

similar to the pre-war period, but this does not mean that nationalism shall be limited to local clashes. In a world in which the dissolution of ideologies and the loss of social illusions are compounded by ecological, economic and demographic tensions, chauvinistic nationalism and other forms of paranoid discourse become attractive. Minority communities, human rights associations, intellectuals and militants will continue to warn everyone about the danger. But only a mass movement, a national political force, will be able to withstand the rolling snowball.”

13. LÁSZLÓ TÖKÉS

The article above is a somewhat typical sample of what was published in the weekly 22 at the end of 1991 (it dates from November 1991): impetuous, very specific, at times pathetic, devoid of major omissions and delusions, but otherwise quite plain-speaking. Good will mattered a lot in times like those, so powerfully though perhaps not sufficiently illustrated by the quotes from Funar and Tudor. Meanwhile, Romanian society had a hard time facing reality. Since reality was painful to the Hungarians, they tried to find some solace in the excuses by means of which some Romanians were hoping to mend the fences broken by some of their co-nationals.⁸⁷ But how much did such positions, generally limited to the intellectual media, really matter? In trying to find an answer, let me quote another article:

“I’ve been thinking for some time about writing on the campaign against bishop László Tőkés.

My trip to Atlanta clarified a few things for me. After the pages of the newspapers, including those in the opposition – from *Tinerama* to *România liberă* – made a habit of placing Tőkés’s photo close to that of Funar and draw ludicrous parallels between the two, writing the article almost became a duty.

I have first met László Tőkés in the Council of the Front for National Salvation (CFSN); and then a few more times on the occasion of several conferences organized by the new Reformed bishop of the Piatra Craiului Diocese, in Timișoara. There followed a short and very polite correspondence. I have since followed his public positions and monitored the attempts to discredit the man (the rumor that he had taken part in a Hungarian plot; then, contradicting the first rumor, the notion that he had been a member of the Securitate). The campaign was subtle but wideranging. If you tune your ear to the gossip in the snobbish circles of Bucharest, or to those of the Romanians in American universities, you’re likely to hear that Tőkés is a member of some secret service or another.

⁸⁷ Such articles were usually reprinted by Hungarian periodicals (mostly in *A Hét*) and Hungarian readers would in turn voice their sympathy.

It is obvious that this authentic symbol of the Romanian revolution is irritating Mr. Iliescu. In *Revolution and reform* the President failed to contain his feelings which so easily lend themselves to psychoanalysis. He wrote: “*then there’s the story of pastor Tőkés... A glorious halo circled him then, and it has been ‘suggested’ that he was a trigger of the events in Timișoara.*” To deny the part played by the man who was at the origin of the revolution is an inseparable component of denying the revolution itself.

László Tőkés led his own image campaign concerning the revolution and his own part in it. He continued the revolution in the name of Hungarians in Romania. The people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been zealously writing down his words, spoken on various meridians and parallels, branding them as ‘against the national interest’: “*Romania does not fulfill Council of Europe membership conditions*”; “*UDMR is the only Romanian party that is truly democratic*”. An “*ethnic cleansing*” is going on in Romania, he said at one point.

Can one speak of ethnic cleansing in Romania? Bishop Tőkés is easy to stir up, but anger is hardly a good adviser or an appropriate premise for objectivity. László Tőkés came to represent the hardline, radical, militant faction of the UDMR. “The extremist faction”, as it has been much too easily labeled because of the all too common failure to distinguish between extremism and radicalism.

László Tőkés is certainly not a moderate. Markó Béla won the presidency at the previous UDMR Congress only after direct involvement by the CDR.⁸⁸

I have followed László Tőkés in Atlanta very closely. His interventions were bathetic. His tone of voice was that of a pastor addressing a crowd, not that of a politician negotiating technical details. “*You are one of my personal heroes because of your decision to make human rights a fundamental goal of American politics,*” he told Jimmy Carter. “*This has had a decisive role in freeing us from the Soviet system. In some countries, this freedom was more thoroughgoing than in others. In my country I am not a completely free person... I would like to remind you that you are the first American president who looked at the issue of the discrimination of the Hungarian minority.*”

⁸⁸ This was an overstatement. Yet the CDR leadership was invited by the UDMR leaders to attend the event at a time when the result of the battle between Tőkés and Markó was not yet certain.

László Tőkés spoke in the name of absolute values. To him, “compromise” seemed to make no sense. “*Rights are not negotiable. If there has to be a Hungarian university, it is so simply because we want it!*” There was a moving force in his voice, probably fed by the voluptuous dream of martyrdom: the press campaign in Romania “*is a form of psychological terrorism.*” “*The Romanian brothers should not provoke the Hungarian brothers!*” Only a mean imagination could see this man as a humble informer. But was he actually wrong when he noted that “*if Romania were an authentic democracy, nobody would deny the wish of 500,000 of its citizens?*”

László Tőkés’ interventions were of little help to the debates at the Carter Center. He was preaching rather than negotiating. He behaved like a pastor and not like a politician. He was closer to Atlanta’s own Martin Luther King fighting for black rights in the street than to the head of a political party. There are many Hungarians who, for good reasons, feel overwhelmed by Tőkés’ radicalism. And indeed, insofar as his discourse replaces any strategic thinking, it is out of tune with the times. For even if László Tőkés is right, this does not mean that what he does is appropriate.

But the attacks against him in the mass media are unusually base. As for his juxtaposition to the PUNR leader... To those who give credence to these images, the spark of the revolution and the nationwide scam known as Caritas must be one and the same thing. To them, the anger of the man who becomes a spokesperson fighting for the rights of others (irrespective of whether they are right or wrong) and the hysteria of the mayor of Cluj must have the same moral standing. To them, a character of true historical significance and a pathetic, mentally unstable buffoon are similar because they are both discomforting.

László Tőkés is entitled to our respect. This does not mean he has to be followed. If he wants to play a *positive political role* for the Hungarian community, he will have to choose dispassionate dialogue over heroic calls to arms. He will have to supplement his will for justice with the science of the real. Judged in the current context, László Tőkés is the messenger of ancient values. He must learn the humility of serving the interest of *all*. It is a harder lesson than courage.”

Maybe this article,⁸⁹ written four years and a half after the first one, does not seem very different. Both are relying on common sense. The latter was published at a time when Tőkés used to be branded as an “extremist”, when the notion that he was “just like Funar” had become a *leitmotif* of Romanian media. (Among those who used this simile was a member of the Group for Social Dialogue, Alexandru Paleologu.) Tőkés was a personality of Hungarian life, and Hungarians seemed to be more respectful toward their historical figures than we were toward ours. His co-nationals felt that the public degradation of the pastor was an offense against their own ethnic identity, an unjust attitude, a provocation. My article on László Tőkés came at the right moment – journalists sometimes seem to borrow their opinions from one another, and the “Tőkés-extremist” thesis could simply be such a phenomenon. Later on, he was customarily painted as a “radical” rather than as an “extremist”, and the former label finally seems to have stuck. The Hungarians noticed this, and they found my otherwise modest contribution in 22 relevant.⁹⁰

Yet the irony is that years later I used the label “extremist” myself. In 1999, during his US tour before the Washington summit on NATO enlargement, László Tőkés complained apocalyptically about the condition of Hungarians in Romania. This time UDMR was part of the government, but László Tőkés was still circulating his stories of ethnic cleansing.

Given the new context, the move was disingenuous. Tőkés’ voice conflicted with the official position of the UDMR and it embarrassed even the Hungarian lobby in the Congress. How could one talk of ethnic cleansing while minister György Tokay was referring to the “model of Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation”? But most of all, Tőkés’ position lacked in fair play. How was that possible, right before the NATO summit? You do not stab someone in the back when the destiny of millions is at stake. I wrote

⁸⁹ Gabriel Andreescu, “Tőkés László”, 22, no.9, March 1-7, 1995.

⁹⁰ In her study “The UDMR’s International Relations” (*Studii internaționale*, no. 2, 1996, p. 33) Ana-Maria Biró noted the following: “A number of articles attacking bishop Tőkés have been published in the *Romania mare* magazine, the organ of the violently anti-Hungarian Greater Romania Party. But articles describing Tőkés as a Hungarian nationalist extremist and traitor of the Romanian nation, and denying his part in the 1989 revolution, were also published in the independent Romanian press. Over the past five years, the only article that rehabilitated the bishop’s reputation as a hero of the 1989 revolution, and which distinguished clearly between Tőkés’ radicalism and the ultra-nationalism of mayor Funar, was published by Gabriel Andreescu in 22 under the title ‘László Tőkés’.”

another article in 22, saddened and angry at the same time, in which I recounted my first story and I concluded by noting that László Tőkés was inventing Hungarian extremism.

The circumstances in which this second article was published were also very interesting. The 22 is published every Tuesday. On the same Tuesday, *România liberă* printed an editorial by Octavian Paler, the sly nationalist editorialist. He was exulting with joy because he had caught Tőkés red-handed, and could now pour his venom on him. But Paler saw an opportunity for settling other accounts as well, so he blamed me for dealing with Romanian but not Hungarian nationalists such as Tőkés. Indirectly, Paler was accusing me of being “anti-Romanian” with the same satisfied grimace with which he would have accused someone in the 1950s of being “anti-communist”. This time, however, Paler was the victim of circumstance. His thesis was published on the same day on which evidence to the contrary was made available.

14. WHAT'S A NATIVE SOUTHERNER GOT TO DO WITH THE MINORITIES?

Maybe it's time to go back to a question left unanswered: what has someone who was born and has spent his life in the Regat region got to do with minority issues? At the beginning of the nineties, when NGO activism was rarely paid as well as it often is today, minorities themselves were not a professional topic, as they are at the end of the decade, for law school or political science graduates. I, for one, had been to Cluj only once in my life, when I was 14, and I only stayed there for one day.

Seen from Buzău, where I was born, Hungarians in Transylvania seemed as far away and as nondescript as those in Hungary. There used to be a community of (probably) several thousand Serbs in Buzău. They were actually Bulgarians but, just like elsewhere, they were called after their Western neighbors. The "Serbs" organized their households on the banks of the Buzău river and, as I was still a child, they turned the town into an enviable center of vegetable agriculture. The markets were full of luscious and cheap tomatoes, cucumber, onion, cabbage, and eggplant. People from as far as Mizil and Ploiești would go there to buy them.

Their "economic identity" aside, the Bulgarians/Serbs were perfectly integrated. As for their cultural identity, the only thing that reminds me of "Serbs" is the goat leather-vest of one of my schoolmates. The "Serbs" raised sheep and goats around their households and worked the pelts into a warm and comfortable leather-vest worn directly on the skin. Since "our" Romanian leather-vests had always been rather bulky, thick and could only be worn over other clothes, the habit seemed genuinely bizarre and I have always related it to the fact that my colleague was a "Serb".

"Serbs" houses were demolished in the early 1970s. The vegetable-growing tradition of Buzău was at that moment destroyed. Today, the markets are no different from those of other towns surrounded by villages. As for the "Serbs", I've never heard any mention of them.

The gypsies, on the other hand, were a minority who made its presence clearly felt in the life of my birth-town. Since in the 1950s the community hall was located on

the very street on which I lived, I could periodically see groups of gypsies going in that direction. They were carrying their families along and they were armed with clubs and iron bars. I would watch them hidden in the shadows behind the gate of our courtyard – they were noisy as they went and equally excited as they came. The neighbors would talk about what was going on in front of the community hall: gypsies would start to fight, and they would grab their little kids by the legs and hit each other using the 5- and 6-year-olds as weapons. It is fascinating to realize that I never doubted the truthfulness of these stories, which impressed me so much that I could clearly see them before my eyes. It seems plainly evident today that, while I have seen the clubs, I have never seen them grabbing their children by the legs to strike at each other.

Later on, I used to enjoy biking on the dusty streets of Simileasca, Buzău's gypsy-district. I liked to watch the people on those streets of yellow clay. The houses were made of mud, children played half-naked in the dust, the dogs mixed among men and women, and gypsy music somehow always provided the background... There were carts with horses and haystacks, and there was soil instead of asphalt or concrete. There were wet clothes hung outside to dry, mostly red and yellow. I have always associated my biking-days and the gypsies with sunny days and taking one's time.⁹¹

I have never met any Hungarians in Buzău. When I was about 16 I made friends with a university colleague of my brother's, the "Hungarian" Ștefan Szabó, whom we called Harry. We both had a passion for manly sports, as Harry had been a boxer. Our friendship grew stronger especially because I admired two things in him: he was very dignified and very faithful to his friends. Over the years we have gone together through a lot, and I knew I could trust him completely. In 1987, when I was arrested by the Securitate, I was carrying a bottle of champagne with me. It was my Christmas present for Harry. This is probably how he came to be on one of the Securitate lists (it might have happened earlier, of course). During the events in Timișoara in 1989 he called me in Buzău (he knew I had been sent there under house arrest) although I had asked him to

⁹¹ The large number of gypsies in Buzău was partly responsible for the fact that Buzău's second mayor after 1992 was a member of the extremist PUNR. His campaign in this city without Hungarians centered on the issue of gypsy delinquency. I returned to Buzău together with my APADOR-CH colleague Manuela Ștefănescu in 1997 for an investigation in the case of a gypsy man who had been shot by the police because he had stolen from a depot near the railways.

avoid direct contacts with me. The same day he called his apartment was broken into by Securitate men who carried him away. He recounted the story later – the face of the star-shouldered officer when he said “I can hit hard too, you know.” I was so excited to listen to people who would not turn yellow in the face of paper tigers.

Yet to me Ștefan Szabó has never had any particular ethnic identity. I was aware, of course, that he was the “son of a *bozgor*”, a noble, maybe a poor one but a noble nonetheless. Back then I could not even distinguish between a *bozgor* and a Hungarian. These distinctions were meaningless simply because I had no adequate “organ” for ethnic identity. My involvement in the “Hungarian issue” came after the revolution, without my knowing, wanting, or planning it.

*

Nevertheless, it came about rather quickly. In February 1990, I had been invited by the League for the Defense of Human Rights in Paris to attend a session of one of the oldest human rights organizations, of which the League was a part, the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme. The meeting was held in Prague, a city I would still cherish years later, and it lasted for two or three days. I met there Sanda Stolojan, the president of the Paris League, a translator (of Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, among others) and a familiar member of highbrow cultural circles. Without any human rights education, it was hardly probable that I would find something to say, especially since I was surrounded by a group of committed activists. And yet, to my surprise even, I negotiated the Federation’s Declaration, within which the Budapest League wanted to introduce a peremptory statement on collective rights and the autonomy of Hungarians outside Hungary. I had no deep understanding of the issue and I failed to see its stake. But there was something strange in the self-assurance of the Hungarian colleagues. My feeling was that they were lessening the significance of individual rights and freedoms, which I invested back then with some sort of mythological aura. I was in agreement with Sanda Stolojan and we managed to obtain from Monsieur Jacobi, the president of the Federation and of the session, support for our position.

*

In the meantime, Bucharest was the site of the great confrontation between the anti-communists and the saviors of the old nomenclature and Securitate elites. I was writing in 22 about dissidence, communism and post-communism, about the members of the Front for National Salvation, of which I was a member. During the Târgu-Mureș conflict, about which we in Bucharest had little reliable information, I received a call from my friend Sorin Vieru. He had learned of the injuries inflicted upon Hungarian writer András Sütő and urged me to co-author a protest with him and fellow GDS member Pavel Câmpeanu. In the 22's tenth issue, out on March 23, we managed to squeeze a short appeal below a photograph of the famed author in which we said the following:

*“We learned with dismay that writer András Sütő has been the victim of an attack. On the background of the conflicts that are undermining the necessary and vital dialogue within our civil society, this news came as the drop that made the glass of our sadness brim over. At a time at which we need, more than ever, calm and stability, when there's hardly any alternative to dialogue among citizens, we find out that a writer who has used his pen responsibly against the Ceaușescu clique and its politics of interethnic conflict, is subjected to a treatment that points to the persistence of the violence engendered by that regime. **There is no alternative to dialogue, peaceful debate and mutual trust!** Poisonous gifts are still pouring out of the Pandora box bestowed upon us by the past totalitarian regimes of different persuasions.*

*We wish a quick recovery to our friend and express our compassion for all the victims of the ongoing conflicts that are poisoning the life of this country. We wish to express our commitment to **social and inter-ethnic dialogue** as the only cure for our common wounds. Let us then talk to each other, in the name of the fundamental values of Western culture, of liberty and democracy!”*

The text was obviously declarative and excessive in its insistence on values, Western identity, and dialogue. We had in fact little precise knowledge of the events in Târgu-Mureș and so there was hardly anything else we could say. The television, which we knew “was lying to the people”, broadcast a version that suited the Front for National Salvation. People in Târgu-Mureș might have felt dissatisfied by the lack of

precision in our appeal, or by the seemingly strange silence of 22 with respect to the events. It is equally true, however, that the protest against the molestation of András Sütő was, at least in Bucharest, an exceptional event.

It was only in the following months that the issue started to look bad: as the Romanian Intelligence Service was established, interethnic adversities were used as a form of political legitimation for former Securitate employees. The president of the national TV channel, Răzvan Theodorescu, was invited by the GDS at the Group's headquarters, where he was criticized (also) for manipulating public opinion in connection with the events in Târgu-Mureș. But by that time (at the end of April 1990), the Romanian Intelligence Service had already been created, and a relatively large number of intellectuals had obtained key information and had taken public positions with respect to the events.

*

My part in the Sütő protest was peripheral. Yet that was the moment when things started to change for me. The appearance on the political stage of the most disgraceful mercenaries of the communist regime, determined “to be what that had been and even more”, unequivocally made the issue of nationalism central to the fate of our democracy. Furthermore, and this was an essential argument for me in a personal capacity, I felt that the absolute vulgarity of the attack against Hungarians was directly offensive to myself. I felt that it was less odious to be cursed than to be made indirectly responsible for having slandered other people. A little while after I had put my signature on this first “pro-Hungarian” text, I went to Hungary invited by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) as an observer of Hungarian elections.

*

The invitation was apparently due to Judit Ingram, who was working for the NDI in 1990, after she had been with the American delegation at the CSCE. I had first met Ingram during an investigation by the American authorities in Bucharest⁹² during

⁹² [who was investigating what]

the first half of 1989. My name was on the list of political opponents so I went to the American embassy for a long interview.⁹³ It was a friendly encounter.⁹⁴

So there I was, leaving for Budapest, on March 22. By 12 o'clock, I had already read the newspapers on my way to the airport. It was clear to me then that the violence in Târgu-Mureș had plunged us into a different kind of world. Romulus Vulpesu had published in the daily *Adevărul* a venomous piece on the affair.

During my conversations with members of the Hungarian parties I understood that the bloodshed in Transylvania had become a matter of national importance. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (which eventually won the coming elections) used an offensive discourse. In the evening, I saw the Forum's electoral advertisement on TV. The image of Transylvania, as a part of the Romanian state, was associated with communist symbols. The Târgu-Mureș reports were showing images of the fiercely beaten man (Cofariu, then still presented as a Hungarian) among anti-Hungarian flags and posters.

An old Hungarian man who was born in Romania embraced me in Miskolc. "There are Hungarian extremists and there are Romanian extremists. They do not speak on our behalf," a member of the Hungarian Parliament later said during one of our meetings.

On the last evening, I interviewed Lajos Für, who would later become Ministry of Defense. As I look back at the questions today I find, with a certain surprise, that they were not completely irrelevant.⁹⁵ Will the "war" in Târgu-Mureș bring more votes to the Democratic Forum? He did not think so. What about the Forum's policies with respect to national minorities? It was based on 5 principles, my respondent said: (1) attention to the requests of all minorities; (2) no discrimination among national

⁹³ It was also an opportunity to send all sorts of messages [to whom about what].

⁹⁴ We went out together with a colleague of Ingram's. At street corner, near the former Société Générale building on Batiștei street, we said goodbye to each other. I was detained two meters and only a couple of seconds later. The Americans had seen what happened and had called the US embassy. I am asking myself now, though, if the move was not done simply for the show. The police van that the policeman and I were expecting in a passway never arrived. What was the point of grabbing me in front of the team of American investigators?

⁹⁵ I published an article in 22 (No. 12, April 6, 1990) in which I reflected on these questions.

minorities; (3) salvaging minorities' identity; (4) acknowledgement of the affective bonds to land and territory, respectively; (5) the right to use the mother tongue.

I asked Für about his views, as a historian, on the events in Târgu-Mureş and on the minority issue in Transylvania. His answer was full of pathos, like those of many other Forum politicians. He referred to the close bonds among individuals and those within small groups. "*And borders should be transparent,*" he added. I asked whether the autonomy of Hungarians in Romania was necessary to accomplish this goal. "*It is not,*" he answered back.

15. THE HUNGARIANS AND THE UDMR

A study published by the journal *Korunk* in 1994 showed that practically all of the over 400 investigated Hungarian organizations in Romania had placed on their agendas the development of community identity. This also meant that most of the associations and foundations established by Hungarians were paying little attention to Romanian-Hungarian relations. Salvaging the bridges has been essentially a problem of Romanian civil society. Not because the latter was somehow better than the Hungarian civil society, but because this was the logic of the events.

The corollary of this state of affairs was the considerable importance of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), which managed to “confiscate” not only the domain of political relations with Romanian political groups but, as a matter of fact, the entire spectrum of the relations with Romanian organizations. (While this statement may be excessive if taken too literally, it is accurate if interpreted as a comment on the ethno-political context.)

It is for this reason that, in order to grasp what happened to ethnic relations in Romania between 1990 and 2000, one must have an understanding of the political group which played (and is still playing) a crucial part in the destiny of the Hungarian community – and thus in that of the Romanian community as well – in this country.

The Statement of the Front for National Salvation (FSN) of December 22, 1989, the first document with constitutional value after the December revolution, pledged “respect for the rights and freedoms of national minorities” and to “safeguard a status equal to that of Romanians.” UDMR’s Statement, drafted by a Council responsible for the creation of the Alliance, was issued three days later. This document defined the Alliance (UDMR), which became a legal entity on January 26, 1990, as “the organization representing and protecting the common interests” of Hungarians in Romania.⁹⁶ The statement announced the cooperation between UDMR and CFSN and set forth the basic goals of the organization: self-government, constitutional guarantees for the protection of the collective rights of national minorities, representation rights,

⁹⁶ Miklós Bakk, “The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania”, Working Paper, Institute for Central European Studies, Budapest, May 1998.

the right to publicly use the mother tongue, the creation of minority cultural and scientific institutions, and the creation of a Ministry of the Minorities. On February 24-25, 1990, the Hungarian delegates elected a fifteen-member Council: Domokos Géza as president; László Tőkés as honorary president; Károly Király as president of the Provisional Council for National Unity's⁹⁷ Minorities Committee.

It is worth pointing out here that since its inception UDMR has strived to be the only group representing the Hungarian community at large. The program stressing self-government and collective rights was designed so as to underlie the institutions of a self-governing minority, the life of which was supposed to be if not separated, then distinct from that of the rest of Romanian society. It is also interesting that the UDMR leaders wanted the Alliance to cooperate with the first power structure that emerged at the end of 1989 (the Council of the Front for National Salvation – CFSN).

This model of organization, specific to self-governing minorities, was pinned down in the months to come and then slowly worked out in more detail at each of the Alliance's congresses. The Bill on the Rights of National Minorities and Autonomous Communities was adopted in 1993 as a codification of the principles that define the substance of self-government. After the elections in the summer of 1990 and those in the fall of 1992, the UDMR practically became the unique form of representation of the Hungarian community. The Alliance in effect turned into the *administrative structure* of internal self-government.

This form of organization, which expressed the very purpose for which the organization had been created, was validated by UDMR's electoral success. Attempts at destabilization from within, designed to turn the organization into one more amenable to the desires of the Iliescu regime, failed. Couched in political science lingo, one might say that Hungarian leaders designed the relation between the Hungarian community and the Romanian society in consensualist terms. The term "consensualism" (or "consociationalism") does not appear as such in the Hungarian documents or in the

⁹⁷ *Idem*. The Provisional Council was a proto-parliament.

speeches of its leaders. The notion of a plural society is implicit in requests for the “status of co-nationality” for the Hungarian community.⁹⁸

*

The conception of minority rights initially advanced by the UDMR leadership immediately clashed with the developing nationalist and ultra-nationalist movements in Romania that were encouraged (to say the least!) by the Iliescu regime.⁹⁹ So that, instead of pushing through its own project concerning its place within the Romanian state, the Hungarian community had to fall back upon a defensive stance. The tensions in the first part of 1990 and then the bloody clashes in Târgu-Mureş changed the context within which UDMR was defining its strategies. The First Congress of the UDMR, which opened on April 23, 1990, decided that the organization should break with the Front for National Salvation (FSN), which it regarded as a neo-communist structure,¹⁰⁰ and adopt instead the Timișoara Declaration. The UDMR thereby acknowledged that the first priority of the country was democratization. The main message was that the organization was open to cooperate with the pro-democratic forces in Romanian society. Starting with the spring of 1990, UDMR no longer defined its involvement in Romanian politics in terms of a plural society with borders drawn along ethnic bases,¹⁰¹ but rather along the ideological line that had fractured the entire Romanian society: democrats versus anti-democrats.

On October 26, 1990, the UDMR too part in the creation of the Anti-Totalitarian Democratic Front. Exactly one year later, the Front became a member of the Democratic Convention, a large alliance of political and civil organizations. By integrating in the Forum the Hungarian community integrated in Romanian politics.

*

Throughout the following years, the UDMR participated in the design of the Democratic Convention’s strategies and projects on an equal footing with all other

⁹⁸ Spelled out at the third Congress of the UDMR.

⁹⁹ Iliescu’s support had various dimensions, so this formulation is perhaps simplistic, though convenient.

¹⁰⁰ See Bakk, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ This formula is somewhat tautological. Arend Lijphart defined a “plural society” as a society split alongside racial, ethnic, or religious lines (*Democracy in Plural Societies*, 1977). Theoretically, we may imagine a society split along other criteria still in need of a consensualist solution.

member groups. As for its internal program, the Alliance remained true to its original ideas. As a matter of fact, these options were shared by Hungarian representatives from all over the region and they had obviously been the product of their collaboration with partners in Budapest. The national minorities and autonomous communities bill, adopted on November 18, 1993, is structurally similar to the Hungarian law of national minorities and local self-governance adopted by our neighboring country the same year. The UDMR program, voted at the Sixth Congress of the UDMR (May 26-28, 1995), simply builds upon, enlarges and amends the project's former goals, which it adapts to the Romanian constitutional context.¹⁰²

The goals promoted by the two documents described above were regarded with little interest by the other members of the Convention. But, first and foremost, they were grossly misunderstood. The national minorities and autonomous communities bill never made it on the Parliament's agenda. In the meantime, the UDMR came under powerful legislative pressure, which culminated with the adoption of Education Law no. 84/1995. The Alliance's partners offered little support. Moreover, UDMR broke with the Democratic Convention in the early spring of 1995 on account of the actions undertaken by several Convention leaders, in particular by Sergiu Cunesco (Social-Democratic Party, PSDR) and Nicolae Manolescu (Civic Alliance Party, PAC). While the question of Hungarian loyalty was raised in order to appease public opinion (and as a result the UDMR was asked to issue a statement of loyalty to the country), the truth is that the move was internally motivated by electoral reasons.¹⁰³

Yet the fact that the UDMR belonged to the Democratic Convention secured a certain protection for the Alliance and prevented the Romanian political space from dividing along ethnic lines in a period when this could have triggered catastrophic consequences. Judging by the strategies adopted by the governing coalition during those years, it would be fair to say that UDMR's participation in the Convention limited the

¹⁰² See, for instance, the definition of "internal self-government" as a right of the country's citizenry as a whole from the exercise of which minorities should not be excluded (see Gabriel Andreescu, Renate Weber, *Evoluția concepției UDMR privind drepturile minorităților naționale*, Centrul pentru Drepturile Omului, București, 1996).

¹⁰³ The request was simply unacceptable (the other political groups had not been subject to a similar demand) and offensive (it implied a presumption of guilt). See the APADOR-CH 1995 Report.

extent and scope of interethnic conflict and prevented such conflicts from turning the country into a second Yugoslavia. The CD-UDMR alliance also underscored the importance of defining democratic forces according to their democratic allegiances rather than by taking into account other considerations.

This goes, perhaps more than anything else, to the credit of the Hungarian politicians in this country. UDMR's evolution has been the expression of a competition between radicals and moderates. Psychologically, the pressure for radicalism has been terrible as it has been constant. Think of the articles and other texts produced by a Vadim Tudor. Imagine the flags, statues, archeological sites,¹⁰⁴ plates, fines and other means harassment authorized and perpetrated by Funar and his acolytes. Under such circumstances, it took a lot of firmness not to give in to the temptation of radical discourse. Every UDMR Congress has been the site of a fierce struggle between the moderates, on the one hand, and the radicals who could always point to some incriminating evidence, on the other. And yet the moderates always won despite all the serious and legitimate grievances.

But wherein resided the difference between these two factions within the Hungarian community? Simply put, there have been two main points of contention: whether to accept cooperation with Romanian political groups; and whether to accept a strategy of incremental steps. These were hardly lateral issues. What would have happened had the UDMR walked out, like Albanians did in former Yugoslavia, of the Romanian institutional system in order to live according to their own rules as prescribed by the Alliance platform? The victory of the moderates has been one of the most substantial achievements of Romanian democracy. As a matter of fact, the achievement was both considerable and, in retrospect, spectacular. And yet few understood its real significance. There was hardly a Romanian politician who went through the kind of agonizing internal and external tests that Béla Markó had to pass. There was hardly any political group in Romania that managed to preserve inner balance in the face of such a clear-cut and substantive fracture between its two main internal factions. I simply do not

¹⁰⁴ [to be explained]

think there was any another way that UDMR could have achieved so much for the Hungarians and, at the same time, for Romanian democracy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ In an article that certainly deserves more consideration and attention than it received at the time of publication, Dan Oprescu pinned down in his somewhat provocative, somewhat bitter and somewhat cynical style, some interesting truths: “There are several guises under which the UDMR appears to its audience (or audiences) in this country: the most familiar ... (and the most accepted) is its ‘European’ face... Non-Hungarians are much less familiar with the face of the UDMR before its (more or less ‘captive’) electorate; here the UDMR is no longer politically correct, and sometimes focuses on local interests and indulges into rhetorical excesses; ... ‘The reformist platform’ is vocal rather than ‘nice’... UDMR ‘radicals’ are, as a matter of fact, ‘provincialists’ (and many of them are downright provincial). ... An objective observer cannot fail to notice the marginalization to which some Hungarian intellectuals condemn themselves when they refuse to ‘follow the party line’...; this is the reason why the group of sociologists in Miercurea Ciuc is so marginal today (Zoltan Rostas and other younger people ... at the Center for Regional and Anthropological Research).” See Dan Oprescu, “The UDMR in 2000”, *Sfera politicii*, no. 79, 2000.

Dan Oprescu’s remarks were observant and intelligent, but he failed to evaluate the UDMR from a political perspective. The ultimately meaningful question is what kind of order is generated from the large mass of individual histories and personal circumstances, the assortment of civic, political and human attitudes that the UDMR is built on. Can Oprescu doubt the UDMR’s contribution to the democratic emancipation of Romanian society? He says: “Our Hungarians cannot be better than us; and the best they’ve got are just as good as the best we’ve got.” Such sentences may be true, but they are not very relevant.

16. LÁSZLÓ FEY, ANTON NICULESCU, PÉTER BÁNYAI, LEVENTE SALAT AND OTHERS. THE MEDIA'S LENS EFFECT

What has been said so far about the identity-centered Hungarian civic organizations was not intended as a denial of the role played by unregimented individuals as bridge-builders. Some simply refused to follow UDMR's purely political tactics. There are individuals whom I have had the chance to meet who became involved in the Romanian-Hungarian issue and passed on a lot of color, not to mention substance, to the otherwise abstract (for a "native southerner" like myself) Hungarian issue. Some of them, people such as Elek Szokoly and Gusztáv Molnár, will appear frequently throughout this volume. Others will not re-emerge, though they were equally important in both practical and subjective terms. The latter group is the subject of this chapter.

What is common to the Hungarians in the title is the fact that their undisputable loyalty to their ethnic community had never been at odds (quite the opposite, in fact, I should say) with a morally and rationally critical perspective of this loyalty. Even in the case of communities subjected to external pressures, within which the mandate for internal mobilization and solidarity is usually much stronger, such members imagined their superior task as that of saving the face of universalism.

The first name I shall recall here is that of László Fey. All these years, he has been the perfect Hungarian counterpart of Romanians who have turned the mutual acknowledgement of the two communities into a personal goal. He belongs to the group of people eager to invent excuses for the members of the other group rather than for one's own, who are less interested in the faults of neighbors and more interested in their own flaws. This attitude has probably less to do with the community and more with individual dignity and generosity. Nevertheless, though the motivation may be individual, it constitutes an exceptional catalyst for large-scale phenomena. One should note, moreover, that the status asymmetry between minorities and majorities makes this kind of critical distance even more difficult for members of the former.

László Fey has written rather extensively for 22. Many of his articles dealt with the general issue of nationalism. At other times, he openly wrote in the Romanian media about the shortcomings of the Hungarians' political strategies. In this he was a true exception. It mattered a lot that a Hungarian wrote critically and without prejudice about certain attitudes of bishop Tőkés, at a time when "your own people" were oblivious to things that they would grasp only years later. "It would be great if bishop Tőkés finally realized that his character and his training make him fit for the pulpit rather than politics," he wrote in a 22 exchange in which he showed that he shared some of the majority's concerns.¹⁰⁶

Fey was courageous enough to open for debate a sensitive topic such as the tradition of anti-Romanian chauvinism among the Hungarians. In another 22 article titled "The Roots of Hungarian Anti-Romanian Chauvinism", he wrote the following: "Romanians could not become city-folk because the city had a special status: without an approval from the city authorities one could not purchase land or a house or settle. Romanians, just like Jews, were not wanted by the Germans and the Hungarians in their cities; this was not due to their national background (this was hardly an issue in those days) but because of their religion, the Orthodox religion in the case of Romanians." On the background of this analysis, Fey suddenly moves to the delicate matter of the "sources of contempt": "The Hungarians felt contempt toward Romanians, whom they regarded as a people of uncultivated, uncivilized farmers and cattle-raisers. ... The Romanians were called, because of what they wore, '*opincari*'.¹⁰⁷ This baseless contempt has other roots as well. Although liberal conceptions started to appeal to Hungarians rather early, during the first half of the [19th] century, the public opinion in the intellectual circles was still holding on to many feudal conceptions. This was the case especially among the gentry, the small nobles who, having lost their fortunes, clung to their pride."¹⁰⁸

László Fey does not forget to mention, in the same article, that the Trianon Treaty traced frontier lines without paying much attention to ethnic boundaries, so that

¹⁰⁶ In 22, No. 12, April 22, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ The *opinci* were a type of soft, pointed shoes worn by Romanian peasants.

¹⁰⁸ In 22, No. 20, 2000, reprinted in *Dialog Interetnic*, Cluj, No. 2, 2001.

Romania ended up with 1.7 million Hungarians, while Hungary only had a minority of 30,000 Romanians. Neither does he forget to complain about the “Romanization” of the Bolyai University. Yet, staying true to historical fact, he does point to circumstances that some would have rather swept under the rug. It is not very easy to refer to the superior political and social tradition of the Hungarians when this may be interpreted as an excuse for the desire of this community to live today in its own secluded cultural space; not to mention the suggestion that this may be a source of the complexes of many Romanians, behind the violent accusations of whom (e.g. that Hungarians are belatedly christianized barbarians, or an Asian horde who had settled in the region) lies some diffuse feeling of inferiority.

László Fey is a member of the Association for Interethnic Dialogue in Cluj. He has turned his attitudes into a coherent ideology by which he judges himself and the others. A Hungarian in whom I have never noticed any ideological temptation (no tendency to value projects and initiatives over reality) is Toni (Anton) Niculescu.

I met Tony in the early 1990s. Soon after the revolution he worked as a journalist with the Hungarian department of *Radio Free Europe*, and then as a political counselor of the Friedrich Neumann Foundation. He was attentive to anything that could somehow overlap with his own interest. He monitored the activity of the Group for Social Dialogue and the Helsinki Committee, and he tried to contact me. After 1993, he became one of the counselors of UDMR President Béla Markó, and eventually was appointed the latter’s Chief of Cabinet, a position he held until 1997. During this period our relationship, though held together only by rather infrequent interaction, resulted in some key achievements. One of these was the involvement of APADOR-CH in a four-sided relation with the UDMR, the National Minorities Council and the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities. To the UDMR, the involvement of the Romanian Helsinki Committee could be advantageous. I believed so too, just as I believed that the relationship benefited the Committee to an equal degree. The effectiveness of its positions on national minorities reached a peak during that timeframe. Toni was an ardent advocate of our involvement, a position which mattered in a period when even the UDMR radicals were giving us some credit.

The trust of Béla Markó's adviser was due, perhaps paradoxically, to our critical study of the UDMR bill on the rights of national minorities and autonomous communities. Toni Niculescu publicized the study among his colleagues in the Alliance, apparently considering the arguments therein a cool-minded, uncompromising analysis that ought not to have been ignored.

Our mutual sympathy – well, of mine I am at least sure – was put to good use once again in 1995, as the Alliance was pressured by the Democratic Convention (CDR) into leaving the coalition. It is easy to imagine the position of the Hungarian leaders: after having to face the hysterical campaign of the nationalist majority for years on end they were being accused (and offended) by their partners inside the democratic coalition. After investing so much in their solidarity with the anti-Iliescu bloc, an assemblage that was otherwise poorly organized and even more poorly run, they now had to withstand public ostracism.

The Helsinki Committee issued a series of positions on the question of Hungarian loyalty and respect for the Romanian Constitution. These analyses, to which the catastrophic positions of the other parties were no match, were sent to the international monitors of Romanian nationalism and benefited from the constant backing of the UDMR. I suggested to Toni that the UDMR should not leave the Democratic Convention and should let the CDR itself undo the alliance, lest the Alliance should later come under fire for its having broken the coalition.

This precisely what the UDMR eventually did. Toni had been carrying around the letters. The “separation” of the Alliance from the Convention was in fact quite confusing and occurred merely at the level of public statements. No formal, irreversible decisions were actually taken. Later on, this allowed the bridges to be easily rebuilt and enabled the two groups to govern together.

In 1997, Toni Niculescu became the government's deputy secretary general and then an UDMR secretary of state in the European Integration Department. Since we were both involved with European questions we started to meet more often. I do not

think I have seen anyone, during all these years, occupying a position of high authority while at the same time displaying such modesty,¹⁰⁹ propriety and seriousness.

I guess Toni Niculescu profited a lot, as a Hungarian, from his extended experience in Bucharest. Nothing in his attitudes ever suggested that drive “to catch up” which is apparent in many provincials. There was no sign of the uptightness that sometimes goes with a powerful consciousness of one’s identity – the kind that I discovered in another Hungarian of Bucharest, Hugó Ágoston, editor of weekly *A Hét* and author of a wonderful series in the magazine *Provincia* on “Bucharest as a province”.

Toni Niculescu has remained a consistent, coherent and perfectly rational actor, and his modesty, that of a man who knows he can always learn something useful from somebody else, in a way sharply contrasts with his successful career. I hesitate to call him something like “a true European”. He is an universalist who keeps ethnic superiority at bay.

*

If Toni Niculescu seemed the most balanced of my Hungarian partners – balanced in terms of his Hungarian identity, that is – Péter Bányai is definitely the most picturesque. A Hungarian Jew, the son of a Romanian Communist Party (PCR) apparatchik,¹¹⁰ Péter had rejected his father’s political identity since he was a kid. A physicist and jazz lover, he was a good son of bohemian Bucharest in the 1960s and 1970s. Imaginative, paradoxical though consistently rational, close to the orthodoxist Horia Bernea yet himself a levelheaded agnostic, restrained yet caring, Bányai could be an unique character in a novel – that of the children that the communist nomenclature alienated even as they were born.

Like any physicist who does not betray his analytical experience, Péter became an analyst of political life. His studies of electoral geography are important to researchers and are a good instrument with which to combat identity-oriented speculations. But what makes him such an interesting figure is not his set of intellectual skills or his determination in applying them to social life. It is rather his humanism, too

¹⁰⁹ The attitude of some colleagues at the GDS was, by comparison, shocking.

¹¹⁰ Ladislau Bányai, at one time rector of the Bolyai University in Cluj.

often offended by the “leftist” label, the panache of his version of liberalism, the consistency of a man who has always refused to let himself submit to “bourgeois respectability”.¹¹¹

I could always trust Péter Bányai’s rational and liberal attitudes.¹¹² The 2000 elections turned him into a champion of e-mail. When the notion that the second run for president should be boycotted won the support of a number of famous intellectuals, he immersed himself angrily into the debates, shouting (in electronic fashion): “Brothers and sisters, are you nuts? How can you place the equal sign between Iliescu and Vadim?” A few months later, after the status law was voted in the Hungarian parliament, he asked, “What’s going on with these people? Are they insane? How could they even imagine such a thing as a Hungarian identity card?”

The Law on the status of Hungarians in neighboring countries is not so much a problem for Romanians (the hysteria in Bucharest is merely a sign of legal illiteracy, and quite counterproductive at that) as it is to Hungarians. The perversity of an “official” acknowledgement of one’s identity, compounded by the administration of the “confirmation procedures” by organizations that can benefit from this prerogative, was much more clearly understood by Bányai than by his Romanian colleagues. It is comforting to see a true-blue anti-nationalist who knows that in order to become such a thing one does not have to reject one’s identity, but only its exaggerations or, as Péter likes to say, its idiocies. He is an adversary of the (hypocritical and cynical) fundamentalist policies of Viktor Orbán and a critic of the radicalism of those Hungarian politicians who, whether in Cluj or in Bucharest, could not distinguish clearly between their private interests and their political ideology.

*

¹¹¹ In the early 1990s, at a time when he was in financial difficulties, he did not hesitate to criticize his bosses – Géza Domokos and Géza Szocz – in spite of the fact that he knew this would lead to his dismissal as editor of the magazine.

¹¹² To refer to his “liberal attitude” is by no means to suggest that he is unaffiliated. Péter Bányai is a member of SZDSZ, the only party in the Hungarian parliament who did not vote in favor of the so-called “status law” (on Hungarians in neighboring countries), both for ideological and for electoral reasons. Their arguments, it should be said, do not coincide with those of Romanian opponents: SZDSZ believes that the Hungarian government should allocate larger resources than the ones currently made available in order to support Hungarians outside the country’s frontiers.

Going through the memories of my relations with Hungarians, some of which were also emotionally rewarding, I realize now how different were the individuals I have met and grown fond of. How could I even begin to place Levente Salat alongside the three men I mentioned above? Very quiet, looking much younger than he actually is (over 40), almost too polite, Salat has the air of a person who likes to listen and judge. Could one attribute his proud benevolence and sobriety to his deliberate and overt awareness of his identity as a Hungarian?

I met Levente Salat first in his capacity as editor of the journal *Korunk* and then as director of the Cluj branch of the Open Society Foundation.¹¹³ His colorful appearance was later radically reinforced by the intellectual dimension of the character. I had the opportunity to read his texts in Romanian translation in *Korunk* and *Cumpăna*.¹¹⁴ However, I was first truly impressed by his study in *Provincia* (no. 6, 2000) on “The state of spirit of the Hungarians in Romania”. Its depth moved me in a way that no other work by a Hungarian analyst has matched to date. I have chosen one of his sentences as a motto: “The deficient nature of reflections on one’s own history may result, on the one hand, in the fact that the past that we wish to overcome keeps coming back to haunt the present, and, on the other hand, in the fact that entire generations are being lulled by illusions so that their spiritual energies, which deserve better, are put to use to ill-conceived goals.”¹¹⁵

Levente Salat is also the author of the first Romanian book-length study of multiculturalism,¹¹⁶ a superb essay written with a keen sense of conceptual hierarchies and possessed of an educational force that is present only in authors who fully master their research topic. The finale of the book is worth quoting in full: “The reasons for ethno-political mobilization will not disappear as long as the principles of ethnic fairness, as formulated by the liberal or by other similar, improved theories of minority

¹¹³ In 1999, the OSF became the Resource Center for Ethnocultural Diversity in Cluj (I am a board member).

¹¹⁴ “Autonomia intelectuală precum o permanentă căutare”, *Cumpăna I*, Cluj 1994; “Natura paraliziei”, *Cumpăna 2*, Cluj, 1995.

¹¹⁵ An English version was presented in London at the conference “Transylvania: EU Enlargement, Regionalism and Ethnic Politics in Romania”, March 3, 2001, under the title “Devolution versus Consensualism”.

¹¹⁶ The study, which has been recently published as a book by *Polirom*, is in fact his doctoral thesis “Multicultuality and European integration: A Critical Approach”.

rights, are not fully acknowledged and applied within the framework of an universal consensus, analogous perhaps to the one that stood behind the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ... I am personally convinced, however, that as long as the right to effective equality among ethnocultural groups – a right which, as we have seen, completes universal human rights and renders them more authentic in the context of diversity – is regarded with reservations, and as long as some national identities are privileged over others on morally arbitrary grounds, stability in the world can only be based on the self-conscious acceptance of the not very heartening fact that the ideal of the liberal rule of law is a pure, albeit noble, fiction; and that the political, spiritual and cultural well-being of a large majority of the world population can only be preserved at the expense of the violation of the rights of other, numerically important minorities.”

This conclusion shows a serious and consequential observer of the destiny of the Hungarian minority in Romania. His intellectual qualities and his intellectual career could decisively influence the space of self-reflection within his community.

*

One of the questions that puzzled me until about 1993 concerned Hungarians’ interest in segregated schools. Why don’t they like the idea of mixed schools? It is obvious that some parents prefer separate classes. But where did the *principled* opposition to schools in which Romanians and Hungarians should study *together* come from? In a 22 editorial, I even refereed to the “obsession among the representatives of the Hungarian community with the separation of schools, as if the natural right of using the mother tongue in education had to be supported by severing communicational ties between children of different ethnic backgrounds.”¹¹⁷

A short while after publishing these lines I received an answer, published in 22 in the “Letters” column.¹¹⁸ The author, Éva Pollnitz, made a few important points on a friendly tone. Simply put, she suggested that Hungarian schools are community institutions which are essential not only for the preservation of the community’s language but also for cultural coherence: “*The great Hungarian schools, the gymnasyums, are very old and have powerful traditions. The most important and the*

¹¹⁷ “Etnocentrismul, o inconsecvență”, 22, No. 42, 1993.

¹¹⁸ In 22, No. 46, 1993.

most representative of them (those in Cluj, Târgu-Mureş and Aiud) are over 400 years old.” She also shared the story of her formative experience in those schools, “which no one touched until 1984”. After 1984 they were turned into mixed schools. The effects of this change immediately left their mark on the system of Hungarian education. After a short while, “the use of Hungarian language in traditional holidays celebrations all but disappeared”.

Éva Pollnitz opened her letter by asking me, with some kind of obliging irony, how familiar I was with life in the Ardeal region.¹¹⁹ She then went on with a generous, educational invitation: “To let you understand better the atmosphere here, I solemnly promise to send you an invitation for the beginning of summer, so please do your best to visit us during the holiday” (the end of the school year at the school where her children were studying).

The invitation did come and I did my best to go to Cluj, where I met a family of Hungarians consisting of two sweet children and two lively adults – two intellectuals leading an austere life, although in a normal society they would have probably been a part of the upper-middle-class. The same was true of many a Romanian family, of course, but unlike the latter, the Pollnitzs could blame a culture (and a mentality) that was alien to theirs.

I attended the school celebration, we said good-bye to each other, and then we met again a few times in the years to come. As time passes, these meetings will become the subject of nostalgic remembrance. Anyway, after 1994 I never again mentioned the “obsession with the separation of schools.”

*

There were a few disappointing experiences as well. Gábor Kolumbán, a physicist, a man with a very disciplined and well-structured thinking, was a rather big surprise. His pedagogical talent made him a constant presence at seminars and colloquia, where his rationalist spirit and his ability to grasp and refine ideas were always important assets. Gábor dealt with a field that was complementary to the one I

¹¹⁹ She was apparently right to ask that question. Even today I am teasingly asked by my friend Elek Szokoly, whenever I send him my studies for *Alterra*, what does a native southerner have to do with minority issues...

was exploring at the Helsinki Committee: he was specialized in regionalism and covered an area that had few researchers in this country. As president of the city council in Miercurea Ciuc (the heart of Harghita county), he proved – as he put it with undisimulated satisfaction – how far you can go with local autonomy within the existing legal framework.¹²⁰ He did pretty well, which is to say he went pretty far.

This extraordinary mind – in the oppressive eighties, his area of research was non-linear systems analysis, which sounds quite impressive even (or perhaps *especially*) to those who know what that is about – gradually turned illiberal. At the end of the 1990s, Gábor Kolombán became closer to the radical wing of UDMR. He sought to prevent the publication of a country report on the “leadership of local communities”¹²¹ because it contained a positive assessment of the evolution of Romanian-Hungarian relations in post-1996 Romania.

It was surprising to see at several meetings (to which my participation was as a mater of fact exceptional¹²²) that he considered the Romanian-Hungarian issue the expression of a tension between two alien identities. The Romanian one would be Balkanic because of generalized practices such as bribery and broken engagements; the Hungarian identity, on the other hand, was Central European because it embodied the virtues of correctness, punctuality and dignity. Other speakers also expected me to acquiesce in this stereotyping. But the problem was not so much that in the Alliance’s backrows there were still nostalgics. Rather, the problem was that the participants failed to assume a position against this unhappy concurrence between our own stereotypes and theirs.

The lens effect of the Hungarian press

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which inter-personal relations between Hungarians and Romanians molded multicultural life in post-communist Romania. The above are a few portraits in a subjective gallery. The relations that were ethnopolitically relevant were, as noted, numerically marginal. Yet for various reasons they mattered a lot. The hunger of the Hungarian media (of the newspapers and periodicals, but also of

¹²⁰ He was also for a short while adviser of prime minister Radu Vasile.

¹²¹ This initiative of elaborating a regional textbook on the management of multiethnic communities, addressed specifically to the local authorities, belonged to the Budapest Open Society Institute.

¹²² Such meetings of Hungarian associations were for all practical purposes closed to outsiders.

the TV channels) to cover the communiqués or other statements and positions of Romanians sympathetic to the Hungarian cause amplified the impact of the small number of Romanian personalities upon the Hungarian population.

Nevertheless, it was not only pro-minority statements, but also the daily, routine activities of associations such as the Pro-Europe League, APADOR-CH, and the Association for Interethnic Dialogue that received better coverage in the Hungarian media than in the Romanian press. Everything related to the democratic reformation of Romanian society or to the support of the pro-European trend was greeted with arms wide open. The Hungarian press had been publishing important articles by non-Hungarian democrats, from Victor Ciorbea and Emil Constantinescu to Andrei Cornea, Doina Cornea and Smaranda Enache. Hungarian readers could get acquainted to pro-European Romanians and abandon cultural confinement. As a result, many Hungarians were protected from the risk of radicalization and, perhaps for the first time after 1989, they had credible evidence that their cause was also the cause of some Romanian democrats.

This is the reason why Romanians such as Smaranda Enache of Târgu Mureș and Octavian Buracu of Cluj were much more familiar among the Hungarians than among Romanians. As an anecdote, I should mention that Smaranda was awarded the prize of the Association of Hungarian Journalists in Romania in 1994. Paradoxically and embarrassingly for the category of Romanian journalists, I was awarded the same prize twice.¹²³

¹²³ Such distinctions honored civic rather than journalistic performance.