

THE DISCURSIVE CONFIGURATION OF ROMANIAN POLITICAL IDENTITY:

Elite Reactions to Hungarian Demands for Minority Rights (1996-2009)

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Abstract

The identity profiles discursively shaped by the Romanian and Hungarian political elites have been antagonistic throughout the post-communist period: while the former is outlined in the logic of *standardization*, the latter is marked out in terms of *accommodation*. The first identity frame is characterized by the following elements: the preservation of rigid norms and structures in the socio-political sphere, the desire to extract full compliance to them even when they are not expressive of a different background (ethnic, cultural etc.), the assimilation of non-conformity to social rules with “disloyalty” to the state, reluctance to engage in negotiations that might curtail their decision-making monopoly. On the other hand, the latter has as markers the subsequent elements: a visible dynamic stance as a means for engaging in negotiations that generate consensual rather than one-sided decisions, the aspiration to challenge the present social or political organization, attachment of great importance to targeted norms, which allow for the free expression of minority identity at all levels. Seeing that the existing literature has generally analyzed the Hungarian elites’ minority rights discourse expressive of the above-mentioned features, the present article will explore the discursive stances of the Romanian political elites on the topic.

Introductory Remarks

The negotiations made in view of the adoption of various normative acts regulating state-minority relations in post-communist Romania have engendered significant progress in this field as compared with the early ‘90s. They have not, nevertheless, entailed profound changes in the construction of a *political community* with ties resulting from common objectives. In this study’s contention, the discourses of the Hungarian and Romanian political representatives are explanatory for this failure. They shall be addressed subsequently, with an emphasis on the discursive reactions of the Romanian political elites. The article’s findings will point to the fact that the process of negotiation concerning minority rights has yielded important normative changes, but less of a genuine and multi-

layered rapprochement between the Romanian and Hungarian communities.

This article acknowledges the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach as a most suited qualitative research method, which has inquired into the role of discourse in legitimating rigid views about the collective ethnic self and further ethnic groups coexisting in the bounds of the same society. Such discourses have generally established relations of majority self-perception of superiority and minority self or attributed perception of inferiority. The creation of such a dominant - subject type of relation has obviously generated various forms of reaction from minority groups, among which discursive ones, which CDA studies (see Fairclough 1993, 1995, 1997, 2003). This is extremely relevant from the point of view of analyzing how political discourse forms the political identity of an ethnic group (be it in majority or in minority in a given society), because discourse becomes one of the most compelling tools of socialization of the general population or segments within it. Moreover, critical discourse analysis reveals how majority and minority political elites bargain their demands or concessions for the enactment of minority rights, and what elements do they appeal to justify their respective stances. Beyond the divisions in interpretation, focus or methodology, *discourse analysis* lays significant emphasis on understanding and identifying the effects produced by discourse at social, political and psychological levels.

The political representative of the Hungarian minority in Romania (UDMR - Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) has constantly challenged the institutional monopoly held by the Romanian elites. Following the 1996 elections, when UDMR joined the governing coalition, the Romanian elite domination over the aforementioned institutional spheres engaged in a process of gradual - yet limited - retrenchment. As a result of the bargaining leverage acquired by UDMR following the 1996 elections, as well as due to international pressures (i.e. EU integration) majority and minority elites negotiated the extension of the minority rights framework in Romania. One principal recurring element that made up UDMR discourse referred to the five key dimensions listed above. They also represented the strategic points around which UDMR structured its demands. Apart from their value in protecting and promoting the ethnocultural, linguistic and religious identity of the Hungarians in Romania, they also had marked political implications that are relevant for the balance of institutional power in these fields.

In the case of majority-minority relations, there are *five key dimensions* where power relations have been most intensely disputed in what concerns Romanians and Hungarians in post-communist Romania: *education, administration, culture, media* and the *judiciary*. These fields are institutionalized, as is the control of various elites over them. In a state where the nation building process is incomplete, the institutions that are responsible for the coordination of this process almost inevitably lie under the control of the political representatives of the national majority. The topics concerning *education* and *administration* have been attributed the highest importance in UDMR discourse, as they bear increased relevance over the *political power* relations between the Hungarian community and the Romanian state – especially when correlated with *autonomy* demands. UDMR demands relating to these two fields have encountered a higher degree of reluctance from Romanian political parties. Fervent reactions were released due to the fact that demands for mother tongue education at all levels contain the claim that is the major contestation of the political power held by the majority: *autonomous decision-making* in matters related directly to the interests of the Hungarian community in Romania. The claims regarding bilingualism in administration, regionalization, and decentralization are also contending elements that challenge state control. These two types of claim (in education and administration) – once pushed to their higher confines – result in the *autonomy* demands that have been rejected without right to appeal by Romanian political elites throughout the post-1989 time frame. These two themes consequently have the strongest relevance for Romanian – Hungarian power relations in the socio-political arena. In other words, the political claims voiced by UDMR have attempted and partially succeeded in curtailing the authority of the Romanian elites “to define the ethnic situation” (van Dijk, 1996) in post-communist Romania. The following pages represent an analysis of how the discourse of Romanian elites has influenced this process.

I. Political Power Contested: General Overview of Majority Elites’ Reactions

The post-communist period in Romania has witnessed a rhetoric battle between the centralizing Romanian political elites and the challenging Hungarian elites. UDMR representatives have argued for the self-administration of the local communities as a reconciliation device for minority-majority relations. This, in practical terms, means that the leaders of local state institutions could engage in projects or decisions that did not necessitate the approval of central authorities, but which could have a

major sway over the manner in which the ethnic Hungarians conduct their existence.

Romanian elites have interpreted this demand as a significant decrease of their political and social power. They have adhered to an argument which states that the acquiescence to minority demands would aggravate the separation of a large part of the Hungarian community from the other Romanian citizens. *Integration* - in the understanding attributed to it by majority elites - would no longer be possible and interethnic communication would consequentially be hampered. On the other side of the argument there is the claim of UDMR, stating that *integration* can be successfully achieved only in terms of the *equal opportunities* criterion. One of its forms of implementation would also be - UDMR argues - in the prospect of Hungarians to have binding decision-making powers in matters that concern them directly. Political power that results from the control over political institutions is vital in this sense. Although the Hungarian community is very active in terms of social issues, a field where various associations, foundations and organizations fulfill the task of promoting the markers of Hungarian identity, this does not entail political power. Moreover, control over state institutions - be they at a local level - implies more than issues of *identity* or *justice*. They have an important *economic* facet, as controlling public institutions entails the control over the allocation of budgetary resources. It therefore becomes apparent that the demands to political decision-making powers would provide the logistic support for the continuation of minority nation-building that is considerably more difficult to achieve only through social activism.

The central UDMR argument in and outside parliamentary debates was that the Hungarians were a political community that had the right to protect and reproduce its specific identity features (as regards culture, language and religion) through autonomous institutional means. This type of claims was made in two domains that were vital for the socialization of Romania's citizens according to the values upheld by the Romanian elites: education and administration. Ceding autonomy of decision-making in these two domains to the Hungarians has been inconceivable for the Romanian authorities, since that would automatically disrupt the standing state organization and lead to a decrease of political power and control. Ever since, UDMR demands have been accepted only as long the upshot is not the instatement of autonomy for the Hungarian community (cultural or territorial).

The patent division separating Romanian and Hungarian stances remains to this day the same: *autonomy*. The Hungarians (as well as the other national minorities in Romania) have the right to make free use of their language in education, local public administration, in judiciary proceedings and in all types of mass media). However, these rights are more cultural than they are political. The demands that have an accentuated feature that implies political power have been constantly denied and continue to raise fiery contestation on the part of Romanian political elites, without significant distinctions between the sides of the political continuum.

As a rejoinder to Hungarian claims of partial independence from *majority* political authority, Romanian parties have displayed an approach that can be termed as “politics of negation” (Connolly, 2002). In reply to the politics of identity sustained by UDMR discourse, Romanian political parties reacted with the above-mentioned strategy in relation with what has been perceived as radical claims to *autonomy*. In relation with demands that were perceived as less threatening for the integrity of the Romanian state (such as language use in primary, secondary and even some tertiary types of education, in relation with local public administration bodies, in the media or in the judicial actions), the majority proved more inclined to follow the *politics of concession*.

To even the most faultfinding observer of the evolution of Romanian-Hungarian relations, the post-communist period has yielded remarkable positive developments. The level of national minority rights has reached an unprecedented peak at the level of adopted normative acts (175) (Salat 2008), although the implementation of some of them has proved even more strenuous than their adoption at times. It is therefore beguiling that the mere utterance of the word *autonomy* in 2009 inflames the same type of virulent reaction on the part of Romanian politicians as it did at the beginning of the 1990s. Some of the arguments brought by the majority parties’ representatives against this claim addressed by the political representatives of the Hungarian minority have an objective basis: as it is, the Romanian Constitution (Art.1, Art. 152) cannot support the territorial-administrative reorganization of the state in keeping the autonomy principle.

However, the objectivity of this unequivocal argument under the present constitutional context does not explain the panic syndrome that infuses discourses without leaving any leeway for a minimal dialogue in this sense.

On the other hand, the utterance of this claim by UDMR leaders is not accompanied with a detailed strategy that could sustain their claims. To the Hungarians claims of *autonomy*, the Romanians oppose a discursive offer of *decentralization*. In reality, this principle is not backed by pragmatic strategies, measures and actions.

The discourse of the post-communist Romanian political parties can be placed within three categories, although the differences between are to be traced in some respects, while in others they do not have dissimilar discourses: the *radicals*, the *swinglers* and the *moderates*. The discursive argumentative strategies of the Romanian parties that can be placed within these three categories are analyzed in the subsequent sub-sections.

II. Majority Key Discursive Themes

The following sub-sections address the key themes present in several Romanian parties' discourse during the post-communist period with the aim to analyze how the expressed demands configure the political identity of the Romanian community as a response to Hungarian claims. The discourses have been selected according to their relevance for the intra and/ or extra-parliamentary debates concerning language use in education, local public administration and autonomy demands. The subsequent analysis is based to a large extent on parliamentary discourses held by the subsequently analyzed Romanian parties' representatives during the analyzed time-frame. The following *Official Journal* of Romania issues are quoted in the present article, although a considerably larger number of issues was researched in order to select relevant elements of discourse: 205/ 1997, 73/ 1999, 92/ 1999, 121/ 1999, 122/ 1999, 12/ 2001, and 13/ 2001.

II. 1. The Radicals

In what concerns the first type of discourse, this has been linearly articulated by the two ultranationalist parties that have gained parliamentary representation in Romania beginning with 1990: Greater Romania Party (PRM) and the Party of the National Unity of the Romanians (PUNR). PUNR merged with the Conservative Party (PC) in 2006, at a time when PC was still one of the parties forming the governmental coalition that ensued after the 2004 general elections, next to the Democratic Party (PD), the Liberal Party (PNL) and the Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). PRM and PUNR were the governing allies of the Party of the Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR)

from 1994 to 1996, when the lack of dialogue between Romanian and Hungarians at a political level was a marked feature of the public space.

Until 2008, when it no longer reached the 5% threshold for entering the Parliament, PRM discourse has voiced the most radical contentions against the demands of UDMR. Whether these were related to language use at any level or in relations with local public administration authorities, PRM representatives have alerted against the alleged *irredentist* UDMR tendencies, against its *disloyalty* toward the Romanian state, against its supposed *conspiracies* with the Hungarian state etc. These elements of anti-Hungarian discourse are hardly proven arguments, but rather groundless accusations that are repeated regardless of the context.

This study uses a selection of parliamentary discourses of PRM representatives. On various occasions - such as the proposed modifications to the 1995 Education Law, and the 1991 Local Public Administration Law, the 2003 revision of Romania's Constitution, the 2008 debates concerning the position adopted by Romania with regard to the self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo etc. - PRM discourse disregarded punctual, often legal matters that formed the object of the debates and engaged in rhetorically aggressive condemnation of all UDMR demands and implicitly of the legal provisions that represented the focus of the debate. The analysis of the language used by PRM representatives in Parliament yields the following result: the key words employed almost invariably throughout 18 years are evidence of *politics of rejection* of all minority rights claims.

The following lines present a short selection of some of the aforementioned terms and phrases: "enclave", "isolation", "irredentist claims", "separatism", "obscure interests", "blackmail", "privileges", "segregationist demands", "rights to segregation", "impairment of the Romanian state", "plots against the Romanian state", "self-government is tantamount to the decomposition of the Romanian national unitary state", "defiance of the Constitution", "territorial integrity", "assault against the independence and sovereignty of the country", "UDMR is an irredentist and extremist Hungarian organization", "anti-constitutional", "sovereignty", "ethnic reservation", "forces that loom from the darkness of history", "ethnic cleansing", "bilingual signs infiltrated in localities and institutions", "threatening state security" etc.

The following selection from a PRM representative discourse held during the parliamentary debates on the amendments regarding minority language use to the Law on Education is revealing:

PRM parliamentary group voted against the separation of higher education on ethnic criteria, respectively on the endorsement of segregation on racial or religious criteria in higher education. [...] Consequentially, this implies that the founding of a faculty or university with Hungarian or any other minority language as the sole tuition language [...] and defying the Constitution. (Stanciu 1999)

In the view of the ultranationalist and populist PRM approach, the only option for higher education was the multicultural one, which “protects both the right to education of citizens belonging to national minorities *over* [emphasis added] the European standards and the official standing of the Romanian language” (Stanciu 1999). The option to be made was allegedly not for ethnic segregation and parallel education, but for “a multicultural university, where the teaching of the Romanian language would constitute the guarantee of national unity” (Stanciu 1999).

PRM and PUNR discourses were deprecatory of UDMR demands all the more as regards debates in parliament concerning administrative reforms. UDMR supported normative items were allegedly

[...] anti-Romanian, anti-constitutional, imposing by law the Hungarian language as the second official language of Romania, thus breaching the provisions of Art. 13 in the Romanian Constitution and creating the bases of territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds (Stanciu 2001).

PRM and PUNR discourses have called attention to the principles of *equality*, but defined from an antagonistic angle to that of UDMR. While for the latter equality has meant the adoption and implementation of norms and measures that lead to fairness of opportunities, for PRM this definition has been labeled as granting of *privileges* or *additional rights*.

II. 2. The Swingers

As regards the second category of discourse outlined above, the rhetoric of the Social Democrats (Party of the Social Democracy in Romania – PDSR,

which became the social-democratic Party – PSD in 2001) warrants a separate analysis. The evolution of party's discourse on minority rights is illustrative for rhetoric adaptation to the national and international political context. During 1990-1996, PDSR showed no willingness to cooperate with the Hungarian party and allied itself with the PRM and PUNR ultranationalists, while the party's rhetoric emphasized the importance of protecting state integrity, unity and security rather than the importance of protecting minorities for the development of a democratic regime. It was during this mandate that the 1991 Administration law and the 1995 Education law were passed, in almost complete disregard to minority rights.

During 1996-2000, PDSR rested represented the political opposition and pronounced itself against the amendments concerning minority language use during the debates on the modification of the Education and Administration laws. During the 2000-2004 mandate, PDSR/ PSD won the general and presidential elections, but its majority in Parliament was weak. On the basis of yearly protocols of collaboration, PDSR/ PSD negotiated for UDMR's support in passing normative acts. The pressure of the EU integration process and its demands for administrative reforms considerably aided UDMR bid for minority language use in administration. The approval of revisions of the Local Public Administration law in 2001 was very speedy in comparison with the protracted discussions in 1999 concerning similar topics and the disinclination of PDSR/ PSD to vote such provisions. Relevant in this sense is the following assertion of Ecaterina Andronescu, high-ranking PDSR member and the future Minister of Education during 2000-2003: "We did not vote against the Education Law. We voted against separation grounded on ethnic criteria" (Andronescu 1999). It should be added that during 1996-2000, PDSR/ PSD discourse was targeted against the entire governing coalition, of which UDMR was a member.

Another relevant sample of pre-2000 PDSR discourse related to minority language rights was given by PDSR Senator Viorel Ștefan, who incriminated President Constantinescu's actions as encouraging "territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds" (Ștefan 1999) and detrimental to the "unity and territorial integrity of the state" (Ștefan 1999). This occurred following the 1996-2000 mandate when PDSR, together with PRM and PUNR, attempted to disrupt the voting of normative adjustments with a view to national minority rights (as those referring to minority language use in

education and local public administration). As mentioned above, the 2000 elections recalibrated the political relations between the Hungarians and the Social Democrats. The two parties signed a series of yearly collaboration protocols that prescribed mutual support for a series of parliamentary legislative initiatives. Pressured by the EU-demanded reforms, PDSR pushed several legislative items through Parliament, among which there were also those that were relevant for public administration (the local public administration law, the statute of civil servants, the law concerning public information, the law concerning the regional reorganization of Romania). Among these normative items, the Local Public Administration Law was the most relevant for Romania's national minorities, including the Hungarians. However, the support given to PDSR also marked a turning point for the relationship between the Hungarian elites and UDMR's voters and also between the UDMR elites themselves. At that time, a crisis in the identity of the Hungarian party was already brewing.

One element that deserves emphasis is the difficulty in achieving a common sense of identity or in establishing a common socio-political project, despite the numerous efforts made to establish a complex and functional minority rights framework. This reality is also visible in PDSR/ PSD discourse, despite its formal revision imposed by the domestic and international political context after 2000. The normative items that were passed during the 2000-2004 mandate were the result of compromises that did not contribute to a transformation in identity frames on either part. Sustaining its parliamentary ally, PDSR representative Octav Cozmanca argued in 2001 that the articles most intensely debated did comply with constitutional provisions; moreover, they represented precisely "the upholding of Art. 13 in the Constitution" (Cozmâncă 2001).

Contextual as they may have been, the equally advantageous relationship between PDSR/ PSD and UDMR yielded significant legislative improvements in terms of minority language use. The procedural cost-benefit approach to the adoption of such normative items, however, is still visible in the implementation sector. Often deficient in suitable implementation mechanisms, such provisions often remain on paper (Horváth, Ra , Vitos 2006).

A significant debate topic that generated renewed contentions in the Romanian-Hungarians political relations was linked with *regionalization* and *decentralization*. The debate was carried on at the political level, but also

at an intellectual one – a noteworthy development, since it represented a Hungarian-Romanian initiative. The *Provincia* group was very active for a number of years, abruptly ending its endeavor in 2002. Reviving the interwar paradigm of *Transylvaniam* as a solution for the Romanian-Hungarian dilemma, the intellectuals that were part of this group advocated the necessity of reinforcing a regional identity for Transylvania, one in which Romanians and Hungarians alike (as well as the other minorities living there) would find absolving. The ossified stances of the political parties on both sides, however, failed to acknowledge the arguments that were brought in what has represented during the post-communist period the most ample intellectual debate on minority rights that coalesced Romanians and Hungarians with common objectives.

A disinclined supporter of decentralization and regionalization, PSD has appealed to discursive strategies that identified a direct correlation between regionalization on ethnic criteria and “enclavization”, “segregation” and eventually “federalization”, evoking a historically rooted and elite-manipulated fear of losing Transylvania. The reluctance of PSD to any form of decentralization lies far beyond ethnic considerations, and extends to the centralized structure of a party permeated by former communist *nomenklatura*.

PDSR/ PSD discourse has formally tailored its discursive strategies to various political contexts, but this failed to surpass superficial levels. Confronted with minority claims that challenged the state organizational structure, PSD declined any possibility of genuine participation in a process that would involve critical self-analysis and reconsideration of Romanian and Hungarian political identity frames. The Social democrats were not alone in this stance – along with them stood all parliamentary parties, UDMR included.

II. 3. The Moderates

As regards the third type of discourse, this analysis analyzes the discursive strategies of the following Romanian parties, in the course of the following electoral terms: 1996-2000 (the National Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, the National Peasant Christian Democratic Party); and throughout 2000-2004 and 2004-2008 (the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Party).

II. 3. a. *The National Liberal Party (PNL)*

While in opposition, after a four-year governing coalition with UDMR, former PNL President Valeriu Stoica declared that “the Liberals sincerely believed that the UDMR ethnic project was subordinated to its liberal project” (Stoica 2001), but “recent evolution of UDMR in relation [...] with Hungary’s political initiatives [the so-called *Status Law*] raises a number of questions concerning the liberal or in fact ethnic features of UDMR project” (Stoica 2001). Concluding, Stoica avowed that PNL “supported the concept of a *civic nation* [emphasis added], not ethnic nation [...]” (Stoica 2001). PNL discourse has moved back and forth between offering rhetorical sponsorship to the protection of the individual rights of Romania’s citizens (including those of a different ethnic background than the majority) and recognizing the values of diversity on the one side, and defending the unity and integrity of the Romanian state. Avowing a liberal point of view, the preservation of the rights of citizens belonging to national minorities has been given a distinctly individual connotation.

During the debate on administrative reform, PNL contended against “an anachronistic argument - ethnic belonging” (PNL press release 2003), arguing that UDMR was protecting only the interests of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, without regard to the wider social elements by sustaining the claim that the creation of an autonomy for the poorly developed Szeklar region would have as outcome the preservation of economic scarcity. This would result in “ethnic enclavization” (PNL press release 2003) in PNL’s understanding of the concept, which would furthermore lead to “the curtailment of the rights of the ethnic Romanians [...]” (PNL press release 2003) living in such a region with Hungarian majority population. Nevertheless, the rejection of the institutionalization of autonomy was counterbalanced in PNL discourse by the avowed support for the “reform of local public administration”, due to its high importance (Stoica 2001).

Situated in the same line of reason as the other Romanian parties, PNL has heightened the importance of protecting the status of the Romanian language, as “according to the Constitution [...] the official language is the Romanian language, while the citizens are equal as regards the law and public authorities, without privileges and discrimination” (Popa 1999). PNL has argued that minority languages cannot acquire the status of official languages: “We cannot use another language in dealings with state institutions apart from the Romanian language, as prescribed in the Constitution” (Popa 1999).

Concerning the debates on local administration, a 2002 document expressing PNL stance on regionalization argued for the importance of subsidiarity, which was seen as representing an essential factor in “the construction of an authentic democracy in Romania, based on equal legitimacy of the various levels of power: local, county, regional and national” (PNL release 2002). What is more, regionalization was deemed as an appropriate unit “for the application of the values that lie at the basis of European integration”. (PNL release 2002) PNL sustained in the above-mentioned document the connection between the creation of sustainable and co-dependent institutions at both the regional and local level, acknowledging that “regional development ought not be accomplished to the disadvantage of local community autonomy” (PNL release 2002).

Additionally, PNL supported a heavily employed argument on the Romanian political stage, namely that regionalization and the autonomy given to local communities were rigorously interlinked with due “loyalty towards the national unitary state and the deference for sovereignty and territorial integrity” (PNL release 2002). This would – in PNL interpretation - not prevent national minorities from possessing “guarantees according to the European norms” (PNL release 2002). It is worth noting that PNL practical-level representation of regionalization was rooted in “regional autonomy” (PNL release 2002). In the meaning ascribed by it in PNL view, the concept stood for “the right and the effective capacity for territorial communities to [...] administer an important part of the public activities, under their own responsibility and in the interest of the population they represent” (PNL release 2002). The qualification brought to that statement that could easily be interpreted in favor of granting territorial autonomy (to the predominately Hungarian region included) came in the following form and content: “The principle of regional autonomy must be recognized by the Constitution, and ought not to affect the principle of state [territorial] integrity” (PNL release 2002).

Even during the 2005-2008 mandate, when UDMR and PNL shared the governing reins, PNL President and Romania’s PM, Călin Popescu - Tăriceanu, displayed a discourse similar in structure and argumentation to the other Romanian parties, discarding any possibility of surpassing the barriers that had already been reached and were evident in the unwillingness of the Parliament to adopt the *Draft Law for the Status of National Minorities*. In this sense, Tăriceanu declared himself as a stern supporter of decentralization and “more specifically of local autonomy”

(Popescu Tăriceanu 2006), but without any recourse to ethnic belonging in the delineation of the spheres of authority in this sense.

Briefly sketched in this analysis, PNL rhetoric on minority rights has proven to oscillate in dependence with the same factors that are noticeable in the cases of the other majority parties. The limits of support for minority rights are immediately visible when transgressing the borders between cultural rights (defined here as right to language use in education, the media and administration) and demands that – once granted – would result in conceding a significant share of political power and lose control on a part of the decision-making process in certain respects.

II. 3. b. National Peasant Christian Democratic Party (PNTCD)

Since the 2000 elections, PN CD (one of the historic interwar-based Romanian parties) has become a fringe party on the Romanian political scene. During 1996-2000, when it was the leading party of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR) and one of the governing parties, PN CD displayed a discursive strategy that supported minority rights to a certain extent and also implicitly any productive form of political communication. Following the 1990-1996 time-span, the political will to engage in dialogue was incontestable. A supporter of minority language use in education, PN CD was also favorable to the preservation of the interethnic and multicultural frame of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj. Therefore, PN CD also turned a blind eye to UDMR demands for the establishment of a separate state-financed Hungarian university. Virgil Petrescu observed that the amendments brought to the education law contain the provisions necessary for the Romanian language to be “studied, appropriated and learnt by all citizens, regardless of the nationality” (Petrescu 1999). In what regards higher education, the PN CD representative states that “restrictions regarding minority language use in education must be eliminated [...] but the integration [of all Romanian citizens] cannot be made through institutional separation at the university level” (Petrescu 1999). Multicultural institutions are favored instead, as they include Romanian as one of the tuition languages.

II. 3. c. The Democratic Party (PD)

Part of the governing coalition of 1996-2000, PD agreed that the Law on Education needed to be modified with regard to provisions regarding minority language use, at the same time avowing its respect for pluralism. The debate on the establishment of a separate Hungarian university did, however, bring to the surface the confines of PD support for minority

rights. The concern for the “unitary and national character of the Romanian state” (Filipescu 1997) delineated the boundary between defending diversity and the discarding claims for minority rights that surpassed the *safety level* (namely undivided political control on the part of majority representatives). However, in what concerns minority language use in education (especially the Hungarian language), PD proved as resilient as the other Romanian parties in supporting any minority claims that incorporated an element of autonomous decision-making.

In what concerns the Local Public Administration law, PD argued that it sustained the minority-relevant modifications for the following reasons:

[...] it is undoubtedly a European law, one that lays in our path towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration [...] It is an important piece from a mechanism that regards the reform of local and central public administration and the accomplishment of the principle of local autonomy that is stipulated under Art. 119 in the Romanian Constitution (Onisei 2001)

A clear change is thus visible in the PD discursive strategy when referring to the issue of local autonomy. In 1997, a PD representative referred to this principle as resting “outside the legal international standards and can lead to the serious undermining of state sovereignty” (Filipescu 1997). Twelve years later, a PD-L representative (PD merged in December 2007 with the Liberal Democratic Party, thus forming the Democrat-Liberal Party) reasoned that local autonomy epitomizes “a modern form of expression of the principle of decentralization [...]” (Ialomi ianu 2009). Moreover, the reassigning of decision-making and responsibilities to the local authorities “represents an important resource of economic growth [...]” (Ialomi ianu 2009). The discursive swing is significant from this viewpoint, but it does not overlap with UDMR claims regarding local autonomy, as PD-L continues to be adamantly opposed to taking into account ethnicity as a criterion for regionalization or decentralization in Romania.

During 2005-2007, PD was part of the governing coalition, together with PNL and UDMR. On the eve of Romania’s accession to the EU (1 January 2007), the Draft Law on the Status of National Minorities represented the main hurdle as regards minority rights between the Romanian and Hungarian parties. Although the adoption of the draft law in parliament

was among the items present on the governing agenda, UDMR failed to secure the support of its two coalition partners. Neither PNL, nor PD supported the establishment of local autonomy councils (in the region where Hungarians live in compact numbers) as part of the administrative organization of the state, and cast them off them as parallel establishments that were not to be tolerated, since such arrangements would lead to ethnic segregation and a climate of reciprocated suspicion.

The European Union is a symbol often used in both Hungarian and Romanian discourses, but with different purposes: while for the Hungarians, the EU represents the mark of border-effacement, for the Romanians it represents the ultimate argument for the preservation of the present-day borders. This element is used to assure the Hungarians of their freedom to interact with the other communities making up the Hungarian nation, while for the Romanians it is an argument that soothes reactions to the alleged threat of Hungarian irredentism.

In this line of reasoning was also the message addressed by Romania's current Prime Minister, Emil Boc, to the members of the Hungarian minority in Romania on 15 March 2009. The message was constructed around a key concept for the Romanian vision of minority-majority relations: Hungarians are constantly reminded that regardless of their ethnic identity, they share with the Romanians the attributes of *citizenship*.

I consider that the celebration of the Day of Hungarians from everywhere signals a fine opportunity for all of Romania's citizens to affirm their will and common desire to build in harmony their European future (Boc 2009).

The message of Romania's President, Traian Băsescu, contained the same embedded message: "I believe that at the same time, you also ought to be proud of your status of Romanian citizens" (Băsescu 2009), highlighting the fact that within the EU context, "assuming a double identity and pride, of being Hungarians and Romanian citizens, is considerably less complicated and more natural than ever before in history" (Băsescu 2009).

Concluding Remarks

After the First World War, instead of acquiring its legitimacy from all of its citizens, the Romanian state strove to acquire it only from the Romanian people defined in ethnic terms. The most severe pitfall – with repercussions

to this day - is that the Romanian authorities have failed to successfully integrate national minorities such as the Hungarians, who were incorporated into the post-1918 Romanian state by external decisions and against their will. Efforts at forceful assimilation yielded similar results - alienation from the state and its values.

Romania's interwar and communist periods represented momentous failures in the path of building a political community of citizens bound by common objectives and values. As acknowledged formerly, the evolution in the minority-majority relations during 1990-2009 is certainly incontestable. However, the threshold that has been reached has deeply-rooted historical implications and explanations. The members of the Hungarian nation, including its "trapped" minority, deemed the territorial expansion of the Romanian state after the First World War as illegitimate. This did not prevent them from granting the Romanian state their formal allegiance. The duplication of these representations and attitudes did, however, impede them from legitimizing the foundations of the state on a deeper level. Policies aimed at the stifling of their national and cultural identity rightfully contributed to the increase in the feeling of resentment towards the Romanian state. The Hungarians continued to perceive state as lacking legitimacy after 1989, but not only for the. Former communists "reinvented" the potential of the nationalist license for the buildup of legitimacy, which only partly succeeded. Robert Dahl insightfully captures the impact of lack of state legitimacy on the democratic consolidation in a given country. This issue is profoundly linked with the emergence of the conditions that favor the construction of a political community in the democratic sense:

We cannot solve the problem of the proper scope and domain of democratic units from within democratic theory. Like the majority principle, the democratic process presupposes a proper unit. *The criteria of the democratic process presuppose the rightfulness of the unit itself.* If the unit is not proper or rightful - if its scope and domain is not justifiable - then it cannot be made rightful simply by democratic procedures" (Dahl 1989).

In equally observant terms, Levente Salat (2008) analyzes the "patterns and agents of exclusion" of the Hungarian (and other national minorities), which lie at the sources of the reproduction of a Romanian *political community* defined in ethnic terms. One of the key factors he identifies lies

in the very constitutional foundations of the state. Article 2.1 of Romania's Fundamental Law (2003) stipulates that "[t]he national sovereignty is held by Romanian people [...]", while Article 1.1 states that "Romania is a sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible National State". Article 61.1 put the last touches by stipulating that the "Parliament is the supreme representative body of the Romanian people [...]". Article 6.1 stipulates that "[t]he State recognizes and guarantees the right of persons belonging to national minorities to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity" (1991); in this regard, it is noteworthy to emphasize the disinclination to employ a political concept - that of *citizen* instead of *person* (Barbu 1999).

For both Hungarians and Romanians, one feature of *political identity* that discourse has deeply engraved is the consciousness that the two communities have irredeemably separate and conflictual identities. Once constructed, identity can also be deconstructed and replaced. It is in this process of reversal that political discourse plays a most significant role. In this study's approach, the reconfiguration of Hungarian and Romanian political identities (through discursive practices) has to occur *consensually* and *gradually* and aim at achieving a transformation in values that guide the workings of state institutions. These elements are key coordinates of a genuine, multi-layered process of identity change, a process that ought to unfold regardless of changing political incumbents. The post-communist political, social and international conditions are favorable for allowing such a significant process of change to occur. The will of the political elites (Romanian and Hungarian alike), however, still lingers.

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