

**Pages from the  
Romanian–Hungarian  
Reconciliation, 1989–1999:  
The Role of Civic Organizations**

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## FOREWORD

Much has been written about particular minorities, their situation and the laws affecting them. Less often acknowledged and recorded have been the substantial, constructive contributions of civil society organizations and actors in many of these situations. In *Pages from the Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation: 1989-1999: The Role of Civic Organizations* Gabriel Andreescu describes the lengthy involvement of civil society actors in the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania and the positive impact of these organizations and actors over a number of years in potentially volatile situations. The work is never simple nor is it ever really finished. However, the story Mr. Andreescu tells is an encouraging one. He himself also has a long history as a human rights activist in Romania, having being imprisoned more than a decade ago for his dissident activity during the Ceaucescu years. His paper thus underscores the importance to human rights work of committed patience.

Gabriel Andreescu wrote *Pages from the Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation* during the fellowship he was awarded by the International Human Rights Internship Program (IHRIP). IHRIP's Fellowship Program is based on the belief that activists, through their year of hard, careful work, gain a host of valuable insights from which other activists and the human rights movement as a whole can benefit. The fellowship program is designed to provide an opportunity for activists such as Mr. Andreescu to reflect on and write

about some of their experiences. IHRIP, in turn, seeks to share their insights with others.

One of the criteria which IHRIP's Advisory Board uses in making decisions on fellowship applications is the likely relevance and interest of the proposed topic of reflection to activists in different countries. There are few countries that do not have minority communities within their borders, and thus Mr. Andreescu's focus—the role of civil society organizations, including human rights organizations, in helping protect and promote the rights of minority groups—certainly fulfills that criterion. We were thus very pleased at the opportunity to make his experience and those of other activists in Romania better known.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the John Merck Fund for its support for the Fellowship Program.

Finally, we want to hear from you, the readers of this booklet, particularly as to whether you find it accessible and useful. IHRIP's goal, in the fellowship program and its other work, is to help strengthen human rights organizations through sharing knowledge and expertise among human rights organizations and activists. In order to determine whether these booklets are helpful to that end, we need to hear from you. Thank you.

D.J. Ravindran  
Chair  
IHRIP Advisory Board

Ann Blyberg  
Executive Director  
IHRIP

January 2001

## **1. Is There or Isn't There a Model for Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation?**

US President Bill Clinton wished to explain to his fellow citizens the necessity of US intervention in Yugoslavia. A few days after NATO started the bombings in Serbia, the president brought up the possibility of settling disputes between majority and minorities. He mentioned this among other arguments made while on a trip to the northern area of the United States. He explained that Romania knew how to overcome tension between Romanians and Hungarians. Romania had become a model for settling interethnic conflicts.

This wasn't the first time Bill Clinton had made such statements. Around two years before, on July 9, 1997 while on a brief visit to Bucharest two days after the North Atlantic Alliance nominated Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, but not Romania, to join NATO, he made the same statement: *"You have turned old quarrels into new friendships, within and outside the country's frontiers. You have signed treaties with Hungary and Ukraine. For the first time, you have shared a democratic government with the Hungarian ethnics. You let minorities play a larger role in creating your future. Together with them, you represent the new Romania."*

The Romanian newspapers spread the news (with their own slant) without delay. "Look, the United States president himself is repeating that the Hungarians should be happy with the current situation in Romania. These Hungarians are always so hard to please!"

This time Marko Bela, the president of the UDMR (Magyar Democratic Union of Romania), responded. Since 1990 his party had won the majority of votes from the Hungarians living in Romania. He even organized a press conference. This political leader who is regarded even by UDMR critics as a true moderate stated that it wasn't true that reconciliation was possible in Romania.

The positive, contrary opinion on the other side of the Atlantic was voiced, I repeat, in the spring of 1999. For two years UDMR had been trying unsuccessfully to obtain approval for a Hungarian language university. In November 1996, the two former opposing coalitions which won the elections—the Romanian Democratic Convention and the Social Democrat Union—had invited UDMR to join the governmental coalition. In exchange, they promised to solve the problems regarding the use of the Hungarian language in education and administration. In May 1997, the newly nominated Ciorbea government adopted an Emergency Decree concerning the completion and amendment of the Education Law. The requests of UDMR were respected.

However, the Parliament continuously postponed approval of the document. The senators and deputies of the Coalition, as well as those of the opposition, made unbearable scenes in relation to UDMR. Out of desperation, UDMR decided to take parliamentary initiatives on its own. Both initiatives—the first, the reestablishment of the Historical Hungarian University in Cluj, called

Bolyai University, and the second, the establishment of a multicultural University in Hungarian and German—both failed, the former in the summer of 1998 and the later in the fall of the same year. The constant anti-Hungarian campaign of nationalistic groups and newspapers, who manifested their unrestrained chauvinism, added to the irritation and fatigue of the UDMR leaders. “The model of Romanian–Hungarian reconciliation,” which was constantly mentioned by the Government and the Romanian President at international discussions to demonstrate Romanian democratic progress, often looked awkward inside Romania. Even the Secretary of State for Higher Education of a government that included UDMR referred to the petitions of the Hungarians as “*ethnic segregation requests in various institutional forms!*” Where did the signs of reconciliation come into this?

Only three months after President Bill Clinton’s intervention and Marko Bela’s reply, the Romanian Parliament adopted the new Law on Education. In June 1999, the main petitions of the Hungarians on the most important areas of their interests were adopted. The final draft included a few small compromises, but did this new turn in Romanian–Hungarian relations produce results. Who was right in the end? Bill Clinton or Marko Bela?

## **2. Romania: A Regional and Geopolitical Profile**

But why was the US president concerned with the fate of the Hungarians who live on the Romanian territory? In order to answer this question we need some background information.

Romania is a relatively young state, created between 1859 and 1862 through the union of two principalities with a Romanian ethnic majority: Moldova and Valachia. In 1918, Romania changed its borders by incorporating two other provinces populated by Romanian majorities: Transylvania, which had been a part of the Hungarian state until the 17<sup>th</sup> century and then an autonomous province within the Austro-Hungarian empire, until the latter's dissolution at the end of WW1; and Bessarabia, historically a part of Moldova until 1812 when it was occupied by Russia.

The Romanian borders were modified once more at the end Second World War, when Bessarabia was occupied by the USSR. These historical developments have led to continuous shifts in the country's ethnic composition. After 1918, between the frontiers of Greater Romania, there were some 10,0% Hungarians, 4,4% Germans, 3,2% Jews, 1,7% Roma and 2,9% Russians left— around 22% of the country's whole population. The Romanian state dealt with this multicultural reality from the position of a “national, unitary state.”

Bessarabia was once again claimed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War (the Peace of Paris, 1947). Together with the population shifts during the war, the new redrawing of national frontiers led to a decrease in ethnic diversity. Between 1947 and the 1990, an important number of German and Jewish ethnics left the country, driven away by the communist regime. The ethnic map of today's Romania is significantly different from that of 1918 to 1940. Of the sixteen national

minorities that were recorded by the 1992 census, Hungarians were 1,620,199; Roma (Gypsies) 409,723<sup>1</sup>; Germans 119,436; Ukrainians 66,833; Russians–Lippovans 36,688; Turks 29,533; Serbs 29,080; Tartars 24,649; Slovaks 20,672; Bulgarians 9,953; Jews 9,107; Czechs 5,800; Poles 4,247; Croatians 4,180; Greeks 3,897; Armenians 2,023. Another 8,420 persons declared they were Carashovenians (2,775) and the Changos (2,165).

Doubtlessly, the status that each minority has within the Romanian State can easily become valuable political capital. The Hungarian minority plays an exceptional part in the country's political life because its size, traditions and solidarity and its options have been the main source of self-legitimation for the nationalist and ultra-nationalist movements in contemporary Romania.

Therefore, ethnic relations in the country are crucial to the evolution of democracy in Romania. But the stake is even higher. The status of national minorities is, especially in this area at the periphery of the Balkans, an issue of national stability. A conflict with Hungary started by an alleged repression of the Hungarian ethnics in Romania, or a conflict with Ukraine started by the supposed repression of the 900,000 Romanian ethnics in that country, would have terrible results.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures established by census are obviously different from the actual numbers. Roma associations provided different figures, most of them ranging from 1 to 2 million Roma.

Finally, Romania's ethnic diversity has geopolitical consequences. Romania is separated from Russia only by the Republic of Moldova and by Ukraine, the latter of which seems destined to be a buffer zone. NATO and the EU are stretching their margins toward this area. Will Romania become a member of these structures? Will it stay under the influence of the Moscow regimes? The answer varies with the political prominence of nationalist forces, a prominence that depends itself on the fate of the country's minorities.

This is why the US president mentioned the relation between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority. Indeed, this relation affects internal politics, regional security and geopolitical relationships—and ultimately the lives of every Romanian man and woman.

### **3. Smaranda Enache**

January 29, 1990. Evening, in Bucharest. The first time I ever heard about Smaranda Enache was at the headquarters of Social Dialog Group. "Did you see that lady from Targu-Mures on TV last night?" asked an old friend as he crossed the hall, visibly impressed by a TVR1 broadcast. I had not watched it. Smaranda Enache, the co-chair of the Pro-Europa League founded at the end of December 1989 in the Transylvanian city of Targu-Mures, had given a TV interview on January 25, 1990. The interview was broadcast on TVR1 [Romanian public television] in Bucharest on the evening of the 28th. Her intervention and comments triggered alarm over tensions in Targu-Mures. As she had put it

rather bluntly, “There is no need to repeat all that is happening in Nagorno Karabakh; the outcome of the situation in this city is a key factor for the fabric of the Romanian democracy.”

What was happening in Targu-Mures? Who was Smaranda Enache? What was the Pro-Europa League?

Targu-Mures is an old Szekler town with a strong tradition of university education and intellectual life. Between 1948 and 1959, it was the capital of the Hungarian Autonomous Region. Like most Transylvanian towns, the ethnic make-up of Targu-Mures was mostly Hungarian. During the period of autonomy, the Hungarian population constituted around 80% of the city’s inhabitants. During the 70’s it dropped to 70%. From that moment on, the ethnic proportion-change program ran in a straight line. Moldavian workers were brought in to work in newly built factories.<sup>2</sup> Doctors, professors and other categories of the Hungarian social elite were appointed as far as possible in other Romanian provinces, never in Targu-Mures. In 1989, the percentage of Romanians and Hungarians in the city was almost equal. After the revolution, a map was found at the Party’s County Commission headquarters. The map showed details of yearly Romanian migration measures for the further change of ethnic proportions. It was the first

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<sup>2</sup> Romania is divided into three provinces: Moldavia and Muntenia, to the east and south, and Transylvania. Transylvania was added to Romania after 1918 and that is where most of the Hungarian population is found.

solid proof of the program for systematical intensification of Romanian ethnic dominance upheld by the National-Communist State under the Ceausescu regime.

The last years of the 80's saw violent displays of anti-Hungarian politics. Those who spoke Hungarian were excluded from all leading functions. The old bilingual or bicultural traditions of official celebrations became only a memory. Hungarian poems were no longer recited, not even at the end of the school year. Hungarian documents had to use exclusively Romanian geographic names.

However, those years had also heralded the beginning of a timid disobedience founded on democratic attitudes. The Puppet Theater in Targu-Mures enjoyed a privileged environment to this end. In 1983, Smaranda Enache, the young literary secretary of the Theater, graduate of the Philology University in Bucharest, was appointed director of the Institution. Since then, the Puppet Theatre became the scene of several ingenious and amusing yet marginal ways of disputing the government. The Party Committee got furious whenever the colors of the actors' clothes in a particular scene happened to resemble the colors of the Hungarian flag, red, white and green<sup>3</sup>. Whenever Hungarian symbols appeared on posters, the posters had to be destroyed. Censorship made drastic cuts in any Hungarian nationalist references. In 1989, control on any sign of disobedience had become hysterical. For some of the Romanians at the Puppet Theatre in

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<sup>3</sup> The Romanian colors are red, yellow and blue.

Targu-Mures, disobedience meant making common cause with their Hungarian colleagues.

#### **4. Pro-Europa League**

This early solidarity is the reason why the December 1989 demonstrations that led to the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime found a united Romanian-Hungarian group in Targu-Mures. On the evening of December 21, the slogan "Chauvinism does not exist" was loudly heard on the streets of Targu-Mures. Smaranda Enache was invited to be part of the National Salvation Front's County Council, the new governing structure of the city.

The group of intellectuals from the Puppet Theater gathered together daily in those restless times. A Hungarian ethnic, Elek Szokoly, Smaranda Enache's husband, was convinced of the necessity of founding alternative associations. On December 30, 1989, twenty-one citizens of Targu-Mures gathered together as founders of the Pro-Europa League. They were of the opinion that the goals of democracy and interethnic cooperation could only find fulfillment within the framework of a united Europe. They regarded pro-European militancy as the most complete expression of reform in the Romanian society.

However, the signs of national communist restoration appeared very early in Targu-Mures and were less ambiguous than in other places. The same dinosaurs that used to run the city were now active again within the local CFSN

(National Salvation Front Council) building.<sup>4</sup> Ioan Movila, the former County Secretary, did not hide his presence in the place where the new party was presently ruling. General Scrieciu and Col-onel Jueu, the men responsible for the repression of the revolutionaries (shots were fired and people died on the evening of December 21), had already made their presence felt in the small local leadership.

In the first few days of January, the National Salvation Front Council issued a declaration in which they referred to the abuses of the Ceausescu regime regarding national minorities and promised that measures would be taken to remedy them. The position CFSN took on the matter of nationalities led to quick progress in the demands of the Hungarian community. A main demand was the separation of mixed schools. The former Hungarian schools and high schools, veritable institutions of community identity of the Hungarians in Transylvania, had all been transformed into mixed schools. Hungarian signs had disappeared without a trace. Hungarian education had become only an annex of the Romanian majoritarian education. The all-encompassing Romanian process of assimilation had unfolded rapidly in the 1980's.

This negative action determined the UDMR strategy to claim the restoration of former schools-institutions immediately after the revolution. The return to the separation of schools

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<sup>4</sup> This was the first legislative and executive structure established in Romania after the fall of Ceausescu regime.

had already taken place in a few cities in Transylvania. The CFSN of Targu-Mures had decided in favor of de-mixing the main local high school, the former Bolyai Hungarian High School having around 25% Romanian students in 1990. CFSN's decision requested that the separation take place in September, after the school holidays. The Romanian parents were opposed to it. On every public occasion Romanian and Hungarian children expressed opinions acquired from their parents. Finally, one day, the Romanian students found the gates of the high school closed. The Hungarian teachers banned them from school. The Romanian population of the city reopened the school gates for their children after a day or two, but the tension between Romanians and Hungarians had already reached critical heights.

## **5. Pro-Europa League and Violence in Targu-Mures**

All this time, the members of the Pro-Europa League were desperately trying to stop the deterioration of the relationship between the Romanians and Hungarians in the city. Smaranda talked to the Romanian and Hungarian teachers and to the students in school. She tried to mediate. She spoke to the Orthodox priests who stubbornly refused to talk to the Baptists, Catholics, or Jews. The intellectuals of Targu-Mures were not much more interested than the priests. The historians invited to debate the Romanian-Hungarian theme also hesitated to use their authority to promote talks between Romanians and Hungarians. The repeated appeals

made by Smaranda Enache and her colleagues, often on the local TVR station, were in vain. Moreover, she started receiving threatening phone calls at home. Smaranda's parents suddenly found themselves without friends. The communities stopped communicating. Their co-nationals considered promoters of Romanian-Hungarian relations, such as Smaranda, traitors.

On March 17th (1990) Smaranda Enache went to the Romanian and Hungarian Intellectuals Meeting held in Budapest. On March 19th the violence started in Targu Mures. Hungarian and Romanian groups (the latter brought by administration buses from villages in the Apuseni mountains, armed with clubs they had crafted a few days beforehand), confronted each other in the central square. Five people died and hundreds of Romanians and Hungarians were hurt. The writer Suto Andras lost an eye.

The trouble in Targu Mures took place from March 19 till March 21. At the end of March, SRI (the Romanian Information Service) was founded. The Decree founding the SRI, issued by the Council's Bureau for National Unity, was illegal, as it had not been voted on by the CPUN (Provisional Council for National Unity).<sup>5</sup> The campaign of a certain part of the media added more proof that the violence in Targu-Mures was arranged by Ion Iliescu's men in order to justify

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<sup>5</sup> CPUN replaced CFSN by the inclusion of representatives belonging to the historical political parties.

the founding of the SRI<sup>6</sup>. This came three months after Nicolae Ceausescu's Securitate was disbanded, following the December 1989 Revolution<sup>7</sup>.

## **6. Interethnic Pacifism After Violence**

The wave of violence of March 19-21 changed the Romanian society for many years. The Pro-Europa League could no longer draw people to their meetings. Words about the good relations between Romanians and Hungarians would have only sounded hollow to the ears of the people of Targu-Mures. The city was licking its wounds. The Pro-Europa League, defeated in this moment of its existence, had to come up with another strategy. In June 1990 operation "Bicycles" was started. Romanian and Hungarian children were invited to participate in a competition where they had to fix damaged bicycles from Germany and the winners won them as prizes. In September 1990 a seminar on ecological themes was held. Romanian and Hungarian specialists who were invited presented their speeches together with their German colleagues. October '90..., November '90..., January '91...—other veiled tactics were used to bring Romanians and

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<sup>6</sup> One month before the violence, Virgil Magureanu, the future Director of SRI initiated Vatra Romaneasca, the chauvinistic organization which was deeply involved in the events from Targu Mures.

<sup>7</sup> While in hospital, Mihaila Cofariu, one of the victims, admitted that his village priest rang the bells a few days before the events took place, telling the people to get ready to go to Targu-Mures in order to quell the "Hungarian irredentism."

Hungarians closer together. In the summer of 1991 the Pro-Europa League, together with FIDESZ<sup>8</sup>, took over the organization of the Balvanosz Camp. From that moment on, this annual summer camp gathering Romanian and Hungarian leaders became a privileged space for meeting and dialog between the two communities elites. Sometime later, the Pro-Europa League created *Gazeta de Mures*, the first local weekly magazine dedicated to the promotion of tolerance.

### **7. Other Local Battles: Cluj, Octavian Buracu and Interethnic Dialog**

Octavian Buracu was a founding member of the Civic Alliance<sup>9</sup>, of the Cultural Foundation of Transylvania in Cluj, and of the Romanian-British Organization for Education in the Human Rights Field and honorary member of the Hungarian-Romanian Friendship Association of Pecs. But above all, his name was tied to the Interethnic Dialog Association, for which he was founder and director.

At the reading of *Laudatio*, on February 27, 1999, on the occasion of conferring on Octavian Buracu the post mortem title of “Honorary Member of the Pro-Europa League,” the following rhetorical question was asked “*Is it any wonder that in Octavian Buracu’s 1993 interview for Gazeta de Mures, just after he had been fired, (...) he said regarding the Cluj ethnic incitations, that ‘as a*

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<sup>8</sup> FIDESZ is the actual ruling Party in Hungary.

<sup>9</sup> Civic Alliance is the largest civic organization in Romania.

*Romanian, I am more indignant than the Hungarians’?”*

The reader of the *Laudatio* continued:

*Isn't this particular dignified consistency the most natural characteristic in the world for a man of honor? What could be more dignified for this authentic Romanian and European patriot than the apology he addressed to the minorities in the name of his people, for the xenophobic nonsense of the Cluj Mayor? What could have been more natural than the wisdom he expressed a few months before his demise: 'there are no good nations or bad nations, there are only good and bad people'<sup>10</sup>.*

Starting in 1990, Octavian Buracu initiated contacts, meetings, associations, seminars, children exchanges, took stands, declarations, communiqués, and lists of signatures in the name of Romanian-Hungarian friendship. He was the most consistent of all Romanian voices that expressed disapproval against the paranoid excesses of Gheorghe Funar, the Mayor of Cluj, the capital of Transylvania. Together with the voice of Doina Cornea, the well-known political dissident during the Ceausecu regime, he joined in opposition to the Romanian nationalists.

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<sup>10</sup> Szokoly Elek, “Laudatio for Octavian Buracu”, *Pro-Europa League Gazette* No. 2/1999, pg. 6-7. The xenophobe Mayor of Cluj was Gheorghe Funar, PUNR president between 1992 and 1996.

Just like Doina Cornea, he had no doubt about the connection between the noisy ultra-nationals and the political group around President Ion Iliescu who took over power in Bucharest after the first freely held elections after Ceausescu. Free elections do not automatically result in democracy, however. As far as Doina Cornea was concerned, she had remained as staunch against the nationalist provocations of the post-revolution regime as she had been against the totalitarian manifestations of the previous communist regime. This is what she wrote after Gheorghe Funar, the Mayor of Cluj and the PUNR (National Unity Party of Romania) President, opened an archaeological site in the central city square (actually for the purpose of moving the statue of St. Stephan, the most important Hungarian monument in the whole of Transylvania):

*I am convinced that the Cluj diversion has a far greater meaning than the strictly local one. Funar is not a fool, as they call him, but an instrument in the hands of the Power and at its disposal (like all the other extremists in its circles). I think we can call it a KGB-like desire to Yugoslavise Romania, that serves the Power's mean interests of self-preservation.<sup>11</sup>*

Starting with the founding of the nationalist organization Vatra Romaneasca and the PUNR in 1990, but mostly after the election of Gheorghe Funar as Mayor, the city of Cluj had become the center of anti-Hungarian provocations. This

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<sup>11</sup> Doina Cornea, "The Cluj Conflict Is Not An Interethnic Conflict", 22, No. 28, July 8, 1994

negative development took place in a city that, up until the first World War, had a majority of Hungarian ethnics and currently still is 23 percent Hungarians. Cluj was the center not only of economic and university life, but also of the symbolic competition between Romanians and Hungarians. But since 1992 it has been dominated by the presence of Gheorghe Funar, the mayor who was the leader of PUNR (between 1992 and 1996), the second most important party in Romania as far as parliamentary importance is concerned. He is a national extremist whose speeches often reach the pathological. Within the city, Hungarian monuments were toppled, participants at Hungarian meetings were arbitrarily fined, statues were under threat of being moved, the flag from the Hungarian Consulate was stolen following the advice of the mayor (!), park benches were dyed red, yellow and blue, etc. The Hungarians protested, held demonstrations, participated in processions, warned, reacted passively and sometimes with anger.

Still, the reason why Cluj did not become the center of bloody confrontations also lies with the presence of certain Romanian personalities who associated themselves with the Hungarians in Cluj. Perhaps the most significant event took place in 1994, when the Interethnic Dialog Association and the Civic Alliance branch called on the people to march together with the Hungarians in one of the tensest moments in the life of the city. The extremists of Vatra Roman-easca were preparing to quell the Hungarian demonstration.

This is why Octavian Buracu, Doina Cornea, Dana Prelipceanu<sup>12</sup>, Virgil Lazar<sup>13</sup>, Marius Tabacu<sup>14</sup>, Liliana Bocu<sup>15</sup> and their colleagues, although few in number, gave life to the main civic organizations of the city and had a considerable role in the prevention of a bloodshed similar to the one in Targu-Mures in March 1990.

Romanian militants of interethnic communication have also been active in other cities of Transylvania. Ana Maria Pop, a well-known Hungarian-Romanian translator, was active in Satu-Mare. Another city that cannot be overlooked is Timisoara—the most cosmopolitan and multicultural city in Romania. All of the important associations in this city, such as the Civic Alliance branch, Solidaritatea, Timisoara Society, the Writers Union branch, and exceptionally, the leaders of religious communities, supported the region's tradition of tolerance.

## **8. GDS, “22”, Civic Alliance, Writers’ Union**

However, in a super-centralized country such as Romania, the small provincial victories would

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<sup>12</sup> Her husband, a doctor, treated Doina Cornea during the time of her dissidence. This was in a time when such ordinary acts of professionalism were noted as a sign of opposition.

<sup>13</sup> Virgil Lazar was also the correspondent of the national newspaper *Romania libera*. His articles bore a considerable importance on correct presentation. This paper took sides with the Opposition between 1990 and 1996, especially after its nationalistic tendencies deepened.

<sup>14</sup> TV Cluj journalist for a while.

<sup>15</sup> Liliana Bocu also had the rare initiative to launch a program for Gypsy children.

have made too little a difference had the bridge between Hungarians and Romanians not been sustained in Bucharest, where the grand political stakes were. That is where even the UDMR, the Representative Hungarian Formation, had to lead its political battles, even though 93% of the Hungarian population is in Transylvania.

It so happened that a group of intellectuals who founded GDS, the Group of Social Dialog, at the end of 1989 and its magazine, named '22' after the date the communist regime fell, had a decisive attitude regarding the matter of Romanian-Hungarian relations. Set up by former dissidents (Doina Cornea, Mircea Dinescu, Radu Petrescu, Radu Filipescu, etc.) and intellectuals who explicitly rejected the communist ideology (Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Plesu, Mihai Sora, Radu Popa, Mariana Celac, ...), the group enjoyed tremendous prestige immediately after the revolution, due to their past reputation. Motivated by democratic, liberal thinking, the group immediately got in touch with their colleagues in Hungary, participating in several meetings and events which had great symbolic meaning in that period of time. One of the events was the Romanian-Hungarian dialog on March 17-23, 1990, in Budapest.

However, the '22' magazine synthesized even better the "ideology" of the group in this respect. Starting with its first editions, the magazine had minority representatives as collaborators (Szasz Janos, Helmuth Britz), and this is where appeals regarding Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation were published (see the Appeal of the Hungarian

Helsinki Committee towards the Romanian democratic politicians). While the language of chauvinism and hatred filled the newspapers of political power, the articles of '22' called for dialog and made room for their German, Hungarian, Armenian, Greek, etc., colleagues. The first article on Gypsies appeared in March and following that, the magazine adopted the term 'Roma' (Romany) exclusively, which at the time was absolutely exotic to the majority of the population.

The Writers' Union was another institution fostering intercommunication in that crucial period. Compared to all other organizations in the whole European Communist system, the Writers' Union enjoyed a special status. Seen by the former communists as a major propaganda institution and recognizing the power of writers to dominate symbolic space, these unions were offered material advantages and symbolical privileges. Romanian, Bulgarian and former Soviet writers were among the few citizens who had the chance to visit western countries. All these contributed to promoting the visibility of writers' unions in society.

This is the reason why the symbolic space controlled by writers played a decisive role in the overthrowing of logic in Romanian society at the end of 1989. The session of the Writer's Union that took place at the end of December 1989 elected Mircea Dinescu as President. One of the best-known dissidents of the Ceausescu regime and extremely popular for his style of communication, Mircea Dinescu was a liberal

person. Immediately after the revolution, Hungarian writers from Budapest and Bucharest forged relations and worked on projects<sup>16</sup>. Systematically, the Writers' Union refused to implicate itself in the nationalist propaganda of the regime nor with writers who collaborated with the new regime led by President Ion Iliescu.

The nationalists could hardly underestimate the meaning of this distancing of the Romanian Writers' Union from the nationalist politics. (We understand it better if we compare it to the supporting nationalist role the Yugoslav Union had in Yugoslavia.) Even though the Writers' Union has never been a proper militant for the Romanian-Hungarian relationship, it facilitated the bonding of the two, ensured space for meetings and a framework for common interests.

The largest liberal organization in Romania, the Civic Alliance, was founded in November 1990. This umbrella organization was created as a result of the cooperation of certain local organizations: the Group for Social Dialog, the Independent Group for Democracy in Bucharest, the Timisoara Society in the city where the December 1989 revolution started, the November 15 Association in Brasov, Agora in Iasi, and the Pro-Europa League in Targu-Mures. The Alliance achieved a national impact from the start. Around 200,000 people in Bucharest responded

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<sup>16</sup> Pomogacz Bela, the Hungarian writer who became the President of the Writers' Union in Hungary in 1996 and who initiated many of the meetings between Romanian and Hungarian writers and intellectuals, also played a decisive role.

to the appeal of the Civic Alliance in December 1990 and tens of thousands more in the main cities. There had never been a civic mobilization of this proportion up until then.

Personalities such as Smaranda Enache and Peter Banyai were invited to the first board of directors of the Civic Alliance. In spite of the tension created by long-term manipulations, Romanians and Hungarians did, extraordinarily, get together at the Civic Alliance's branches in Targu-Mures and Covasna. Since it was thought of from the start as a multi-ethnic movement, in its first phase the Alliance succeeded in showing that an extensive national level movement could once again bring Romanians and Hungarians together. In January 1991 the Civic Alliance elaborated and adopted a document on Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and in June 1991, a Declaration on the Rights of National Minorities.

The Alliance intervened in a spectacular way in the fall of 1991 at a time when a dangerous incitement was about to inflame Transylvania.

## **9. The Fall of 1991: State of Emergency in the 4<sup>th</sup> Army in Transylvania**

In the fall of 1991, a draft bill on the organization of the SRI (Romanian Information Services), the successor of the old Securitate, was submitted to the Romanian Parliament. In the draft bill the SRI requested the right to indefinitely surveil any citizen, to own and use commercial enterprises and perform other economic activities. It sought the excessive power so hated by the population

because it reminded them of the omnipotence of the old Securitate. Again, the SRI had to demonstrate its usefulness, as it did in March 1990. Moreover, within the same period of time, the adoption of the Romanian Constitution was being finalized and hopes were high for the adoption of a nationalist outlook in the Constitution<sup>17</sup>.

In order to once again draw the attention of the public to the Hungarian threat, the “Covasna-Harghita Report” was brought to the Parliament. It was a report that incriminated the Hungarian majoritarian population of the two counties, by alleging that the Hungarians threatened and drove out the Romanians in the region. It was a scheme that perfectly followed the patterns of the anti-Albanian propaganda in Kosovo, that claimed the Albanians drove out the Serbs, and which opened the way to repression<sup>18</sup>. For days on end, representatives of the extremist parties declaimed speeches against the Hungarian peril from the platform of the Parliament. The accusations regarding the events in Covasna and Harghita were ridiculous, but efficient. TV stations aired them constantly. Suddenly, a heated atmosphere emerged out of nothing. Each new step taken by the nationalist parties and the institutions they dominated was meant to amplify instability. The representatives of the Hungarian minority started protesting. Anxiety was on the

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<sup>17</sup> In the end, the Constitution adopted principles such as “*Romania is a Unitarian National State*” and “*the foundation of the State is the unity of the Romanian nation*” (suggesting that Romania is for Romania).

<sup>18</sup> Recent studies have shown the falsehood of this thesis.

rise in Transylvania. The fourth Army of Transylvania, led by a general who had close ties with the Romanian nationalist parties, made the final move when it went into a state of emergency. Tension was floating in the air. Somewhere in Transylvania, a spark was expected to kindle the flame. The fire it could have ignited, causing once again the deaths of Romanians and Hungarians, would have been an argument in favor of adopting the law that invested SRI with greater power.

At this point, the Civic Alliance in Covasna made an appeal for reconciliation. It invited Romanians and Hungarians to gather together in protest meeting against the incitement to interethnic hatred. It organized everything, going to great lengths to involve the leaders of communities. As vice-president of the Alliance, I left Bucharest for Miercurea Ciuc, the capital city of Covasna County, where I got together with Smaranda Enache and other local leaders, in order to deliver a public address to the people of the city. The city was full with men in uniforms, soldiers as well as police officers. Around 3,000 to 5,000 people gathered at the meeting. Romanians and Hungarians could get together to express their desire to dwell together in peace, in spite of the fact that they were surrounded by nationalist fury! (Isn't this event reminiscent of the demonstrations that took place in Sarajevo, before the tragedy?)

In Romania, despite the intrusive presence of soldiers and police (in contrast to their supposed responsibility to keep peace) the meeting for

interethnic dialog took a positive turn in the outcome of events. Suddenly, tensions dropped. Through its intervention in Miercurea Ciuc, the Civic Alliance succeeded then, in the most dangerous of moments, to prevent bloodshed that would have had irreversible repercussions for Romanians and Hungarians. As far as the interethnic rapport was concerned and before its multiethnic outlook became secondary, this was perhaps the most spectacular intervention of this mass organization of the Civic Alliance.

### **10. The Intervention of the Romanian Helsinki Committee**

However, debates on the theme of national minorities, insofar as they went on within Romanian society, lacked a certain depth of practical and theoretical knowledge. Multiculturalism, interethnic rapport, autonomies and special status continued to be subjects of an exotic nature, even for cultured Romanians. The authors involved in such debates, who came from universities and from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were unable to produce anything but preposterous theses such as the one stating, “the theory that international standards are minimal is dangerous.” The representative of an anemic “Center for the Study of Minorities...,” created by the Romanian Academy in 1991, maintained during a meeting with the former President Ion Iliescu held in Brasov in 1995, that “national

minorities” do not even exist<sup>19</sup>. This so-called “researcher” was disputing her own subject.

Most of cultivated Romanians have always paid little attention to the theme of heterogenous cultures and civil society. They focused on national identity—of the Romanians—and on the rapport between Romania and the great cultural systems. The mythology of the Unitarian National State dominated Romanian culture. During the inter-war period this subject was occasionally disputed by Transylvanian intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> However, this kind of exception did not change the tendency. This theme of multiethnic Romania was even less preserved in the cultural memory during the 50-year period of communism.

Following 1989, the politics of the intellectuals united around the Group for Social Dialog and magazine “22,” the Writers’ Union and briefly, around the Civic Alliance, were motivated mostly by humanitarian attitudes. Their pro-“minority” attitude was the expression of a decent and educated conduct, but not of an adequate vision regarding the characteristics of a multicultural society. The appeals, declarations and articles signed by the intellectuals associated to the Group for Social Dialog that expressed the philosophy of friendship could not cover the thorny matters and tensions of interest within a multicultural society such as the Romanian

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<sup>19</sup> Of course, the language employed by the lady in question had nothing of the elevated discourse that would deal with the theme of doctrines, concepts, and so on.

<sup>20</sup> Developed federalist theories have appeared here, such as that of C. Popovici.

culture, in spite of its refusal to recognize this fact.

The people of Transylvania were the only ones to know better. Starting with 1996, the Pro-Europa League produced *Altera*, an excellent magazine meant as a space for the analysis of concepts such as multiculturalism, minorities, autonomies, federalism and so on. However, the road to 1996 had been a long road that went through the events that saw the Helsinki Committee enter the “market” devoted to a minorities’ theme.

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The first newspaper that heralded the founding of the Romanian Helsinki Committee was ... the January 6, 1989 edition of *The New York Times*<sup>21</sup>. I created this organization together with several friends, following the visit of the Helsinki Watch organization to Romania. The purpose of their visit was to support the founding of another Helsinki organization with which they could have professional ties. I was contacted and helped as well by representatives of the League for the Protection of Human Rights in Paris, militants like Sanda Stolojan and Mihnea Berindei (both Romanian exiles).

The Committee received legal recognition in April 1990 under the name the Association for the Protection of Human Rights in Romania–Helsinki

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<sup>21</sup> Celestine Bohlen, “Ex-Dissidents Will Monitor Bucharest on Rights”, *The New York Times INTERNATIONAL*, Saturday, January 6, 1989.

Committee (APADOR-CH), after it had already started some research. However, the Helsinki Committee made real progress after several members of indisputable competence joined, such as Renate Weber in the fall of 1990 and afterwards Manuela Stefanescu in 1991. The Committee achieved several spectacular objectives, the blocking of certain anti-democratic draft bills and the elaboration of public policies in support of democracy.

The members of the Committee had certainly made previous reference to national minorities. Their comments were kept correctly enough within the limits of civic militancy; however, they stood out through attitude rather than subtlety. In May 1994, Renate Weber and I were invited to Tusnad (a city in the heart of Transylvania) to a reunion of the UDMR leadership to meet their main specialists. The subject was the draft bill on the rights of national minorities and autonomous communities that was submitted by UDMR to Parliament as far back as the fall of 1993.

That is when it became obvious that no substantial progress could be made without a thorough study of the way Hungarians view the rights of the Hungarian minority, of their view on minorities in general. Back in Bucharest, Renate, a new colleague and I launched research on the UDMR draft bill.

A few months after the launching of our plan—during the autumn of 1994—the Helsinki Committee (in fact, the new Center for Human

Rights that was meanwhile founded under the aegis of APADOR-CH) published a “Study on UDMR’s View regarding the Rights of National Minorities.” After another few months the Center published a draft bill on the rights of national minorities, following the results of research. This is the only “offer” of this kind written by Romanian authors up until today.

### **11. Gyula. “The Progress of the UDMR Concept”.**

The National Minorities Council, created under the authority of the General Secretariat of the Government, distributed hundreds of copies of the Center for Human Rights’ study. (As a matter of fact, at the request of the UDMR and the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE, Max van der Stoel, the Romanian government was forced to accept the involvement of the Centre for Human Rights in the meetings/negotiations between the main actors.)

Embassies and institutions asked for and were provided copies of our study. The Hungarians used it in their elaboration and decision-making. This document led to closer ties with UDMR analysts like Anton Niculescu and Bakk Miklos. The openness of these specialists tied to the political formation of the Hungarians was as important for maintaining ties with the Romanians as the activity of the democrat Romanians was.

From one day to the other, the role our study played was becoming more visible. From May 12 and 13, (1995) the three of us were invited to

Gyula, a locality in eastern Hungary. The theme of the seminar had an appropriate title, “The National State and Ethnic Autonomy.” It had been organized by the Pro Minority Foundation of FIDESZ, with Friederich Neumann as treasurer and the Pro-Europa League as friend. The Hungarian participation was unexpected. There were Zsolt Németh, FIDESZ’ vice-president, Gáspár Biró, one of the best-known experts in the field of minorities and later on a good friend, and Gergely Pörhle. Attila Varga, who represented the UDMR in many of the discussions regarding their draft bill, had arrived from Romania. Smaranda Enache was also there. The seminar was in fact dedicated to the study we published. And a surprise! The “Study on UDMR’s View regarding the Rights of National Minorities” had been translated into Hungarian by the organizers, and published in the magazine of the Foundation. And behold! We heard the vice-president of FIDESZ stating that our study was in fact the most important text on the problems of minorities that ever appeared in Romania after 1940. ...! Could this be an exaggeratedly polite comment? Somewhat ironic, perhaps? Shortly afterwards we received the Pro Minority prize of the Hungarian State and realized it wasn’t an irony.

Some time later I collaborated with Renate Weber on the writing of “Evolution of the UDMR Conception on Hungarian Minority Rights” and made the necessary corrections on the previously written text. However, now, a few years later, even I believe that the study was the start of a series of researches that changed the essence of Romanian political debates and, implicitly, the framework of negotiations between the two countries. The

“Study on UDMR’s View on the Rights of National Minorities” had initiated a succession of theoretical research with direct application to the essential problems of minorities in Romania. Without this kind of a doctrine of minorities that was developed “on the run,” it would have been hard to find other answers to the numerous provocations meant to agitate or ignite public life in the years to follow.

## **12. 1995: The Year of Major Crises**

The elections in the fall of 1992 had brought to power the following parties: PDSR (the Romanian Social Democrat Party) led by Ion Iliescu and a group of extremist parties, PUNR (Romanian National Unity Party), PRM (Great Romania Party) and PSM (Socialist Labor Party). Following that date, putting pressure on Hungarians in Romania was a systematic exercise of the political day-to-day life. The Hungarians’ Party, the UDMR, found itself in the opposition coalition, the CDR (Democratic Convention of Romania). This fact had an altogether symbolic value: the Hungarian and Romanian democrats found themselves together, harassed by forces that mixed nationalism with anti-democracy. In this regard, politics followed a political rather than an ethnic line.

Few political leaders within the CDR were conscious of the considerable role of this association. Up until 1992, the union of UDMR, PNTCD (National Peasant Christian Democratic Party), PNL (National Liberal Party), PSDR (Romanian Social Democratic Party), PAC (Civic Alliance Party), etc., within the framework of the Democratic Convention, had been made possible

due to the constant pressure exercised by civic associations such, as first of all, the Civic Alliance, and the receptivity of the greatest political figure of the Opposition, Corneliu Coposu.

Moreover, in 1993, when two factions within the leadership of UDMR—the moderate led by Marko Bela and the radical by Laszlo Tokes, the Lutheran Pastor in Timisoara<sup>22</sup>—were competing in the elections, the CDR leaders came to the Congress to support the first (moderate) team. This was another symbolic assist brought about by pressure from the Romanian civic organizations. The importance of having a moderate team at the helm of UDMR leadership was considerable in a post-factum perspective.

However, the beginning of 1995 brought about a sudden and radical change in the atmosphere within the CDR. A number of the National Council members started criticizing UDMR's position, and especially the fact that the options of the Hungarians did not respect the Constitution. They employed the same accusations made by the Power of that time together with the slogan that Hungarians were not loyal to the Romanian State. UDMR was challenged by the entire array of Romanian politics. The Opposition coalition-CDR asked UDMR to take an oath of loyalty and an oath of recognition of the Constitution. Had it refused, it would have had to resign from the Coalition.

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<sup>22</sup> His removal by the Securitate and opposition to this by both Hungarians and Romanians was considered the spark that led to the 1989 revolution.

### 13. Atlanta

The unrest that was taking place within CDR was apparently the sign of a more subtle strategy. The Romanian Government was about to finish negotiations with its Hungarian counterpart for the signing of the Fundamental Treaty and also held confidential discussions with the Meciar Government in Slovakia, in order to deceive the Hungarian Government. International pressure on Romania was, however, considerable. The European Union, the European Council and the United States wanted the source of insecurity that was the Hungarian problem in Romania to end. Dennis Sammut's report on "The Romanian and Hungarian Communities in Romania. Conflict and Reconciliation?"<sup>23</sup> noted:

*The sensitivity of the political leaderships to nationalistic discourse, the impact of military and church leaders on the sway of political debate and the fragility of the situation on the ground means that a small incident (...) may very well spark of larger incidents. The lesson from other countries teaches us that the spiral of violence once started is difficult to stop."* However, the author, who visited Romania in May 1994 and talked with Romanian officials, was hoping that "... some progress will be registered soon, leading perhaps to the

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<sup>23</sup> Round table discussion hosted by the Verification Technology Information Center at Chatham House: 13 July 1994.

*signing of the Romanian–Hungarian  
Friendship Treaty.*

Apparently, Mr. Sammut was unable to imagine that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest together with its Slav colleagues was frantically preparing for confrontations. Neither did he imagine the death blow given to any reconciliation with the Hungarians through the adoption of the offensive Education Law No. 84 in 1995. Meanwhile, the alienating of the UDMR by the entire Romanian political class offered the Romanian nationalists an important trump card. The Hungarians were rejected not only by Ion Iliescu, Gheorghe Funar, Corneliu Vadim Tudor<sup>24</sup> or Ilie Verdet<sup>25</sup>, but also by their UDMR colleagues, the self named “democratic” parties of the Opposition.

However, in this first half of 1995, while the sophisticated character of the anti-Hungarian strategy regarding preparations for the internal and international battle were rapidly intensifying, Romania accepted a mediation proposed by the US group, Project for Ethnic Relations. The mediation took place in Atlanta, conducted by former President Jimmy Carter.

The participants to the roundtable talks held on February 14-15, 1995 at the Carter Center in Atlanta were people of prestige, such as Viorel Hrebenciuc, general secretary of the Government; Traian Chebeleu, the President’s spokesperson;

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<sup>24</sup> The leader of the xenophobic Great Romania Party.

<sup>25</sup> The leader of the Socialist Labour Party and a former communist apparachnik.

Ovidiu Sincai, the consultant of Adrian Nastase, the main person in PDSR at the time; Liviu Maior, minister of education; Nicolae Taran, vice-president of the Civic Alliance Party. Radu Vasile, the vice-president of the Romanian Senate, did not respond to the invitation. The whole UDMR leadership participated: Marko Béla, the President; Laszlo Tokes, honorary president; Csaba Tacaks, executive president; Gyorgy Tokay, the leader of the UDMR parliamentary group; senators Gyorgy Frunda and Jozsef Csapo and Arpad Kelemen, one of the leaders of the university community.

Surprisingly, in spite of the overwhelmingly political nature of the debate, Romanian civil society was not forgotten. I had also been invited to the meeting in Atlanta, together with all the titles I held in the Civic Alliance, the Group for Social Dialog and the Helsinki Committee. The organizers, Allen Kassof, Livia Plaks and other members or persons invited by the Project for Ethnic Relations, were also present.

Not even a common communiqué could be agreed on during the meetings. However, the presence of the nongovernmental organizations' representatives prevented the outcome of the talks from taking a turn to the worse. They prevented the situation from becoming more critically tense than it had initially been.

#### **14. The Failure of the Treaty With Hungary**

In Paris, on March 21, 1995, the State leaders of the European Union were about to meet their

counterparts from the countries that wished to join the Union. Two years earlier, the European Union had launched a Pact for Stability meant to solve regional crises in Europe. The EU wanted fundamental treaties signed by neighboring countries, such as Hungary and Slovakia, or Hungary and Romania. The leaders of the Union used those countries' desire for integration as a tool in order to force them to end the main sources of sub-regional instability. Undoubtedly, the deplorable failure of the European Union regarding the Yugoslav crisis was the reason for this pressure.

In March 1995, before the Paris summit, Bill Clinton and the European Union sent messages to the presidents of Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, diplomatically drawing attention to the importance of signing the treaties of good neighborhood.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs played to the tune of a government emerged from a nationalist coalition. Bucharest, together with the similarly demagogical and nationalistic Meciar Slovakian Government, tried to throw the whole responsibility for the blocking of the treaty on Hungary's shoulders. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said "no" to the Hungarian offer the moment the Slovaks declared it was unlikely to sign the treaty with Hungary. As soon as Teodor Melescanu, the Romanian minister for Foreign Affairs, announced the failure of negotiations with Budapest, the Slovaks betrayed the agreement, accepting to sign "their" treaty. Romania had thus become the "black sheep" in Europe.

In the face of such bitter diplomatic failure, the Government tried to save face. It tried to get Romanian public opinion on its side, to support its stand on the decision. To this effect, it accused Hungary of asking for Recommendation 1201 to be included in the treaty of good neighborhood. The Recommendation is a document regarding the protection of national minorities, adopted by the Parliamentary Meeting of the European Council in 1993. The Government succeeded in convincing almost the entire Romanian mass media that this document, if adopted, would cause the disintegration of Romania. In fact, there was nothing to worry about. Numerous public figures were brought to TV stations to brand Recommendation 1201. At first, the Illiescu Government received congratulations not only from the politicians of the nationalist coalition, but also those in the Opposition. By declaring its support, the Opposition took on, at the symbolic level, some of the responsibility of the Coalition in power.

Amidst this atmosphere that would have created a lasting solid wall between the Romanian and Hungarian societies, an initiative launched in the previous year proved very important. Together with Renate Weber, we had founded a Center for International Studies, the first independent think-tank concentrating on foreign policy issues. The Center was presented on TV, radio channels, and in the written press, explaining the rather positive nature of Recommendation 1201 as well as the reason for this thoroughly impressive manipulation of public opinion. We obtained signatures of solidarity on a Declaration that condemned the manipulation of public opinion by means of

presenting false or incomplete information. However, what mattered most was the success we had in convincing the Opposition to distance itself from the Government's policy of sabotaging the treaty with Hungary. Following the discussions we had with the leaders of the main Opposition parties, these leaders finally distanced themselves from the manipulation attempted by the nationalist government.

### **15. Adopting the Law on Education No. 84**

So, the first part of 1995 appeared as a continuous Illiescu government campaign directed toward the Hungarians in Romania as well as those in Hungary. UDMR was still hoping to offer even a minimal satisfaction to its Hungarian electorate with a victory concerning the new form of the Law on Education. The adoption of the law was expected to take place before the beginning of summer in 1995. The chapter on the use of mother tongue in education represented the most important field of Hungarian identity interests.

And true enough, the Law on Education No. 84/1995 was passed. What a catastrophe! The Hungarians not only failed to obtain the desired changes in the law,<sup>26</sup> but they also lost some of the rights they previously enjoyed. Instead of the previous "History of Romania," the law introduced "The History of the Romanians" as a compulsory subject, offending the minorities. Hungarian specialized education in several fields of major

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<sup>26</sup> The previous law dated since 1978.

importance became practically inaccessible to national minorities. Access to education in the mother tongue in State universities was limited to only a few subjects. However, the worst provision of the law concerned the severe limitation on taking admission exams in the mother tongue. To ban national minority candidates from sitting for the exams for which they studied in their mother tongue meant placing them in an inferior position compared to the other students. The only way to avoid such disadvantage was for parents to send their children to Romanian high schools. The expected outcome would have probably been a dramatic drop in the number of children who wished to study in Hungarian schools.

So then, this was a law with provisions definitely inferior to the ones within the previous law on education. What a provocation! This time, the Hungarians reacted with threatening solidarity. The Hungarian lobby immediately obtained a resolution from the European Parliament condemning the adoption of this law. The July 13, 1995 resolution clearly stated that, "*The European Parliament ... calls on the Romanian Senate and the Chamber of Deputies to introduce a law seeking to overturn the discriminatory law already enacted.*"

Two weeks later, UDMR succeeded in obtaining almost 500,000 signatures for a new draft bill regarding education in the mother tongue. The numbers represented almost the entire adult Hungarian population! In a sign of protest, Hungarian students went to the European Council on bicycles. The beginning of the new school year was drawing closer and heralded a major conflict.

Against such a background, Max van der Stoel, the High Commissioner of OSCE, rapidly arrived in Bucharest. He talked to the government, to the Hungarians, and to the Romanian Helsinki Committee whose intervention seemed indispensable. In August 1995, the Helsinki Committee published a communiqué that analyzed and condemned the Parliament's decision. The result of these massive negotiations was the postponement of putting the law into operation. As a matter of fact, the provisions regarding education in the mother tongue of the Law on Education No. 84 were never put into operation. The political changes in the fall of 1996 were about to permanently eliminate the legislative incitement created by the nationalist coalition in 1995. Another major crisis was prevented.

## **16. Why has Romania not followed in Serbia's footsteps?**

Dennis Sammut's US mission of July 13, 1994, which I mentioned previously, tried to synthesize its results in four annexes: (1) the main positive security measures that would have been taken by the leading actors in Romania; (2) their actions, perceived as hostile; (3) the preoccupations of the leading actors; and (4) their aspirations. But, from the US mission's point of view, who were the "actors"? Who mattered in settling the Romanian interethnic rapport? The list included: The Romanian Government, the Hungarian Government, the leaders of the Hungarian minority in Romania and the nationalist groups.

In the report presented at the roundtable in 1994, the US mission failed to mention Romanian civil organizations. It only added international organizations to the list of actors mentioned above.

However, if the only actors in Romania were the ones mentioned there, it is quite likely that the country would have become the center of a considerable interethnic and regional conflict. The example of the Yugoslavian conflict is not necessarily a model, but it remains a possible scenario of what could have happened in Romania. The similarities between Slobodan Milosevich's regime and the regime of Ion Iliescu are far from superficial.

There are 1.8 million Albanians in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In Romania there are around 1.8 million Hungarians. The former enjoy the support of Albania and the possible assistance from Arab countries. The latter are backed by Hungary and enjoy an undisputed international sympathy. Members of both communities, the Albanians in Yugoslavia and the Hungarians in Romania, manifest strong internal solidarity. Both have managed to maintain, years on end, a single representative formation. Both have elaborate projects that rely on internal self-determination.

In Romania, as well as in Yugoslavia, political progress after 1989 was dominated by the problem of the legitimacy of the forces interested in gaining power. In Belgrade, at the moment communism fell, Slobodan Milosevich, a member of the nomenclature, played the nationalist card

and won. In Bucharest, after the December 1989 revolution, four former communist leaders close to Moscow appeared in front of the new power structure, the Council of the National Salvation Front.<sup>27</sup> In order to save themselves from the disputes that dominated the capital of the country within a fragile context, they launched an ample xenophobic and nationalist campaign. For this purpose they employed the aid of the entire mass media and administration at their disposal. In Yugoslavia, Milosevich used the secret forces for manipulation, blackmail, crime and whatever actions seemed necessary to accomplish his nationalist strategy. The forces that made up the occult army of Ion Iliescu were interested in saving the members of the former Securitate and did not shy away from starting the bloody confrontations in Targu-Mures.

However, the greatest resemblance between the regime of Ion Iliescu and that of Slobodan Milosevich was the use of certain forces of a paramilitary nature against those who opposed their adventurous politics. President Iliescu called thousands of miners from Valea Jiulu four times in order to settle his political tensions. The first time he called them in January 1990 to intimidate those who disputed his office. The second time, in February 1990, they were called upon in order to crush the demonstrators. The third time the miners were brought to terrorize the Opposition between July 13-15. In September 1991, the miners came again to pull down a

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<sup>27</sup> Ion Iliescu, Silviu Brucan, Dumitru Mazilu, Alexandru Barladeanu.

government that already seemed too committed to reform.

These examples show that in Romania, as in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Ion Iliescu's regime stopped at nothing as far as violence is concerned in order to preserve power. And seeing that Ion Iliescu's regime had followed the nationalist, anti-minority policy similar to the one adopted by the southwestern regime, it would have been ready to continue the conflict with the Hungarians, which he had constantly incited all those years, to the bloodiest of all confrontations.

By this I am not trying to say that an escalation in the interethnic conflict in Romania would have followed the Yugoslav pattern. Fundamental differences such as the participation of Hungarians in the political life (unlike the Albanians in Kosovo) or the dispersion of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania—where its population doesn't even reach 35%—not to mention the fact that they are totally devoid of an arms-bearing tradition—are all decisive elements for the configuration of a possible conflict. I am only maintaining that such an escalation could have been very likely, and it would have reached national proportions and would have destabilized the entire region.

Unfortunately, the similarity between Romania and Serbia also extends to the political Opposition's view of the nationalist regime. It is a weak, disunited, mean, confused opposition. The founding in 1992 of the Romanian Democratic Convention, a coalition of the Opposition, was

made possible in spite of the wishes of most of the party leaders. The only factor that made this marriage possible was the pressure exercised by prestigious non-governmental organizations even to the point of threatening the government. The Civic Alliance was first. The 1996 election campaign that included the control of the electoral system and ensured the 1996 victory of the Opposition definitely depended on the efforts of the same civic society organizations. Moreover, for years on end the parties of the former Opposition tried to win elections by means of nationalist declarations. Its preoccupation with the “ideal” of a Greater Romania was not any less firm than our neighbors’ preoccupation with Greater Serbia.

## **17. The letters**

What should be added to this history of efforts for reconciliation is the occasional blaming of Hungarian politicians for their stubbornness or fatigue. In the fall of 1996, UDMR had the uninspired idea of publicly opposing the signing of the Fundamental Treaty between Romania and Hungary. Before the elections, the ruling coalition in Romania had agreed to make this external political gesture. UDMR’s motivation superficially stated that the text of the treaty failed to offer sufficient guarantees regarding the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. UDMR stood to be criticized for its attitude whether the treaty was signed or not. I immediately included these observations in an open letter addressed to the Hungarian leaders. Fortunately, UDMR’s stand gradually changed within the following weeks.

However, open letters to the leaders of UDMR were often needed, especially after 1996 when UDMR repeatedly threatened to leave the Coalition. Although its dissatisfaction with its coalition partners was well-founded, such a decision would have led to the fall of the Government, with catastrophic consequences for political stability. Those consequences would have been felt also by the Hungarians who would have attracted the hatred of their former partners as well as that of their traditional political adversaries. Among these open letters, some of which were read at the meetings of the UDMR's Council of Representatives before the elections, it was important to include those written by Smaranda Enache and Doina Cornea. The respect these women enjoyed within the Hungarian community—Smaranda Enache being an expert of Hungarian culture and speaking the language—contributed to the decision of the politicians who were analyzing the wisdom of leaving the Government. The UDMR remained in the Coalition and the motives for intense frustration passed. However, it is only now when things have stabilized from the legislative perspective that some of the politicians are just starting to see how irrational it would have been to leave the Government on any of the occasions when they threatened to do so (in 1997, 1998 or 1999).

### **18. The 1996 elections and the change in interethnic relations**

At a meeting with the leaders of Romanian non-governmental organizations which the new

President, Emil Constantinescu, proposed in March 1999 in order to employ their help with the reform process, he started with the following statement: *“up until 1996 civil society ensured the democratic education of the population. The inclusion of UDMR in the Government and the signing of the Treaty with Ukraine would have not been possible without it...”*

It was the first official recognition of the role the battles of the few militants of civil society played in establishing good Romanian–Hungarian relations and good relations with Romania’s neighbors that changed the political outcome after the 1996 elections. Following the 1996 elections, which were won by CDR and Emil Constantinescu as its candidate for presidency, UDMR was co-opted into the majoritarian coalition and the Government. It was the first time in the history of the country from 1918 until 1996 that representatives of Hungarians in Romania shared in the running of the country. PUNR and PRM, the nationalist parties, joined the Opposition. Immediately, the new government took important steps to improve relations with neighboring nations. Under Adrian Severin, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Romanian–Hungarian relations quickly changed to a strategic partnership. Soon after, the extraordinarily complicated Fundamental Treaty with Ukraine was signed and ratified by the two countries. A Department for the Protection of National Minorities was founded and managed by a Hungarian minister. In May and June the Ciorbea Government, by means of two emergency decrees, established new norms in the field of

using the mother tongue in education and administration. The norms met the high standards specified by UDMR, satisfying the main wishes of the Hungarians in Romania.

These achievements came easily, almost naturally, as if the history of the past seven years was just a bad, half-forgotten dream. The political class seemed to follow in the footsteps of civil society and carry through to completion what civil society had been claiming for seven years could, should and was worthy of being done. In the beginning of July, before the Madrid summit of the North-Atlantic Council which was going to discuss the expansion of NATO, Romania had not yet taken the necessary radical measures for economic reform. However, in an absolutely spectacular way she had fulfilled the political conditions regarding minorities and relations with her neighbors, putting an end to the main sources of international insecurity.

In Madrid, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were invited to join in. Prospects of the further expansion of NATO were announced as well as the Alliance's recognition of the progress made by Romania and Slovenia in the field of criteria for integration. It was a "no" followed by a polite promise for some hope.

## **19. The Hungarian Language University Crisis**

By means of the two emergency decrees, the Ciorbea Government had settled the most important requests of the Hungarian community regarding education and local administration. They still

had to be adopted by the Parliament. Despite all rules regarding the functioning of a political formation, some politicians in the ruling Coalition took sides with the nationalist Opposition and rejected the decrees. The first session of the new Parliament made up of mostly CDR-USD (Social Democratic Union)-UDMR membership, ended in the summer of 1997 on a note of pathetic crisis brought about by this rejection. In the fall, a governmental crisis started. In the winter of 1997-1998 it reached its peak. The crisis overshadowed the ethnic theme. However, in the summer of 1998, political games turned again towards the Romanian-Hungarian relations.

At the end of June 1998, four Hungarian Congressmen from Cluj submitted a draft bill regarding the re-establishment of Bolyai University, putting pressure on the situation without adequate preparation of the procedure and without evaluating the consequences. The Hungarian proposal offered ammunition to politicians and the mass media. The Parliamentary summer, for lack of other political *can cans*, was offering a scandal on the Hungarian university theme.

The fact that nearly the entire Romanian university community did not focus on an objective more dignified than opposing the Hungarians' wishes for their own state university is a worrying but revealing sign. Immediately following the submission of the draft bill for the re-establishment of the Bolyai University, the Romanian National Civic Forum organization published an aggressive communiqué against an independent Hungarian institution. Forty-eight universities adhered to the

Forum's open letter. In July, professors speaking on behalf of the Romanian Fundamental Sciences Society maintained that the Romanian State had no moral or material interests in producing Hungarian-speaking specialists.

Leading this movement was none other than Dr. Andrei Marga, the new Minister of National Education and former Rector of the Babes-Bolyai University. In response, an official document signed by Mihai Korca, Secretary of State for Superior Education from the Ministry of National Education, was published. Its title was "*The Ethnic Segregation of Romanian Higher Education is not Opportune.*" The text was as irritating and aggressive as the title.

UDMR threatened to leave the Government and its decision was strengthened by the continuous sabotage in Parliament of the draft bill for the change in the Law on Education. In an emergency meeting, the Council of Union Representatives declared that unless the decree put forward by the Ciorbea Government was adopted in its initial form by September 30, 1998, UDMR would leave the Coalition. On September 8, the CDR and PD leaders made a new offer to UDMR: a Hungarian-German University.

Due to a complicated parliamentary mechanism, the adoption of the decree in a span of three weeks was practically impossible. At the last moment, during the night of September 30, members of the Government found a solution. Through a Government's decision, they initiated a procedure for founding a university with subjects in Hungarian

and German (The Petöfi-Schiller University). In a meeting on October 4, the Council of the Union Representatives decided that UDMR would remain in the Government. The crisis was postponed.

The period of relaxation following the anxious month of September did not last long. On October 15, the National Council of the Rectors in Romania maintained that the Government's decision had been unconstitutional and illegal. Taking sides with the rectors' stand, the deans of law faculties in the four main cities of the country published their critical analysis on the situation. They declared that "the founding of a Hungarian-German University would constitute a discriminatory measure in relation to the Romanian citizens of Romanian ethnicity and the other minorities." They branded the Government's decision illegal and criticized the involvement of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities.

Faced with this atmosphere that confused public opinion—university rectors and the deans of the law faculties expressed their views only regarding the Hungarian university!—the Helsinki Committee had to launch a counter-campaign. Its communiqués sent to institutions and to the mass were very timely. The detailed and thorough analysis indicated the errors and falsehoods in the arguments of the rectors and deans. Undoubtedly, the voice of the Helsinki Committee was frail in the general choir raised against the petition for a university in the mother tongue. Still, the Committee had undermined the symbolic value of the reactors and deans'

intervention, which was their presumed competence.

Once again, civil actors had proof that the Romanian society is not a chauvinist monolith.

Such debates and negotiations helped win the time necessary for the evolution of the process. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the war in Kosovo and the NATO intervention demonstrated to Romanian public opinion that problems with minorities change the logic of the international life. As she had a minority party in Government and referring to her ability to solve minority problems, an ability also mentioned by the US President, Romania had naturally opted for supporting the NATO actions. A little while later, the main legislative objectives on UDMR's agenda were attained in a form similar to the one initially desired. The political game met with success. However, for this, and in order to overcome critical moments, the intervention of civic society was necessary.

## **20. The Romany Minority. Eyeing the American Experience?**

I have talked above about the prevention of a profound crisis in Romanian democracy between 1990 and 1999, a crisis which would have occurred had the tension between Romanians and Hungarians changed into an internal and regional conflict in the logic, but certainly not the shape, of the conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Consequently, during these years the rapport between Romanians and Hungarians has

been crucial for the interethnic realities in Romania and the region. The conduct of the High Commissioner for National Minorities, Max van der Stoep, is not an irony but a mere confirmation of what I mentioned above. He made frequent trips to Romania in order to discuss the matter of Romanian–Hungarian relations with the authorities. On the other hand, the serious problem of the Romanies preoccupied him less, even though reports show that up until 1996 there were 35 attacks against several Romany communities in the villages of Romania, of which some resulted in deaths, burnt houses—while there was only one attack in March 1990 against Hungarians<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, the Hungarian minority situation required the most important legislative adjustments and thus constituted the propeller for the norms and attitudes in the field of minorities.

If the problem of Romanian–Hungarian relations were essentially one of a political nature, the means of solving it would also be political. Consequently, the solution to overcoming communities' disputes is relatively simple: essentially, it is an act of will coupled with one of knowledge. This explains why a number of governmental organizations that dominated the symbolical and special zone on this subject have

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<sup>28</sup> The High Commissioner's Status is of "early warning" and takes into consideration the danger interethnic tensions represent for the international stability.

been able to play the role they did in Romanian–Hungarian relations.

However, this is unlike anything that concerns the Romany minority in Romania. The seriousness of the challenges that the Romanies bring to the Romanian society is so extensive that, were we to view things from this perspective, the subject of the Romanies would completely dominate the problem of minorities in Romania. This problem could not be “solved” alone by specialists or by dialog between Romanian and Romany good-willed militants. The only factors that could bring some hope to this minority would be an ample process of internal construction and the development of large strategies at levels of central and local politics. So far, the internal construction of communities has already started due to a most important factor: the appearance of civic leaders in the communities.

Generally, the Romanies raise two issues: that of *discrimination* and that of a *problematical cultural identity*.

Since we have embarked on the theme of Romany discrimination, I would like to quote the following text. This short excerpt is taken from an essay Roger Parham-Brown read in 1999 at a symposium (in Bucharest) and later published in the “22” magazine.<sup>29</sup> After having lived in Romania

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<sup>29</sup> This is the English version of the essay called “What Would We Write About Romanies?”, published in the “22” magazine, in 1999.

for two years, the American writer had brilliantly synthesized the mentality problem that appears in the relations between Romanians, Hungarians, and members of other nationalities and gypsies, as well as the merciless stereotyping of the Romany community.

*... by the time desert came around something had caused me to venture into the perilous subject of the Romanian's treatment of the Roma, and how I saw such an incredible similarity to the Romanian attitude towards Roma and the attitude that had been prevalent towards blacks and Indians in America.*

*"Oh, no! Absolutely not," said my host. "One simply cannot make any comparison to the situation with Tigani's and the American black. It's just not at all the same."*

*I told my host that I thought it was precisely the same. First of all because racial chauvinism was racial chauvinism, and that the same things were said about blacks and Indians, that they were ignorant, incapable of learning, unclean, lazy, and were only good for entertainment and sex, etc. And I went on to talk about how the internalization of these prejudicial ideas damages the hearts and minds of its victims as I had seen not only in my own family (Here I must say that I am a person of mixed blood, African-American, Anglo-Saxon, but predominantly Native-American Indian Cherokee. And I am a psychological victim, from a family of generations, conflicted by racial self-hatred) but*

*that I had seen this with blacks and Indians throughout Latin America, principally southern Mexico in the state of Oaxaca where I have lived nearly twenty-years.”*

Socioeconomic data also adds to the stereotyping. The percentage of unemployed Roma is more than 50%. The percentage of the children who graduate from primary school is much lower than the percentage of any other national or social category. The number of students that go on to university does not go above 1%. The Roma in Romania have the worst standard of life, etc.

This data regarding social life originates from historical discrimination. The Roma had been slaves until 1856. But modern discrimination is not any less obvious. In work places the Roma are the first to be fired. Notices to the effect of ... “we do not serve Gypsies (Roma)” still exist.

During the dialogues I had with Romany leaders I have often mentioned the use of the Afro-American example<sup>30</sup>. The Romany leaders, however, remained reticent about it. And yet Roger Parham-Brown insists on the analogy. To this day his essay published in magazine “22” (1999) constitutes the strongest association ever made between the two experiences. Moreover, coming from America, his essay could be viewed in a less suspicious light, even by Romany leaders.

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<sup>30</sup> I particularly remember the seminar organized by Romani Criss in 1997, when the most skilled Roma leaders came to tackle the most general issues of the Roma community.

What could be learned from the US experience of fighting against discrimination?

The US protection system is the inherent expression of the evolution of the US constitutional system<sup>31</sup>. In this regard, it is the product of an extremely powerful justice system and its flexibility to respond to the considerable changes in the reality and mentality of the American society. From this point of view there are several indisputable “lessons” for the promotion of the Romany situation in Romania.

First of all, a lesson would be the role of the act of justice in this process. The writing and adoption of pro-minority laws remains useless unless the act of justice is applied. The Romanian norms are firmer and more precise than the letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment or the Civil Act of 1964. Thus, in the cases of Romany discrimination, there is not as much a need for legislative development as for legal thought and action. From this point of view, the pressure of civil society could give results. Organizations such as the Romanian Helsinki Committee, APADO-Brasov, the Pro-Europa League took the initiative and tried to motivate lawyers to participate in trials involving the Romany and to observe the unfolding of the

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<sup>31</sup> The constitutional system has undergone a continual process of development while the system for the protection of minorities reached a peak in the 60's. The reference point of this evolution was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, adopted by the United States Congress on July 2, 1964. and considered as the most comprehensive legislative act since World War II.

trials. However, in this regard there is still much work to be done.

Secondly, what we can see from the US experience is the role of the appeal to the theme of discrimination of community members. There is no need to emphasize the collective dimension. In a considerable way, it grows out of each member's status.

Thirdly, the unity of the US justice system is remarkable. Progress cannot be made just for the Romany. The evolution of the democratic system regarding the respecting of its principles is essential for promoting a policy for the Romany in particular and for minorities in general. The reverse is also true. Democracy cannot exist in Romania if the justice system does not extend to the Romany as well.

Beyond discrimination, the Roma of Romania also raise an issue we previously mentioned, their "problematic cultural identity." By this formula is meant a cultural reality that clashes with the general laws of the State; it is an expression that precedes a larger system that reflects the status of the European citizen at the end of the century. The State is called upon to apply its internal law and to implicitly confer its benefits on the citizen.

One problem of the Romany community is that many of the customs that pertain to their traditions clash with the law. However, they do not clash with any laws that can be adjusted, but with the law regarding fundamental rights and freedom.

Among the problematic attitudes I would mention the custom of keeping girls at home. The reason for this is that school would taint their identity. Another theme would be the men's violent opposition to sexual education in general and to family planning in particular. The system of selling girls and boys, depending on the region, and the marriage of girls at the age of 13-14, which contravenes general law, is another problem.

All these raise the problem of the rapport between the cultural identity of this community and the cultural identity of society as a whole. More often though, they raise the problem of the rapport between the universality of human rights and its cultural limits, in the event that those limits become accepted.

Shall we take another look at the American continent? Does it not seem to remind us of the Native Americans' situation? In this case, the typical conflict between group rights and individual rights is tied to the issue of conferring the status of being an Indian. Thus, Indian women of certain tribes who marry non-Indians lose their Indian status. This does not apply to Indian men, however, which introduces a clear discrimination between the two categories. A Canadian law from 1985 had annulled this difference in treatment. Over 100 000 people had thus regained their Indian status.

Still, the said law had not completely eliminated this kind of discrimination. The Indian status is

not inherited by the offspring of the Indian women married to non-Indian men (a measure that does not apply to Indian men). Therefore, the problem of discrimination shifted to a secondary level, if we can call it that. Can we then talk about “a model” that could be imported from America and “applicable” to the Roma? I rather believe that the tendency on the American continent is largely towards the prevalence of individual rights and freedom.

One could certainly also quote other examples regarding a possible tension between individual and group rights that especially concern the self-determination enjoyed by Indian tribes and which pertains to their “indigenous nation” status and not the status of a “minority.” This sovereign nation status of Indian tribes grants them specific rights as a nation within a nation and not just as a minority. Still their treatment and rights have relevance to minorities elsewhere.

## **21. The Fall of 1999: National Minorities, Civic Activity and Social Sciences**

Even though civic activities are above all concerned with the interests of the public, they cannot overlook personal psychological data. Some people are radically inclined and others prefer to shun conflict. Perhaps radicalism was indispensable for survival in a difficult and cruel world, such as Romania before 1989. However, as I have previously shown, as far as public life is concerned, the tendency towards radicalism must be rejected. The small group that dedicated itself to pro-minority militancy had to make use of

compromise, the middle solution, the rescuing idea, problem-solving. This is why, in order to push ahead, we had to negotiate with recognized leaders and disputed leaders, with hypocrites and opportunists, with the strong and the weak.

However, ten years later, it can be said that something of significance has been achieved. First of all, as previously mentioned, a destructive escalation has been avoided. I am not saying that Romania could have become a Milosevich's Serbia. But it could have become a Romania of Iliescu, Vadim Tudor and Gheorghe Funar, the kind of internal fiery conflict somewhat similar to the conflict with the Kurds in Turkey that would have blocked the democratic system to a very low level and created a tension in external relations that could have completely marginalized the country.

It is not just that the escalation was stopped. Something essential had been won, namely, substantial progress in the logic of the "Romanian National and Unitarian" State. Minorities had become present in the public conscience, not only in a negative, threatening and foreign way, but also as a part of the world we live in and which sometimes shows a positive side.

UDMR's presence in the Government constituted a symbolic and exceptional fact. We are still too close to this moment to realize the full significance of the fact that a Hungarian political formation has been called to rule in Romania.

In my opinion, the legislative situation of national minorities in Romania is in character with what the Romanian Constitution and the special measures have to offer. It is true that the Hungarians did not obtain the possibility to study geography and history in their language in high school. Also, State universities can be multi-cultural but not in the language of a single minority. However, these limitations to their initial draft bill still remain rather minor details in comparison with the main goal of education in the mother tongue.

If we agree that we have a tangible result at the end of those ten years, to whom do we owe this success? To political action? To external intervention? To logic, concepts and theories? To civic militancy?

We have seen that political life, the battlefield for power within the void left by the fall of Communism, had been in fact the great generator of tensions, confrontations and interethnic manipulations. The exceptional fact that the Hungarian representative party had been integrated for a while in a Romanian political coalition is due to pressure from beyond political space. It could be said that this had also happened in Bulgaria and Slovakia. However, in all cases, this was a late phenomenon and it came to be as a matter of circumstance.

As far as external intervention for minority protection is concerned, it was important, but conditioned by the existence of internal actors. It should be noted that the chauvinistic forces were

also xenophobic. The ones who manipulated ethnic hatred were also the ones who opposed external presence. The truly interesting thing for them had been the cooperation with the mafia and authoritarian entities in the former Soviet Republic. The case of Serbia had shown that external intervention meant nothing without an internal counterweight.

## **22. Conclusion**

All that has been said so far sheds light on the role of civic activity for the affirmation of Romanian intercultural achievements. However, what can civic activity achieve without the force of concepts? What can it say if it is not fed on academic science?

In order to answer this question, I would like to draw attention to one of the commentaries written by a wonderful philosopher, Richard Rorty. *“Human rights need passion and courage, not reason and theory”*<sup>32</sup>. For him, *“the quest for secure philosophical foundations of human rights practice is philosophically doomed to fail and is practically useless.”*

There is no doubt that in the formula for human rights we also have to include the rights of minorities.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentally”, in Stephen Shute & Susan Hurley eds., *On Human Rights*, 1993

But how are we to understand Rorty? Are we to agree that only passion and courage is needed to create a society that protects the rights of minorities? Surely not *ad literam*. The status of minorities in a multicultural society is not as easily understood and described. In order to overcome stereotypes one needs arguments as well, not just the will to do it. However, my entire experience tells me that concepts appear if there is a living desire to use them for the prevention of evil. I don't think that any of the persons mentioned so far within this presentation on the search for interethnic peace had an academic knowledge of the minorities' doctrine from the start, nor did they live in an intercultural environment. Still, it was these people who developed the present concepts on interethnic rapport in Romania and not the universities or other academic institutions. On the contrary, the academic world of Romania displayed poor manners and knowledge when the subject of national minorities was brought up.

There is another observation regarding the more general theme of social sciences. They can be viewed from the perspective of *solving conflicts* more so than from an academic or bookish perspective. This would involve a pragmatic concept of social sciences, an active approach, rather than a theoretical.

The principles mentioned above are related to the theme of the functioning of *our* concepts. Social sciences have remained abstract for too long. They have lagged far behind the real debates on the public scene. They can only qualify as ma-

ture if they become functional. Perhaps this is why social sciences are becoming increasingly integrated in the new paradigm of the science of conflicts.

Finally, something needs to be said regarding the place of *details* and *context* within a multicultural doctrine. How would it be possible to understand the status of the Aland islands and Swedish, the official language in Finland, even though there are only 295,000 (5,8%) Swedish-speaking Finnish people, without knowing that Sweden ruled over these lands for hundreds of years, until 1809? The Finnish people have aspired to the Swedish culture. When they became the vassals of the Russian czar and could no longer become Swedish, not wanting to become Russian, they looked after their own identity but maintained respect for the Swedish culture. The fact that today all of the Finnish people have to study Swedish can not be understood only as a measure of protection taken by an important majority but also as an expression of this whole context which can not be found in Romania nor let us say, Bulgaria.

One cannot think of the rapport between American society and Native Americans without knowing that the latter were considered from the beginning as people with given rights and that they had to be negotiated with. When Francisco de Vitoria, the adviser of the king of Spain, had concluded in 1532 that the American natives had the right to their land, he introduced an element that gradually determined the outcome of later

events.<sup>33</sup> Later on, following the same logic, the American states started signing treaties with Indian tribes. Consequently, given his competency in the field of treaties, the United States' President came to assume an overwhelming role in controlling the situation of the Indians. The modern negotiating space between the Indians and the federal and state authorities has been built along the same line. The thinking that produced solutions for setting up a balanced rapport between the human societies on the American territory had to take the previous factors into consideration. (Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford Lytle have rendered this truth in the following way: "*the ability of the law to incorporate customs within its intellectual framework.*"<sup>34</sup>)

Taking the details into consideration means taking real life into consideration. This is why I believe that social sciences need to be more intimately tied to the civic and political activity. Social sciences represent only the conceptual dimension of the effort we owe to the world, in order to make it more decent. The history regarding the rescue of interethnic rapport in Romania in these past years is also the history of the way in which the mind succeeded in giving a better chance to people and to human communities.

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<sup>33</sup> Vitoria's doctrine mattered because it later influenced the Europeans to have "*respect for the tribes as societies of people.*" (Vine Deloria, Jr., Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1983, p. 3).

<sup>34</sup> Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *Ibid.*, p. 60