Hooghe%20Transition%20+%20Accession.pdf], accessed on December 26th, 2006.

⁶⁵ Due to the fact that it failed to register a Party for Freedom and Rights, the MRF appealed also to other minorities, such as the *Pomak* population, to show that it is not just a Turkish party and, therefore, can participate in elections. See Bugajski, *Ethnic Politics...*, p. 250.

⁶⁶ See Janusz Bugajski, 2002. *Political parties of Eastern Europe: a guide to politics in the post-Communist era*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 343-346.

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