

**GABRIEL ANDREESCU**

**THE ROULETTE**

**ROMANIANS AND HUNGARIANS, 1991-2000**

## **IN PLACE OF A PREFACE, OR “THE RUSSIAN ROULETTE”**

October 2, 1998: I was in Budapest for an international seminar organized as a part of the Royaumont process<sup>1</sup> under the auspices of the Lambrakis Foundation and the Council of Europe. The seminar would eventually turn out to be a site of tough debates between the few of us who thought that in order to achieve stability in the Balkans the states in the region had to openly acknowledge the errors of their past policies on national and religious minorities, and the representatives of international organizations, safe in their cushy jobs and supported by an army of opportunists (some of which had penetrated even the NGOs). Nevertheless, I remember the elaboration of resolutions, the battle for their adoption, the statements and discourses pouring out from one side or the other as a passionate confrontation in a world governed by interests but fortunately also by rules.

On that day of October 2, 1998, I was roaming the streets of the Hungarian capital together with Anna Nagy, assistant to the Romanian head of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities. We were waiting for a fax. We had learned the day before of the dramatic government session held during the night between September 30 and October 1. In a moment of inspiration, minister Gyorgy Tokay had proposed, at about 2 o'clock in the morning, the establishment of a bilingual university (later known as the Petöffi-Schiller University). Imaginative and possessed of a great sense of crisis-management, Tokay had found a compromise solution. The Romanian government wanted to prove itself before the nationalist chorus at home chanting “we do not want segregation by creating an independent Hungarian university, we love multiculturalism”. The proposal would also have satisfied the demands of the Hungarians’ Council of Representatives (CRU). On September 4, the CRU had come up with an ultimatum: if the government Emergency ordinance providing for the right to establish mother tongue universities for the minorities was not pushed through by September 30, then UDMR would be out of the Romanian government coalition. A

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<sup>1</sup> The Royaumont process is an EU initiative aimed at promoting stability in South-Eastern Europe by financing joint projects designed by NGOs in the region. Launching the process was an implicit acknowledgement of the part played by civil society as a stability factor in the region and of its potential with respect to the enhancement of internal and international security.

decision establishing the Petöffi-Schiller University would have enabled UDMR to consider the CRU resolution at least partly satisfied.

I had been in Budapest since September 24, waiting for Anna's arrival, hoping for some news. She had arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup> of the month but things were still in suspense. We had constantly been on the phone with Bucharest. And then Tokay's brilliant idea came out of the blue. He was probably the only UDMR leader able to play the card of political compromise that way.

The morning of October 1 was bright. What a great idea! To support multiculturalism and at the same time safeguard minorities' institutional control of their educational institutions. A new CRU meeting had been announced for October 4. The Council was supposed to decide whether the CRU request of September 4 had (actually) been satisfied. The CRU was once again discussing the Hungarian's position in the Romanian government. The tension was immense, suspense was high up. Things were hanging by a thread. To Anna and me, the consequences were obvious. If UDMR left, the days of the coalition were numbered. This would have meant early elections, the blocking of the reform, and almost certainly having former president Ion Iliescu and his team back in power. The Hungarian community would be the first victim of the lust for revenge. And then a generalized crisis would follow – a spine-chilling prospect. How could people even begin to contemplate such things?

The decision by the UDMR party members to leave the government coalition had to be prevented. All we could do was to use the familiar good old tactics: address an appeal-letter to the CRU leaders asking them not to make such a decision. Smaranda Enache was due to arrive in Budapest on the evening of October 2. It was crucial that her signature, so esteemed by the Hungarians, should be placed on the appeal. We trusted each other absolutely, so I was almost sure she would have consented both to the spirit and to the text of the letter. In writing it, we had to be careful about the sensibilities of the Hungarian members of the CRU. Nothing mattered more in that moment than a "We stay in!" vote.

Anna Nagy and I were walking on *Margaret utca*. We were exchanging ironic comments aimed at the political bosses in Bucharest and Cluj.<sup>2</sup> But our nerves were stretched tight. We had stood on the edge of the abyss so many times. The coalition leaders had signed countless covenants only to break them the very next day. And each time the UDMR, in its turn, had been on the verge of slamming the door in their faces. Appeals to compromise from all sides had been violated by those who had made them and who were irresponsibly playing with our future.

The crisis we feared was miraculously avoided once again. Once again at the last moment. And once again in an almost impossible situation. “Just like in a Russian roulette,” Anna laughed, counting the times the coalition had been about to break. “You put the bullet in the six-hole barrel and you fire. You fire once, you fire twice... You fire the fifth time and bullet is still in,” she went on. “The bullet is now in the barrel. The game is over. You have to quit, or you’re committing suicide.”

That morning, we found the fax we had been waiting for and sent the letter. The radical wing of the CRU had a spectacular change of mind – also prompted by the concerns expressed by the government in Budapest –, so the Council decided that UDMR should continue its cooperation with the parties in power. The crisis had been avoided in the last instance. The pages that follow are the story of this “Russian roulette” type of game that governed the Romanian-Hungarian relations between 1990 and 1999. Year 2000 has passed and the bullet that almost hit both communities is still in the barrel. But luck is not the only explanation for their survival.

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<sup>2</sup> The city where the CRU meetings were held.

## 1. ROUND TABLE AT THE GDS: WHAT WERE ROMANIAN INTELLECTUALS UP TO?

*“Over the past weeks, the Democratic Alliance of the Hungarians in Romania has put forward a series of documents and made several statements that the public opinion received with heightened concern. The Declaration of Cluj as well as the less publicized views advanced at the Târgu-Mureş Symposium (October 30 – November 1) use concepts and ideas on the minorities and the national issue that seem unclear or insufficiently explained...”*

The introduction to the “GDS Round Table” summary, published in the pages of the weekly 22,<sup>3</sup> opened with these slightly arrogant (especially the “insufficiently explained” part) but doubtlessly well-meaning words. This was the first Bucharest meeting of Romanians and Hungarians which aimed to look into the concepts with which the Hungarians’ party had challenged Romanian society. Back in 1992, the Group for Social Dialogue (GDS) still had a significant degree of authority in the relations with the Hungarian minority, and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) still needed the support of this group which consisted of exclusively non-Hungarian intellectuals. The Alliance had therefore sent two of its scholars to the meeting: House-member Varga Attila and Szilagyi Zsolt. The GDS team included Andrei Cornea, Sorin Vieru, Sorin Antohi, Mariana Celac, Mihai Şora, Thomas Kleininger, Radu Popa, Mircea Diaconu, Ana Şincai – all of whom were there to talk about things that, at the time, seemed completely new: collective rights, self-determination, the self-determination of national minorities.

The GDS meeting was seen by some as a real event, so much so that it was later covered by *Uncaptive Minds*, which printed an English translation of the most important statements.<sup>4</sup> What were we at the GDS thinking and what were we able to articulate, in 1992, about issues that we had proposed for debate, as hosts, to those

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<sup>3</sup> No. 45, November 12-18, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> “Minority Rights in Romania: A Roundtable Discussion”, *Uncaptive Minds*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1993, pp. 23-41.

gathered in the GDS conference hall? Which questions and opinions were we able to articulate before the advocates of programs for the Hungarian community?

Mariana Celac asked whether the autonomy of local communities would not also involve ethnicity-based autonomy. Sorin Vieru wanted to know whether national minorities are legal persons under international law. Andrei Cornea inquired why the type of autonomy demanded by Hungarians had not been legitimized through other types of autonomy safeguarded by the Constitution. Sotin Antohi was rather offensive: are not Hungarian options mere pastiches or anachronistic symptoms of an *ancien regime*? Are not autonomy-related demands actually satisfied by a more rigorous application of the principle of subsidiarity? According to Mihai Şora, community rights were based on implicit rather than explicit legal codes. Thomas Kleininger made two direct statements that any minority theorist has to consider and to translate into public language: a minority has to have more rights than a majority; the thought-patterns implicit in the conception of the national, unitary, sovereign etc. state are anachronistic. The late historian Radu Popa stood by the latter observation. Mircea Diaconu had a problem with the Cluj Declaration:<sup>5</sup> were not “Hungarian” values means by which UDMR wanted to secure “personal” advantages? Ana Şincai believed the “moment was not right”.

The positions of my colleagues now make me smile. And in fact so does my own – I inquired whether individual rights and the right to association could not reconstruct, at community level, the collective rights, autonomy, and self-government that the Hungarian minority was claiming. Any minority rights primer that was even moderately elaborate would have offered solutions (or, at least, a handful of arguments) to the questions we were trying to answer that November afternoon just by using our intelligence, which we so easily took for granted.

After the roundtable, I was very proud of what had emerged out of the literature read by the GDS members – at least *for a while*. A few months later, in Cluj, I briefly met Szilágyi Sándor. He made an ironic comment on the conceptual quality of the GDS members’ take on minority issues. He was implicitly jeering at me, because I was the

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<sup>5</sup> A 1992 statement in which the UDMR formulated its doctrine and positions. It should not be mistaken for the 1999 statement, which will be the subject of a separate chapter toward the end of this volume.

one who had come with the idea of a confrontation of arguments. I avoided a direct comment. I was under the impression that he was bluffing. (But why? Hungarians were such wonderful hosts!) Yet Sándor's comments stayed with me. They were the sting of a lingering doubt, the reason for which I was only going to discover later on.

Because it was only later that I found out how much Romanian intellectuals (or "we", in this case) were lacking in terms of our knowledge of multicultural democracy, and even of contemporary democracy itself. But did this detract from the importance of the GDS to Romanian-Hungarian relations? A possible answer was given in these memorable phrase by Richard Rorty: "[original quote]"<sup>6</sup> In 1990, 1991, and 1992, the Group for Social Dialogue did not need to know a lot about liberal theories of minority rights, affirmative action or other special measures, or about the distinction between the interethnic and the multicultural, in order to take crucial positions with respect to Romanian-Hungarian relations.

Nevertheless, the importance of having the right attitude at the right time and in the right place is just one side of the coin. Intellectually-inspired benevolence could not play the same decisive role when the technical debates that followed from the challenges posed by UDMR's draft laws were held before the Romanian Parliament or in the great halls of international bodies.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality", in Stephen Schute and Susan Hurley, eds., *On Human Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. To Rorty, "[quote]".

## 2. ROMANIA: AN ETHNOPOLITICAL PROFILE

What was really at stake for Romanians was not merely the somewhat specialized debate that intellectuals were promoting at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990. The main question was achieving the fundamental knowledge that conditions the mentality of an entire society and defines the relations of that society to itself. How many Romanians are actually aware of basic facts about the world they live in? How many of them are aware of how the Romanian state came to be? The part played by mythology and stereotype in national issues is, in Romania at least, excessive. How many Romanians are ready to acknowledge the implications of the very simple fact that their state is a relatively young one? Created between 1859 and 1862 by the union of two principalities with a Romanian ethnic majority (Moldova and Wallachia), Romania only had about five decades (in an age that took its time) to build and tweak modern institutions. Transylvania was a part of Hungary until 1526 and an autonomous principality until 1711, an autonomous province within the Austro-Hungarian empire till 1867, and a part of the Hungarian state within the latter empire up to 1918. Together with Bessarabia, a part of the historical region of Moldova until 1812 when it was first occupied by Russia,<sup>7</sup> it was essentially remote from the world as seen in Bucharest at the time.

Romanian borders were modified once more before World War II, when Bessarabia was occupied by the USSR. These historical changes brought about continuous fluctuations in the ethnic make-up of the country. After 1918, there were about 17 percent Hungarians, 4.4 percent Germans, 3.2 percent Jews, 2.9 percent Russians and 1.7 percent Roma within the borders of the Greater Romania. Minorities made up approximately 29 percent of the entire population. Meanwhile, Bucharest was looking at this multicultural reality from the “vantage point” of a “national and unitary state.”

Bessarabia was taken over by the USSR once again after World War II. Frontier changes and population movements led, this time around, to an important reduction in

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<sup>7</sup> Russia obtained Bessarabia from Turkey after the Russian-Turkish war.



Romania's multiethnic diversity. Between 1947 and the 1990s, the very significant German and Jewish communities left the country, driven away (and sometimes sold) by the communist regime. The ethnic map of today's Romania differs dramatically from that of 1918-1940.

According to the 1992 population survey, there are now 20,350,980 ethnic Romanians in a total population of 22,760,449. The 16 officially acknowledged national minorities are the Hungarians (1,620,199 or 7.1 percent), the Roma (or gypsies – 409,723 or 1.8 percent),<sup>8</sup> the Germans (119,436 or 0.5 percent), the Ukrainians (66,833 or 0.3 percent), the Russian-Lippovans (36,688 or 0.2 percent), the Turks (29,533 or 0.1 percent), the Serbs (29,080 or 0.1 percent), the Tatars (24,649 or 0.1 percent), the Slovaks (20,672 or 0.1 percent), the Bulgarians (9,935), the Jews (9,107), the Czechs (5,800), the Poles (4,247), the Croats (4,180), the Greeks (3,897), the Armenians (2,023). About 8,420 individuals identified themselves as Carashovans (2,775) and Changos (2,165).<sup>9</sup>

What is the general mentality of the Romanian majority with respect to the history and the current state of ethnic relations in Romania? I will not refer to the views of the average citizen (not least because it is rather difficult to estimate). I would rather quote a respected historian who is regarded as one of the open-minded, liberal members of his profession. Recently, Dinu Giurescu stated this very clearly in an article in the 22 weekly: *“between 1919 and 1939 the Romanian state did not practice any policy of assimilation of national minorities.”*<sup>10</sup>

This is a firm and uncompromising statement. I shall return later in the book to Giurescu's part in the process of obscuring assimilationism tendencies throughout

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<sup>8</sup> This figure is notoriously different from the real one. Complications aside (e.g., “who really is” and “who considers himself or herself” Roma), the best methodology for estimating the size of the Roma population is that of the Institute for the Quality of Life which, in a study of 1997, furnished a figure of 1.5 million.

<sup>9</sup> An analysis of ethnic diversity in Romania is to be found in Renate Weber, “The Protection of National Minorities in Romania: A Matter of Political Will and Wisdom”, in Jerzy Kranz (ed.) in cooperation with Herber Kupper, *Law and Practice of the Central European Countries in the Field of National Minorities Protection after 1989*, Warszawa: Center for International Relations, 1998, pp. 199-269.

<sup>10</sup> Giurescu made a comparison with the systematic policy of assimilation practiced by Hungary between 1867 and 1919. While he was strictly speaking accurate, the comparison itself was a way of avoiding the real question. Hungary later paid dearly for its policies. (Dinu Giurescu, “Imperii și pseudoimperii, între teorie și realitate”, 22, November 10-16, 1998).

Romanian history. The truth is that, in its relations to at least several ethnic groups, the Romanian state pursued, at least to a certain extent, assimilationist goals. These policies have not been and will not be forgotten by the minorities. The majority needs to be aware of them as well.

The Hungarian population decreased after Transylvania became a part of the Greater Romania, in part due to rising emigration. No less than 39.3 percent (156,340 individuals) of the population of Cluj county was of Hungarian origin in 1910. Today Hungarians amount to only 19.9 percent (146,186 individuals). In Arad, there were 130,564 or 25.7 percent Hungarians in 1910, as opposed to 12.5 percent today. But another cause of the change in percentages was the deliberately hostile policy designed in Bucharest. Between the two great wars, the border area with Hungary was colonized with Romanian ethnics in accordance with a program concocted in the Romanian capital. The colonization that took place in the age of national-communism was aimed at securing a Romanian majority in the areas with a predominantly Hungarian population. Immediately after 1989, Hungarian emigration out of Romania magically stopped for approximately 3 months. However, as a consequence of the clashes in Târgu-Mureș and, later on, of the extremist anti-Hungarian public discourse, about 50 to 60 persons applied for residence in Hungary each day. In other words, about 15,000 men and women entered applications for emigration each year.<sup>11</sup> According to some estimates, approximately 650,000 Hungarians have left Romania since 1919.

As for the (German) Saxons, they showed their commitment to the Greater Romania soon after January 8, 1919. Yet the political parties and the country's leaders ignored the collective rights of the Saxons and the Szeklers, which Romania had acknowledged by signing the Treaty of Versailles.

After the Romanization campaign that started in the 1930s, the Romanian government closed Ukrainian ethnic schools, newspapers and cultural institutions. The use of Ukrainian language in public affairs was forbidden. Any violation of these regulations was answered back with brutal police intervention. Officially, Ukrainians were "Romanians who have forgotten their mother tongue." In 1948, the Ukrainian

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<sup>11</sup> Figures provided by the Hungarian Embassy in Bucharest.

Catholic Church was disestablished and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was incorporated by the Romanian Orthodox Church. (Things changed after 1947.)<sup>12</sup> The Bulgarians were subjected to a similar treatment. Their schools, churches, cultural and artistic institutions were closed down.

At the end of the cold war, Greek communities in Romania, which had always enjoyed an energetic community life, were subjected to restrictions as well. Some of their property was abusively confiscated, while the members were subjected to humiliating attempts at forced assimilation. Albanians also suffered a post-war deterioration of community life. Their latest community organization was disestablished in 1953.

The fate of the Jewish community is now the subject of an ongoing debate which benefits from ambitious, large-scale historical studies. We therefore have a much better bibliography on the issue.<sup>13</sup> Under the Ceaușescu regime, they were sold, just like the Germans, to states which were willing to purchase them from the communist government.

I shall not dwell on the frustration of Romanians in pre-Greater Romania Transylvania (their status was that of an inferior nation), on the concerns expressed about Hungarian irredentism, or on the question of balance in the region of Dobrogea.<sup>14</sup> Assimilationist actions in *interbellum* Romania lacked the effectiveness of Hungarian assimilationist policies before the First World War. Minority rights after 1945 were clearly better than those enjoyed (to mention just one example) by German ethnics in Poland. Interethnic confrontation never reached the terrible intensity of conflicts in other Balkan states. Naturally, we should not evaluate events that are 80 years old by today's standards.

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<sup>12</sup> Elementary Ukrainian-language schools were established in all localities with over 100 Ukrainian ethnics. In Suceava, Siret and Sighetul Marmației, high schools and teacher-schools with teaching in Ukrainian were opened. In 1949, the University of Bucharest established, within its Slavic Languages Department, a Ukrainian language section.

<sup>13</sup> See Carol Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor din România (1913-1919). De la inegalitate civică la drepturile de minoritate. Originalitatea unei lupte începând cu războaiele balcanice și până la Conferința de Pace de la Paris*, 1998 și *Evreii din România de la emancipare la marginalizare*, 2000. The books include in-depth analyses of the Mârzescu Law, which removed about 80-100,000 Jews from the list of persons enjoying citizenship rights, of race-based economic decrees and other acts by the Tătărescu administration, of the antisemitic laws of the Goga-Cuza government etc.

<sup>14</sup> [explain]

Yet hiding behind such qualifications is of little avail. Sometimes it is simply counter-productive. We have to understand and to accept the fact that the Romanian state – after all, this is our main topic of interest – followed an obtuse political line that was harmful to the minorities under its jurisdiction for more than a century. When progress was made, as in 1887 or in 1923, it was the result of external pressures. A rule that works for individuals also works for societies: acknowledging one's errors is morally as well as practically liberating.

So what is there to do with misguided assessments such as those provided by Dinu C. Giurescu? Such views hurt ethnic diversity, cloud our thinking and our lucidity, and create bad habits among the population. The entire *interbellum* period, usually hailed as a model of Romanian democracy, was, it seems, inimical to multiethnicity. Whether we have in mind administrative policies or the work of the intellectual megastars of the day (Nae Ionescu was, of course, the paradigmatic case),<sup>15</sup> we cannot miss the orchestrated attack on multiculturalism. The national-communism that sparked in the 1960s and spread like wildfire during the following three decades only added to the crudity and aggressiveness of a culture which defined itself in terms such as “control” and “uniqueness”.

This is a rough picture of Romania's ethnopolitical history. It is also the cultural background of post-1990 evolutions. It is the stuff available to the actors who have been writing chapters in the book of post-December history.

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<sup>15</sup> [explain]

### 3. POLITICAL STAKES IN THE 1990s

Since I have just mentioned the term “post-December history,” let us go back to the first days after the revolution. On December 22, 1989, as the Council of the Front for National Salvation (CFSN) was making known its new policy with respect to the former Securitate (paying the staff for 3 more months and then disbanding it), Sándor Szilágy was saying to himself: “I cannot imagine Securitate men going back to the conveyor belt or picking up the shovel.” After the UDMR was founded, he told the Alliance people: “Be alert on or around March 20. They’ll probably try to fire up something.”<sup>16</sup>

Many others realized that “something was being set up,” unfortunately only too late. Géza Domokos, one of the Hungarian leaders, received a phone call on the evening of December 26, 1989 from somebody telling him that hundreds of Romanians had been killed in Covasna and that such acts had to be stopped immediately. “And might you be, sir?” he asked in surprise. “Virgil Măgureanu,” the answer came back.<sup>17</sup> This name, of little significance at the time, would become within a matter of months that of one of the country’s most controversial personalities.

On January 5 of the next year, the CFSN issued a generous statement on national minorities. It promised official recognition for the individual rights of Hungarians and – this needs to be emphasized – for their collective rights as well. Géza Domokos, then president of the UDMR, read the Hungarian version. He immediately was it meant a fundamental change to Romania’s interethnic landscape. There was, however, a small detail that few were trained to spot at the time. The statement was read in Romanian by none other than the man who had told him on the phone about the killings in Covasna. So Virgil Măgureanu made a new appearance! Upon realizing the “coincidence” I was left speechless, wondering whether the Statement had been

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<sup>16</sup> Sándor Szilágy is an important figure of Hungarian cultural life: professor of linguistics at Babeş-Bolyai University, member of the UDMR and author of a bill on the rights of national minorities.

<sup>17</sup> Géza Domokos retold this story in his memoirs.

premeditated and whether the coming interethnic conflict had not, in fact, been fully scripted before bursting out in such a life-like way.<sup>18</sup>

But let us move beyond anecdotal insinuations. We know for sure that the first power structure after 1989 was led by a small group consisting of four ex-communist leaders: Ion Iliescu, Silviu Brucan, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, and Dumitru Mazilu. The first post-1989 Romanian prime minister, Petre Roman, was the son of ex-Comintern leader Valter Roman and a friend of the notorious Zoe Ceașescu (Nicolae Ceașescu's daughter). He had studied in Paris. All five used an anti-Hungarian discourse before the electoral campaign.

The political coalition that governed the country between 1992 and 1996 consisted of nationalist and ultranationalist parties. All governments and parliamentary commissions were dominated by people who had held positions in the former Romanian Communist Party (PCR), Securitate, Foreign Affairs or Foreign Trade Ministries. All of them lapsed at one point or another into bombastic references to patriotism. All of them asked, albeit in different ways, that the land of our country be protected against Jews, Hungarians or Roma.

Today, 11 years after the change, the President of Romania is still an ex-leader of the PCR, the prime minister is the son of a Securitate general, the president of the Senate<sup>19</sup> (the second man in the state) is an former high-ranking employee of Ceașescu's Ministry of Finance, the president of the Senate foreign policy commission is an ex-chief of cabinet under Constantin Dăscălescu...<sup>20</sup> The list can go on and on.

How can one miss the larger picture once such an abundance of data is immediately available? Do we really need to refer to the ancient history of this country or to age-old ways of thought in Romanian society in order to explain the impact of nationalism after 1989? It would be completely unimaginative to see in our current state of affairs a deterministic expression of our history and our mentalities (aren't social

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<sup>18</sup> To Sándor Szilágyi, this interpretation was supported by other evidence. In 1987, a personal friend of his, an electronics engineer in Bucharest, decided to return to Târgu-Mureș. He managed, although the city was closed to those who were not coming from Moldova or Oltenia. He told about his travel plans to a neighbor, a Securitate member whose house appliances he would fix. "Don't go!" the latter retorted. "You'll regret it!"

<sup>19</sup> Nicolae Văcăroiu.

<sup>20</sup> Gheorghe Prisăcaru.

theorists so skeptical about the latter concept, after all?). What happened after 1990 is, to an overwhelming extent, part of the political battle that started as communism was falling apart. In Romania, the fall of communism was a bloody affair, with a thousand dead and with potential criminals who sought to cover their tracks and save their skins. In this respect, Romania was not so different from other countries in the Balkans. To say that “Nationalism is the second stage of communism” is to simplify the recent history of this country, but certainly not to betray it. The phrase is of course hardly true of Romania alone. Looking at the Balkans but also beyond them, Adam Michnik announced the return of those symbols and ideologies that seemed to have vanished 50 years go: “[original quote]”.<sup>21</sup>

The answer to Michnik’s question is the subject of countless books, articles, and studies. One can find it also in the words of George Carpat-Fouche, whose speech was reprinted in 1990 in the 22 weekly. He recalls the words Francis Fukuyama: “National consciousness is called upon to consolidate threatened powers. Communist elites deliberately use nationalism as an access point to a so-called third way, sparing them the inconvenience of decisive political and economic reforms, and in order to craft a totalitarian system with apparently democratic means. American historian Francis Fukuyama offered a seductive metaphor: ex-communists jump on the departing train of anticommunism which now runs on the new tracks of ultranationalism.”<sup>22</sup>

Along the same line, Stephen Van Evera wrote on the inverse relationship between political legitimacy and the tendency of elites to generate aggressive national mythologies.<sup>23</sup> To leaders who appear compromised by their former positions under the communist regimes, nationalist-extremist propaganda has become a tool of political

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<sup>21</sup> Adam Michnik, *Letters from Freedom*, ed. by Irena Grudzinska Gross, University of California Press, 1998, p. 234.

<sup>22</sup> George Carpat-Fouche, “De la comunism la naționalism. Paradigma românească,” a speech given at the symposium “Romania in Europe in the 1990s”, November 28-30, 1990, Berlin, Freie Universitaet, republished in 22, No. 3, January 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War”, *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1994, pp. 5-37.

survival.<sup>24</sup> Nationalism has been the political refuge of communists. It would be worthwhile to put this in my own words, after it has been said by so many others.<sup>25</sup>

These general, oft-repeated judgments are reflected in every day life by acts and conduct which will in turn engender emotional responses of rejection or approval. The communists' struggle for survival – or, better still, the struggle of individuals caught within the system<sup>26</sup> – in the early post-revolutionary days offered an unique spectacle. It was a sort of symbolic blockage that prevented us from studying with sufficient curiosity, and perhaps also with a measure of admiration, the intricacy of the phenomenon.

As an original member of the CFSN (the first post-revolutionary governing body) and then of CPUN, as someone involved at the earliest stage in the investigation of the Gheorghe Ursu case, I stumbled upon things that were hidden from public opinion. This is how I found out about the stage-setting behind the emergence of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI). The CPUN, the only authority that could approve the establishment of such an institution, was kept in the dark about the operation.<sup>27</sup> During one of the CPUN sessions, I approached the microphone with a paper in my hand and I started reading my own speech “before the nation”. I mentioned something about what was in store for us without our knowing it. I suddenly found myself grabbed by several hands that had somehow found their way to the platform. I had to physically struggle in order to be able to go on. Probably at some signal that I failed to notice, Ion Iliescu's comrades started to stomp with their feet and holler so as to block the words coming out of my mouth.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Evera's views are well illustrated by cases such as those of Adrian Păunescu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor who were, during the first few days after the revolution, the object of contempt and threats by public opinion for their part in the personality cult of the Ceaușescu family.

<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, I have repeated this *ad nauseam* even since the beginning of 1990, as have my colleagues at 22 (see the collection of anti-extremist positions in Gabriel Andreescu, ed., *România versus România*, Clavis, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> A considerable number of informants were not communist party members; some feared that their shameful conduct might be uncovered by a party membership card.

<sup>27</sup> Which means, simply put, that the SRI functioned illegally.

<sup>28</sup> The irony is that, since I was speaking into a microphone, my voice was easy to distinguish on TV. (Back then the television would cover the debates around the clock.) I think “the boys” failed to immediately realize this, probably enthusiastic about covering my voice in the CPUN session hall.



One of those audacious enough to grab my hand and try to pull me off the stand was, once again, none other than Virgil Măgureanu. As you can see by now, he is quickly becoming an omnipresent figure in our story. He had just been appointed director of the brand-new Service of Foreign Intelligence (SIE), soon after the violence in Târgu-Mureș had made this institution legitimate. The SIE was, at least in terms of its goals and personnel, a follower of the old Securitate.

I only witnessed agitation of similar proportions in the Parliament in the fall of 1991, when the Harghita-Covasna Report<sup>29</sup> was quickly pushed on the agenda so as to quicken the passing of the Law on the organization of the SRI. In fact, whenever I spotted dangerous tensions caused by extremism after 1990, I also spotted the SRI. Whenever I listened to voices stridently proclaiming nationalist values I realized that the voices came from individuals who had served the old Securitate. Isn't it amazing to see Liviu Petraru,<sup>30</sup> an ex-diplomat with the Foreign Ministry, waving the flag of the Greater Romania? Why on earth would PNL and PNȚCD members have anything against the "Jewish" Alfred Moses?<sup>31</sup> The case of Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu seems so transparent now. After his long collaboration with the Securitate was uncovered in 2001 he argued, unsurprisingly, that he "believed that [he] was doing [his] duty for Romania". How was he doing that? "I was contacted by the Securitate," Lăzărescu went on, "by the colonel that had released me, Nătălețu. He promised me a visa on the condition that I monitor the propaganda for Romania's destabilization, especially with respect to Transylvania."<sup>32</sup>

It is now so easy to decode the past actions of this man whom Smaranda Enache aptly described as early as 1991: "an erudite and loved orator, [Lăzărescu] was visibly mesmerized by the political discourse of the far right, which he copied only to an extent compatible with his image of a pan-European personality winking at Romanian traditionalism."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> [explain]

<sup>30</sup> A member of the PNȚCD and later of the ANCD leadership.

<sup>31</sup> Ambassador of the United States in Bucharest between 1992 and 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Lăzărescu, "Consider că mi-am făcut datoria față de România", *Evenimentul zilei*, April 25, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> Enache, "Natură moartă în Parlament", *Gazeta de Mureș*, September 5-11, 1991.

To continue the list of Securitate loyalists, let me now bring Virgil Măgureanu, the man responsible for many of the punitive actions and mass movements after 1990 and doubtlessly one of the most odious figures of the past decade, back to the stage. A friend who was then himself a CPUN member entered one of the rooms of the Parliament House at the Metropolitan Building in order to photocopy some papers. He unwittingly heard what was being spoken in the next room, where the door was left open by mistake. Virgil Măgureanu was explaining why a nationalist movement was necessary: it would prevent the so-called “historical parties” from capturing the entire symbolic capital of national identity. This is how the extremist political organization Vatra Românească (The Romanian Hearth) came into being. Among its founders, we found out only years later, was Ion Iliescu.

The communist nomenklatura, the old Securitate, the special services – these were the actors who orchestrated national-communism under Ceaușescu. In 1990 they recycled their past national-communism into 24K-gold nationalism. Nationalism has been the ideological instrument for the seizure, perpetuation and preservation of political power. Throughout the book we shall therefore keep returning to the political context of the 1990s.

#### 4. SMARANDA ENACHE

January, 29, 1990, the day of the IMGB counter-demonstrations.<sup>34</sup> In the evening, the entrance at the Group for Social Dialogue was almost blocked by the mass of people. It was in the heated atmosphere at the GDS headquarters that I first heard a mention of Smaranda Enache's name. While I was fighting my way into the meeting hall, I felt somebody squeezing my arm. "Did you get a chance to see the lady from Târgu-Mureș last night?" asked my acquaintance (an architect) in the hallway. "An extraordinary woman," he tried to persuade me, excited by her performance on the TVR1 show the night before.

I had missed the show. As a matter of fact, I found out the details only years later. Smaranda Enache was co-president of the Pro-Europe League (LPE), which had been founded at the end of December 1989 by a group of Romanians and Hungarians based in Târgu-Mureș. As the tension between the two communities was building up, fueled by the incitements of those who would become leading figures in the bestiary of Romanian politics in the coming years, Smaranda Enache and her colleagues were almost alone in fighting the bulldozing forces. The League had issued communiqués, Smaranda had established contacts, stubbornly trying to get her message through in the mainstream press. She was interviewed by the reporter of the local TVR1 channel only as late as January 25, 1990.<sup>35</sup> The recording was sent to the channel's central offices in the country's capital and was broadcast in the evening of January 28. Petru Popescu, a notorious host at the time, stopped the live broadcast from Piața Victoriei in order to let on the air a "voice that called for responsibility." It was Smaranda's voicem and it warned about the nationalist incitements and the gravity of the latest developments in Târgu Mureș: "We must not repeat here, in the heart of Europe, what is happening in Nagorno Karabakh [Azerbaijan]. The fate of this city," she said in her interview, "will be a measure of democracy in Romania."

That is how I found out about Smaranda Enache and the crisis fomenting in Târgu-Mureș. Unfortunately, Bucharest in general and the Group for Social Dialogue

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<sup>34</sup> [explain]

<sup>35</sup> The interviewer, István Farkas, later fled to Sweden after repeated threats.

(GDS) where I was spending most of my time in particular, were not tuned to the logic and the nature of the events in Târgu-Mureș. We were completely absorbed by the ideological split between the communists who had grabbed power and the rest, which we considered ourselves a part of, who were condemning the confiscation of the revolution by former apparatchiks. To understand Smaranda Enache's statements would have required at least a better knowledge of the history and present situation of one of Transylvania's most interesting cities.

Târgu-Mureș is an old Szekler city with a rich academic and intellectual tradition. Between 1948 and 1959 it was the capital of the Hungarian Autonomous Region. Like most of the towns and cities of old Transylvania, its population was predominantly Hungarian. During the period in which it enjoyed autonomy, the Hungarian majority decreased in percentage to about 74 percent. In 1966, there were 70 percent Hungarians left in the city's total population. According to a 1977 statistics,<sup>36</sup> the percentage had fallen within just a decade to 63 percent.

It was around this time that the goals of Bucharest's demographic policies became shamelessly transparent. Factories were built and manned with workers and specialists from the other side of the Carpathian mountains. Physicians, teachers and members of other occupational groups that constituted the Hungarian elite were sent to work as far away as possible, usually in provinces with a large ethnic Romanian majority. They were for all practical purposes excluded from jobs in Târgu-Mureș. In 1989, the city's population was half Romanian and half Hungarian.

After the revolution, a map of Romanian immigration guidelines was found at the offices of the county's communist party branch. It detailed the ethnic changes envisaged for the coming years. The map was the first proof that the city had been subjected to "Romanization". Amplifying ethnic domination in Târgu-Mureș was, naturally, merely one of the components of a far-reaching program of systematic homogenization that the Ceaușescu regime had devised as one of the foundation stones of its national-communist state.

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<sup>36</sup> [The population of localities in Ardeal according to nationality], Budapest, KSH, 1996.

The final years of the eighties were replete with violent anti-Hungarian policies. Speakers of Hungarian were excluded from leadership positions. The old bilingual or bi-cultural events occasioned in the past by official celebrations were turned into memories. Poems written in Hungarian were no longer read, not even at the end of the school year. Romanian toponyms were forced into Hungarian texts.

The Ceaușescu regime's appalling plans for the future of the Hungarian community were opposed by the communities faced with the prospect of assimilation. Writer András Sütő and Károly Király, who was the party's ex-sectary for the Autonomous Hungarian Region, were probably the most renowned voices in Târgu-Mureș who took a stand against the levelling drives. Sütő's plays – he was an important writer, but also a member of the older nomenklatura – had been forbidden as early as 1983. The troublemaker Király was the victim of a car accident, some say planned by Ceaușescu's Securitate.<sup>37</sup>

Those were also the years of minor acts of disobedience aimed at state-sanctioned nationalism. The Târgu-Mureș Puppet Theatre occupied a privileged position in this respect. In 1983, Smaranda Enache, a graduate of Bucharest University's Philology Department and then the young literary secretary of the Theatre, was appointed director of the institution. The Puppet Theatre, which hosted events that were extremely ingenious but marginal, soon became a site of resistance against anti-Hungarian policies. The party committee would jump up each time the actors in a play were dressed in red, white or green and met on the stage.<sup>38</sup> When the Hungarian symbols made it on posters, the latter were immediately molten. Censorship eliminated each and every hint to Hungarian nationality. By 1989, any instance of indiscipline was reprimanded hysterically. Yet the Puppet Theatre in Târgu-Mureș remained undisciplined and continued to bring together Romanians and their Hungarian colleagues.

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<sup>37</sup> See Dennis Deletant's book.

<sup>38</sup> The colors of the Hungarian flag.

## 5. THE PRO-EUROPE LEAGUE

The December 1989 demonstrations that ultimately led to the toppling of the Ceaușescu regime were hailed in Târgu-Mureș by a small group of Romanian and Hungarian friends. On the evening of December 21, the streets witnessed the first cries of “No chauvinism!”. The fact that the revolt in Timișoara could not be separated from the name of a Hungarian ethnic, László Tőkés, seemed like a good omen in this Transylvanian city where the symbolic competition between ethnic groups had reached peak levels.<sup>39</sup> Smaranda Enache was invited to be a member of the County Council of the Front of National Salvation (CJFSN), the new administrative structure in the locality.

The Puppet Theatre intellectuals were meeting on a daily basis. Some of them made up the core group of the future association known by the name of Pro-Europe League: Boldiszár Csíky, a composer and ex-music secretary with the Târgu-Mureș Philharmonica; Zeno Fodor, literary secretary of the National Theatre; Elek Szokoly, a philosopher who also Smaranda’s husband. They prompted their colleagues to build together an association. On December 30, 1989, twenty-one Romanian and Hungarian residents of Târgu-Mureș gathered together to establish the Pro-Europe League (LPE).

Years later I was amazed by the early insights of the League’s founders. They realized as early as the last days of 1989 that the major objectives of Romanian political life were the resolution of interethnic conflict and European integration. Their statement of intentions of January 10, 1990, signed on behalf of the founders by Smaranda Enache and Boldiszár Csíky, included statements such as this: “The Pro-Europe League believes that national and regional specificity is a reason for rather than an obstacle against integration.” Or: “The Pro-Europe League rejects ... the fetishization of any national culture as well as any form of discrimination, irrespective of its ideological underpinnings.” The fact that the League’s status and the issues it addressed then are today just another instance of politically correct language may prevent us from realizing how truly exceptional this kind of language was eleven years ago. It suffices to look at

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<sup>39</sup> It is an accepted view that the danger of conflict between two different, self-conscious, co-habiting communities is largest when their size is roughly equal.

the statement of the Group for Social Dialogue which seemed to be, at that time, the engine of the independent Romanian elite. What was its picture of this country's future and of itself? Here's a telling fragment: "The Group aims to become a body of critical reflection on Romanian society. Its main strategy shall be the dialogue on all respects and manifestations of modern civilization." Today, studying at the differences between the two would make an interesting experience.<sup>40</sup>

But let us go back to Târgu-Mureș. The first signs of national-communist restoration emerged early on and in an unambiguous fashion. Smaranda Enache encountered serious opposition on the evening of January 10 (January 10, 1990) in publishing the League's platform in *Cuvântul liber*. This daily newspaper was then the heir of the communist party organ *Steaua roșie*. On the night between the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December it had changed its director but the whole editorial team stayed. The old dinosaurs who had run the city were now freely roaming the halls of the Country Council of the FSN (CJFSN). Ioan Movilă, ex-party secretary of the county, was one of the members of the old elite who was not shy of appearing in the antechambers of the new power. The shadows of those responsible for the December killings (several people were shot dead in the evening of December 21), among whom General Scrieciu and Colonel Judea, were hanging over the fledgling local administration.

As I have noted, the Front for National Salvation (FSN) made a statement on January 5 that alluded to the Ceaușescu's abusive treatment of national minorities and promised reparations. The position of the CFSN, the Front's Council, quickly generated a first round of requests from the Hungarian community. First of all, it was asked that mixed schools should no longer be mandatory. Traditional Hungarian-language schools and high schools, the institutions in charge with the identity of the community of Hungarians in Ardeal, had all been turned into mixed-language institutions. Hungarian symbols had been excised from the public space until no trace was left behind. Hungarian education was merely an appendix of the mainstream system of education. The process of national Romanization had progressed a lot in the eighties. Immediately

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<sup>40</sup> There are other significant details, such as the fact that, upon the release of its program, the League disseminated it in English, French, German, and Hungarian.

after the revolution, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) demanded as a priority the reinstatement of old schools and educational institutions.

The separation of mixed schools took place in several Transylvanian localities. The Târgu-Mureș CJFSN decided to re-segregate the main local high school, an old Hungarian institution which had about 25 percent Romanian students in 1990. In its decision, the CJFSN scheduled the start of the separation process for September, after the holidays. Romanian parents opposed the decision and in the ensuing debate Romanian and Hungarian pupils were paraded on different public occasions mimicking the arguments of their parents. One morning, Romanian students found the high school gates closed. Hungarian teachers refused to let them into the building. This serious mistake – one among many to come in the separation process, as Hungarians later admitted – turned out to be expensive. A couple of days later the town's Romanian population opened the gates for their children, but the tension had already reached the critical point.

Târgu-Mureș was one of the few places in the country where the old nomenklatura's strategy of using anti-Hungarian sentiments and protests for the purpose of its own political re-legitimation was clearly apparent early on. The town's ex-leadership organized agenda groups, especially in the police forces and the justice system. Leaflets were disseminated at the end of January 1990 declaring that the segregation of schools was merely the first step toward the separation of populations, culminating in the secession of the Ardeal region.

Around the same time, Frăția Românească (The Romanian Brotherhood), the first nationalist organization, was established in the neighboring town of Reghin. The founding assembly of the Vatra Românească (The Romanian Hearth), the most important anti-Hungarian extremist association of the early 1990s, convened on February 6. Two days later, individuals who attended a public gathering occasioned by the establishment of Vatra Românească cried "We want to drink Hungarian blood!" Behind the new leaders stood the old Securitate, as well as army members involved in the reprisals against the December 1989 demonstrators.



Then the UDMR announced its intention to hold a meeting dedicated to the anniversary of the 1848 revolution, a holiday celebrated by Hungarians all over the world, on March 15, 1990. There were many signs that the event would be turned into an outburst of violence.

## **6. VIOLENCE IN TÎRGU MUREŞ AND THE GROWTH OF THE PRO-EUROPE LEAGUE**

On the background of the events described above people at the Pro-Europe League were doing their best to stop the degrading relationship between the city's two ethnic groups. Smaranda Enache was struggling to mediate between Romanian and Hungarian teachers and between pupils in the town's schools. She addressed Orthodox priests, but they refused to start a dialogue with the Baptists, the Catholics, and the Jews. With precious few exceptions, the Târgu-Mureş intelligentsia was hardly more receptive. The historians who were invited to debate the Hungarian question failed to capitalize upon their authority and call on the two groups to start a public debate. The appeals launched by Smaranda Enache and her colleagues, who made the best of their quite limited access to reticent local radio and TV stations, were of little avail in changing the mood of the public. The most palpable result was the flurry of threats received over mail and telephone. Smaranda Enache and even her parents were suddenly deserted. The communities had severed their ties to one another. The promoters of Hungarian-Romanian relations were regarded by their co-nationals as traitors. March 20, the day on which officers of the former Securitate were supposed to cash in their last salary, the day Sándor Szilágyi prompted UDMR leaders to be suspicious of, was getting closer. The situation in Târgu-Mureş was deteriorating.

On March 17, 1990, Smaranda Enache left for Budapest to attend a meeting of Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals "for historical reconciliation". The violence in Târgu-Mureş erupted two days later. Confused villagers from the Ghurghiului area who had been aroused by the "imminence" of the Hungarian threat descended upon the city. The attacks targeted first the offices of the UDMR and of the democratic political parties, while the law enforcement watched imperturbably from the side. Several Alliance leaders trapped inside the Babeş-Bolyai building were hurt. Among the victims was one of the most respected personalities of Transylvanian life, writer András Sütő, who was beaten up in beastly fashion. (In spite of doctors' best efforts, he lost an eye.) On March 20, the attack against UDMR brought 20,000 Hungarians out on the streets of

Târgu-Mureș. The crowd requested President Iliescu's presence in the city. But a group of farmers and local supporters of the Romanian Hearth tried to break through the much denser ranks of the Hungarian protesters. A street fight ensued. And once again law enforcement officers stood watching. Five individuals lost their lives and hundreds of others were hurt and molested in the clashes.

The national television made the best of the events. (As an aside, that was also the moment when Dorin Suciuc emerged as a journalist covering the Hungarian-Romanian conflict. He would later become one of the most repellent manipulators of the Hungarian issue as a contributor to *Adevărul* and, until 1996, to the Romanian TVR1 channel. The first thing that Budapest requested after the 1996 regime change in Bucharest was the revocation of Suciuc's accreditation in the Hungarian capital.) Images of the street clashes on Hungarian TV and on Western channels became much more famous, however. The terrible image of a fallen man hit with a pole circled the world around. Mihai Cofariu, the victim, was presented as a Hungarian. It was a case of mistaken (ethnic) identity that Romanian authorities were quick to complain about.<sup>41</sup>

As I have noted above, at the end of March 1990 the Romanian Information Service (SRI) was established by a decision of the CPUN. The campaign of a certain part of the media plainly confirmed (while other evidence amply corroborated) that the Târgu-Mureș violence had been orchestrated by President Iliescu's clique in order to legitimize the advent of the SRI just three months after Ceaușescu's Securitate had been dismantled.<sup>42</sup> The commission appointed to identify the actors and the directors of the events in Târgu-Mureș has failed to come up with any adequate explanation more than a decade after the clashes. A few Roma who had been involved in the fighting were haphazardly arrested to be used as scapegoats.

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<sup>41</sup> What follows is pure speculation, but I will indulge: the mistaken identity might be a pure accident, it might have involved a Hungarian hand, or even a much more complicated affair, an expression of the interests of neither Bucharest nor Budapest, but of geopolitical interests. Some forces could accept the fact that Hungary had left their sphere of influence but could hardly reconcile themselves with the loss of Romania as well.

<sup>42</sup> While in hospital, Mihăilă Cofariu admitted to the fact that the priest had rung the church bells in his village a few days before the events, announcing the villagers that they should prepare for invading Târgu-Mureș in order to put an end to "Hungarian irredentism".

The March 19-21 violence changed the face Romanian society for the years to come. The Pro-Europe League now had a hard time bringing people to its seminars. Words on Hungarian-Romanian relations could only ring false to the ears of the city's inhabitants. Târgu-Mureș was licking its wounds and the defeated League had to think up new strategies.

I would dwell a little longer on this organization because it tells us a lot, perhaps like no other, about the cultural and human resources that survived in the multicultural traditions of Transylvania. In the new context, the League became more radical. On April 5, 1990, it announced its adherence to the Timișoara Proclamation.<sup>43</sup> But this was hardly a solution for the wall that had risen between the two communities in Târgu-Mureș. They tried to spark public debates and failed – the wall was difficult to pierce through. There was however the ingenious idea, in 1990, of a competition that could bring together kids in a joint activity. Using some funds provided by a German organization,<sup>44</sup> the League announced a “practical workshop and sports contest” that gathered together Romanian and Hungarian kids whose task was to repair broken bicycles. The latter were then to be used in a biking competition, and the winners were to keep the two-wheeled vehicles. All went well, the organizers congratulated each other, and the kids were happy.

But even this could not change the city. The League was forced to ramp up its political statements and communiqués throughout the year.<sup>45</sup> The interethnic ice was chipped only as late as 1991. The solution was ecological in nature: the “City Health” seminar brought together, thanks to the funds provided by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Germans who acted as a channel of communication among Hungarian and Romanian specialists.

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<sup>43</sup> The Proclamation gathered the most significant part of the political and civil opposition to the new regime (the so-called “Iliescu-regime”) by focusing on the illegitimacy of the high-ranking positions held by ex-Romanian Communist Party and Securitate leaders (the idea being to ban them from such positions for a limited period).

<sup>44</sup> Pro Democratic Romania in Europe.

<sup>45</sup> A hint as to the League's modus operandi: on October 7, 1990, the League addressed the general director of the Romanian Radio and Television, Răzvan Theodorescu, urging him to protest against the broadcasting by the then-famous TV host Corneliu Roșianu of a list of criminals which specified the latter's ethnic identity: “Criminals have no ethnic identity, they are repudiated by the community and by their fellow citizens,” the protest argued. Lest this sound too pathetic, I should mention that the sentence was preceded by a host of technical arguments.

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In 1991 the League involved itself in two other momentuous events. The first was the “Bálványos Summer University” organized together with the FIDESZ and the Hungarian youth organization MISzSz. Bálványos was well-known to the Hungarians of Transylvania. (On a side note, it is perhaps worth mentioning that it is the only locality in Romania which has only a Hungarian name alone without a corresponding Romanian one.) Situated somewhere in the middle of the province, close to the lake of St. Anne, it had become the favorite resort of young Hungarians. They would camp on the lake’s banks to take part in the Catholic celebration of St. Anne. On June 26, the whole set of rituals, including the bathing of women, would be performed. The authorities would harass the people in all possible ways, asking them to remove their tents and doing their best to intimidate the campers. But this actually strengthened the place’s symbolic stature.

As a place of refuge, Bálványos was endowed with both ethnic and ideological significance. Since Ceaușescu’s communism was simultaneously nationalist and assimilationist, the two dimensions were in fact overlapping. As I was listening to the story of Bálványos, I was reminded of 2 Mai, the beach on the Black Sea coastline where people would sunbathe naked and artists would come to paint... Both were spaces of alternative culture. But 2 Mai lacked the dimension that is so important in our story, that of identity. It was less tradition and more the spirit of ’68.

After 1990, several Hungarian politicians thought that it would be a good idea to turn Bálványos into a place of dialogue on the destiny of the Hungarian community. And as some members of the dynamic and youthful FIDESZ party were of Transylvanian origin (among the, for instance, Csaba Lőrincz), they thought, together with other organizations, about initiating a summer camp in Bálványos. The camp first opened its gates in 1990, as FIDESZ and MISzSz scrambling for means of countering the nationalist movement in Romania.

Éva Blénesi,<sup>46</sup> a Szeckler friend of the Pro-Europe League, was at the time working for FIDESZ. She contacted Smaranda Enache and Elek Szokoly and suggested that they jointly organize the Bálványos camps. The League became the partner of FIDESZ in 1991 and its involvement simply changed the face of things. Bálványos turned from a meeting place for Hungarians into a meeting place for Hungarians *and* Romanians.

Back then, the FIDESZ of Viktor Orbán and Zsolt Németh was a young, dynamic, liberal party with a significant – though hardly decisive – role in Hungary’s political life. Romanian and Hungarian leaders came to Bálványos to discuss, explain, answer, and suggest bibliography to those who wanted to find out more. The youth camp was a genuine communication avenue for the opinion leaders of the two countries.

It was essentially individuals who shared in the democratic worldview who attended the camp. It is worthwhile to look at a list of Bálványos’ frequent patrons: Viktor Orbán, Zsolt Németh, Adrian Severin, Renate Weber, Zoe Petre, Horia Rusu, Béla Markó, William Totok, Andrei Cornea, Gábor Kolumbán, Zsolt Szilágyi, Dinu Zamfirescu, Mariana Celac, Nicolae Gheorghe, Paul Philippi, Wolfgang Wittstock, Mircea Toma, Victor Babiuc, Marian Țața,<sup>47</sup> Anamaria Pop and many others. As a constant participant in the Summer University I can confirm the significance of this institution to the two communities’ mutual acknowledgement.

Later on, some people left the club. Varujan Vosganian (who was even at one point invited to become a member of the Editorial Board of the League’s *Alterra* journal) used to be a member but was later excluded when, as president of the Union of Right-Wing Forces (UFD), he betrayed his intelligence and took up an authoritarian, anti-minority discourse.

I have emphasized the fact that the main objective of the camp, that of promoting Hungarian-Romanian dialogue, was actually decided by the Pro-Europe League. In 1996, the Summer University changed location to the Tușnad Bath, an

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<sup>46</sup> Éva Blénesi was the student of Éva Gyimesi, the friend of Doina Cornea. She was the one to take Mrs. Cornea’s letters from Éva Gyimesi and carry them over the border, as her teacher was already under surveillance by the Securitate.

<sup>47</sup> An active member of the civil society in Brașov and ex-president of Pro Democrația, Marian Țața was especially interested in the relation between nationalism and politics.