

DISCOURSES ON COLLECTIVE INTEGRATION VERSUS INDIVIDUAL INTEGRATION. THE NATIONAL PROBLEM AND THE ORGANIZATIONS FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE POLICIES OF THE P.C.R. AFTER WORLD WAR II¹

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The transitional period: 1945-1947

The national problem in Romania after the end of World War II was a very important issue. With the peace treaties still under way, the after-war governments and the most important political factors, among which the Romanian Communist Party (P.C.R.), had to find some viable solutions for this rather sensitive issue. The political organizations of the ethnic minorities also had to find new answers for the new after-war conditions. One of the most argued issues was the way of socio-political integration of the minorities into the Romanian State, given that the P.C.R. and the communist ideology became more and more prominent in the country's political life. This study aims to analyze how the discourse has changed and evolved in relation to the integration of minorities within the P.C.R., what were the answers given by the different minority organizations and what types of discourses/counter-discourses, paradigms (theoretical and practical) were facing each other within these disputes. The study is analyzing the "official" discourse of the P.C.R. and that of the most important minority organizations, as well as the "counter-discourses" that have been born out of these disputes.

After World War II, in Romania, after a relatively short transitional period, the P.C.R. managed to seize all political power

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and gave start to the transformation of the Romanian society. The social, political and economic changes had a deep effect on the policy towards the country's ethnic minorities. During the interwar period, even if there was no "official" support for the organization into cells and factions on ethnic bases, the Communist Party of Romania (P.C.d.R.) has been dominated from several points of view by different ethnic groups.² Without legal grounds, the PCdR was on the periphery of the Romanian political stage, with few members and an insignificant effect on Romanian society. The political discourse of the P.C.d.R., subdued to the Marxist ideology and political interests of the Comintern, was not yet consolidated as far as the national issue was concerned. Even though the P.C.d.R. did not have a well-defined program regarding the issue, by the fact that it rejected the Treaty of Versailles and was talking about absolute equality, it became attractive for certain members of some ethnic groups from Romania.

After the end of the War, the P.C.R., now an important factor in the political life of the country, was aware of the importance of the minorities' attitude towards the future of the country and their importance in the struggle for power, and thus it grabbed the opportunity to come up with a special discourse regarding the national issue. The first step was that the P.C.R. recognized the existence of the problem and the necessity to solve it as soon as possible. "Those among us that do not understand the solving of the problem of the nationalities by liquidation of all privileges for one nation and by granting equal rights, as the document states and Marx teaches us regarding the national problem, those comrades have chosen the chauvinist, nationalist,

² Novák Csaba Zoltán, "Under party protection. Ethno-political borders and minorities in P.C.R. (Romanian Communist Party) at the beginning of communism in Romania," in *Itineraries beyond Borders of Cultures, Identities and Disciplines*, coordinators Carmen Andraş, Cornel Sigmirean, Corina Teodor (Sibiu: "Astra Museum," 2012), 183-185.

bourgeois path”³ - reads one of the official Party documents. During the meeting in Bucharest on September 23-24, 1944, where the program of the National Democratic Front (F.N.D.) has been discussed, some communist leaders (especially ethnic Hungarians) have brought up the national issue. Alexandru Sencovici has pointed out that the notion of national freedom and the rights regarding national dignity, language, religion and education must be defined in detail.⁴

During this period of struggle for power, the Communist Party, especially in Transylvania, was forced to maneuver between the Romanian and ethnic Hungarian public opinion. It had to mitigate nationalist manifestations of both sides. On February 6, 1945, as a first step of the new government, the Statute of the Nationalities has been accepted. It ensured the equality of each citizen, regardless of their nationality, religion, mother tongue. The Statute has also guaranteed collective rights, such as the use of mother tongue.⁵ On July 6, 1946, the plenary of the Central Committee of the P.C.R. has published a communiqué regarding the Party’s position towards chauvinist and revisionist directions and has called to “remove any disagreement between the Romanian people and the cohabiting minorities.”⁶ Party members who disregarded these provisions could expect to be severely punished: “if it is undoubtedly found that a member of our Party is fostering the chauvinist spirit within the Party organizations or disregards the iron discipline of the Party,

³ *Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR/The National Archives of Romania)*, fund CC al P.C.R., folder 38/1946, file 22.

⁴ Olti Ágoston, “Comuniștii români și problema Ardealului, 1944-1945,” in, *Minoritatea maghiară în perioada comunistă*, eds. Olti Ágoston and Gidó Attila (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale & Kriterion, 2009), 81.

⁵ *A nemzetiségi politika három éve a demokratikus Romániában (Trei ani din politica națională în România democratică)* (București, 1948), 5-8.

⁶ *România, viața politică în documente, 1946* (București: Arhivele Statului din România, 1996), 276-277.

measures must be taken according to the statute, and exclusion considered.”⁷

Under the above conditions, during the transitional period (1945-48) and in the beginning of the communist rule, the P.C.R. has offered the minorities a special model of integration, the so-called “Leninist-Stalinist model.” It is about Lenin’s theory according to which, in a first stage of the proletarian revolution, the communist party having gained power, must ensure the cultural and economic equality for all nations and nationalities. The communist process of transforming society must be achieved in the case of each nationality by the help of its elites. In exchange for integration in the process of communism by its elites, each minority has enjoyed different cultural and political liberties. According to Lenin, this integration will give birth to a rapprochement (sliyaniye) of the nations and in these conditions a new socialist culture and identity and the new Man, “homo sovieticus,” are bound to be born.⁸ The P.C.R. offered the minorities, first of all to the ethnic Hungarians, with a way to integrate into the new state, based on recognizing ample cultural rights in exchange for political and institutional loyalty, beginning with renouncing any territorial revisionism.⁹

After World War II, the ethnic minorities of Romania tried to revive the old political formations, or to adapt to the new political conditions, to create new organizations. Almost every important ethnic group has created its own organization. Immediately after the front has passed, the ethnic Hungarians have set up the Hungarian Popular Union (U.P.M.), based on the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Connor Walker, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 201-205.

⁹ Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania roșie. Comunismul român și problema națională 1944-1965* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale & Kriterion, 2010), 61.

former leftist organization, MADOSZ.¹⁰ By the merger of the territorial Jewish organizations the Jewish Democratic Committee (C.D.E.) was founded. The ethnic Albanians have founded the Albanian Antifascist Committee (C.A.A.). The ethnic Bulgarians have revived the Bulgarian Colony (C.B.), transformed later on into a democratic committee. The Turkish-Tartar community founded a Muslim Democratic Front (F.D.M.). For the ethnic Russians and Ukrainians there was the Russian and Ukrainian Democratic Popular Committee (C.D.P.R.U.), for the Greeks the Greek Democratic Committee (C.D.G.), for the Polish and Czechoslovakians there were two cultural organizations, the Polish House and the Czechoslovakian Colony. The attempts of the German population (the few communists and the social-democrats) to set up an “antifascist” organization have been prohibited by the Romanian government for a long time. Under the new political conditions, within these new political organizations leftist elements have prevailed, but in the majority of the cases the communist ideology was mixed with certain attempts to represent the specific interests of the given minority. Sometimes even the purpose of these organizations has been discussed, their role, the way to collaborate with the communists. Within this political process the U.P.M. and C.D.E. have played a significant role, given the fact that they represented the two most numerous minorities (in lack of a German organization) in Romania.

The U.P.M. was set up in the void that has been created in Transylvania in the autumn of 1944, by reactivating MADOSZ a former leftist organization, under the leadership of Gárfás Kurkó and Béla Csákány. Its name, MADOSZ, was changed to U.P.M. that symbolized the desire to become the only organization to

¹⁰ MADOSZ (Hungarian for Union of Hungarian Workers) – a leftist organization set up during the interwar period, with close ties with the P.C.R. and it was the opponent of the Hungarian Party.

comprise the entire Hungarian minority of Romania.¹¹ In its first manifesto, the U.P.M. has declared itself the only legitimate organization of the ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania. It denounced fascism, nationalism and chauvinism, and urged the Hungarian community to unmask the “hostile and antidemocratic” elements from within its own ranks.¹²

The U.P.M. has proposed a single plan of action in order to fix the problems specific to the Hungarian minority of Romania, i.e. the implementation of the principle of equality in rights. Regarding this strategic issue, the leadership of the U.P.M. was unified. However, regarding the tactics for reaching this goal there were two (in some cases three) confronting views or types of political discourse. The radical left wing, communists from within the organization, advocated a close collaboration with the P.C.R., based on democratic principles. Another group from the U.P.M. (popular-democratic), though it agreed to an active participation in building the democratic system, it wanted a conditioned partnership with the democratic parties and called for a quick solution to the ethnic claims. Besides these two major groups, here was a third group (the conservatives) formed by the representatives of the Churches and “conservatory” intellectuals.¹³

The confrontations of these discourses have marked the first two years of existence of the U.P.M., and though there was no ideological break within the organization, they generated a split on a regional level: representatives of the U.P.M. from Northern Transylvania with their headquarters in Cluj-Napoca and the organizations from the Southern parts of Transylvania with headquarters in Braşov. The U.P.M. politicians from Northern

¹¹ Töttössy Magdolna, *A Magyar Népi Szövetség Története 1944-1953*, vol. I (Miercurea Ciuc: Pallas-Akadémia, 2005), 45.

¹² *Történeti kényszerpályák- Kisebbségi reálpolitikák II*, Dokumentumok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetének tanulmányozásához 1944-1989, ed. Vincze Gábor (Miercurea Ciuc: Pro-Print, 2003), 3-4.

¹³ Nagy Mihály Zoltán, “Protejarea intereselor etnice sau urmărirea liniei P.C.R.,” in *Minoritatea maghiară în perioada comunistă*, 117-121.

Transylvania agreed that the Hungarian community must take part in preparing the social transformations. In exchange they wanted total equality in rights, as well as representatives in the government, proportional to the number of the ethnic Hungarians. The faction from Braşov wanted a close collaboration with the F.N.D., stating that the purification of the Hungarian community from the reactionary elements and its participation to the democratic transformation of the country will lead to equality in rights.¹⁴

During the spring of 1945, U.P.M. was extremely popular amongst Transylvania's Hungarian population. Even if some intellectuals and part of the middle class did not have active roles in the Union, many personalities, not particularly fond of the leftist movement, have adhered. During the first U.P.M. Congress, on May 6-13, 1945, the unification of the organizations from the North and South of Transylvania has been accomplished, and there were already 387,753 members.¹⁵ The U.P.M.'s popularity may be explained by many factors. Some of these are: the fact that the program of the Union contained the principle of self-determination, created the illusion for many ethnic Hungarians that in fact the U.P.M. is after a union with Hungary; the establishment of Soviet administration in Northern Transylvania was thought to be the result of the Union's intervention; the "support" given by the Soviet Union to the Hungarian community from Transylvania, which increased the prestige of communism as the ideal solution to the problem of nationalities.¹⁶ During this period the U.P.M. was also seen as protector of the Hungarian

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Makfalvi Gábor, "A marosvásárhelyi Rubicon," in *A Maros megyei magyarság történetéből*, ed. Pál-Antal Sándor, Szabó Miklós (Târgu-Mureş: Mentor, 1997), 252-253.

¹⁶ This phenomenon was also helped by the increasing sympathy of the ethnic Hungarians towards the P.C.R.. For more details: Zoltan Csaba Novák, "Înfiinţarea structurii politice a P.C.R. în judeţul Mureş 1944-1948," *Anuarul Arhivelor Mureşene* (2003).

community's rights, such as: the use of mother tongue in administration, reorganization of the educational system, etc.¹⁷ The leaders of the organization have intervened in the case of the deported Hungarians and have lead a somewhat successful policy in the process of colonizing the villages left behind by the Saxons.¹⁸

In the years 1945-47, there were also moments of conflict between the two wings of the U.P.M. On November 14, an extraordinary meeting of the U.P.M. was called in Târgu-Mureș, where the declaration of the leadership was presented by László Bányai: "It is clear to us that the problem of nationalities in Transylvania is not just a mere issue of borders, but the issue of democracy's future, of obtaining full equality and of definitive abolition of all borders."¹⁹ By this declaration the U.P.M. has in fact taken a stand against any revision of borders. This decision however, has sparked fierce arguments within the organization. The decision made practically by former MADOSZ members was strongly challenged by the nationalist wing of the U.P.M.²⁰ The former MADOSZ members have argued with the following principles: revisionism is a fascist policy and it is important to

¹⁷ At the beginning of 1945, the UPM has published several reports and petitions regarding the situation of the Hungarians from Transylvania. E.g. on June 21, 1945, UPM has published a detailed report on the situation of the Hungarians from Transylvania, presenting the following issues: military service, labor camp internments, employment of civil servants, education, etc. *Minorități etnoculturale: Mărturii documentare. Maghiarii din România (1945-1955)*, eds. Andreea Andreescu, Lucian Nastasă and Andrea Varga (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2002), 129-142.

¹⁸ When the Romanian and Soviet armies have entered Northern Transylvania, many men of Hungarian origins have been deported into labor-camps, like the one from Feldioara. As far as the colonization is concerned, in the Mureș County in villages left behind by the Saxon minority, they brought in Romanian colonists and Szekler colonists from the Gheorgheni region, by the help of the UPM. At times these colonizations however, have created serious conflicts between the locals and the newcomers.

¹⁹ *Szabad Szó* 234 (1945).

²⁰ Makfalvi, "A Marosvásárhelyi Rubicon," 254-255.

believe in the goodwill of Marshall Stalin and the Groza government. Moreover, they considered that a revision of the borders would be just another reason for the “Romanian reaction” to demand the expulsion of ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania and it would generate a conflict among the two nations.²¹ In order to achieve their goals, this wing of the U.P.M. would have accepted the possibility of losing some of the Union’s sympathizers. This decision has ignited countless complaints on behalf of the local organizations.

Another important milestone in 1946 was the U.P.M. congress from Odorhei, on June 28-30. During the congress it became clear that in spite of the leadership’s efforts a part of the Hungarian society from Transylvania did not agree with the Union’s policy. The Odorhei Congress was in fact the last time in the U.P.M.’s history when the opposition from within had the chance to make its voice heard. The main goal of the congress was to present and adopt the Union’s political strategy. During the discussion of the statute the “internal opposition” of the U.P.M. criticized, without any result, the fact that the organization failed to solve the issue of religious education. On the third day there was an organized rally inside the city stadium, in the presence of the minister responsible with the problem of nationalities, Vlădescu-Răcoasa. This time the U.P.M. was confronted by a well-organized demonstration. A great number of farmers, craftsmen and merchants, led by priests, from the adjacent villages have staged a boisterous demonstration against the official policy of the U.P.M.

Gathering the political initiatives of the Jewish community into a single political organization was done in early 1945. With the help of the P.C.R., the C.D.E. was founded on a national level, an organization to which all local organizations have adhered. The

²¹ It must be noted that during this short period more than 100,000 ethnic Hungarians have been expelled from Czechoslovakia.

C.D.E. has already had close ties with the communists, but it also positioned itself as the organism that served the idea of unity in the Jewish community. In its first call towards the Jewish population on June 9, 1945, alongside the idea of unity there was also a call for “isolating reactionary elements within the Jewish population.”²² In spite of the fact that the Union of the Jews from Romania, led by Wilhelm Fielderman, has refused to collaborate with the C.D.E., in a first stage, many notable intellectuals have joined the organization, both in Bucharest and in the provincial cities. In July 1946 the first regional conferences of the C.D.E. have taken place, where the objectives of the organization have been defined: creating a democratic union of the Jews, participation of the community in the country’s political, economic and cultural life, abolition of anti-Semitism.²³

During its first years of existence, the primordial task of the C.D.E. was considered to be the political and social integration of the Jewish community. The hopes for integration of the C.D.E. leaders were linked to collaboration with the workers’ movement. They believed that through equal working conditions and salaries with the majority would gradually eliminate anti-Semitism, discrimination policy. C.D.E. leadership was convinced that the first steps towards integration should be done by learning new crafts, through work, productivity.

The C.D.E. had a very rich cultural activity, but, however this had to be subdued to certain political commands. First of all, in its attempt to find a counterweight for the Hebrew language, the C.D.E. has fostered several forms of Yiddish culture, considered to be a progressive language. The libraries of the C.D.E. organizations boasted with books in Yiddish, and most of the

²² Liviu Rotman, *Evreii din Romania in perioada comunista 1944-1965* (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 114.

²³ *Egység* 10 (1946).

cultural events have been hosted in three languages: Yiddish, Romanian and if needed, Hungarian.²⁴

In most of the cases this was the direction towards which the other minority organizations have evolved. In the case of the Albanian Antifascist Organization (O.A.A.), the leadership has even made contacts with representatives of Albania. On a political level the O.A.A. did not undertake any mobilizing activities, it was rather focusing on the support and representation of Albanian interests in the country.²⁵

The Muslim Democratic Front, founded in late 1946, was an organization that encompassed Romania's entire Muslim population. Their headquarters were in Constanța, and they were led by Hamdi Nusre, the governor of the Constanța prison, but having been accused of "anti-Soviet propaganda and campaigning for the independence of Crimea during the Antonescu regime" was replaced by Fahredin Omer.²⁶

The change in the P.C.R.'s discourse, 1948. The resolution regarding the problem of the nationalities

As has been stated above, the manner and ways of integrating minorities has aroused many debates not only within the P.C.R., but also within the different minority organizations. The most frequent questions were: whether there is a need for separate organizations, what should the relationship between these organizations and the Communist Party be, who should have a place in these organizations, whether these bodies are the "representatives" of the respective minority groups (represent collective rights) or whether they are just allies of the P.C.R.'s

²⁴ In Transylvania a large part of the Jewish community was Hungarian speaking. For more details on the Jewish issue in Transylvania during the interwar period: Gidó Attila, *Úton. Erdélyi zsidó társadalom- és nemzetépítési kísérletek* (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print, 2009).

²⁵ ANR, Fund Comitetul Democrat Albanez, Roll I-106-39-86-1383.

²⁶ ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, folder 10775, vol. 1, file 24.

propaganda (mass organizations), etc. By 1946-47 there were clear signs that the top leadership of the P.C.R. was not always satisfied with the performance of these organizations. During these two years the P.C.R. has managed to force the organizations to change their cadres and through this to alter the political attitude of the organizations.

In 1947, László Luca, communist leader responsible with the problem of the minorities, has signaled the beginning of change in the U.P.M.'s gazette *Igazság (The Truth)*. Luca has criticized the "Hungarian unity with no principles."²⁷ The same Luca has also heavily criticized the activity of the C.D.E.: "... the C.D.E.'s task should have been to address the immediate problems, the immediate justified claims of the Jewish population. On these principles did we begin expansion ... But gradually, this C.D.E. began slipping astray. ... They have turned into babblers who have nothing to do and who occupy themselves with these issues ... As I said during the last meeting: if you wish to leave for Palestine or wherever, nobody is stopping you. But if as long as you are here and elsewhere, fighting against democracy, against the government, it means that you are preparing the death camps again."²⁸

In 1948, after seizing power, the P.M.R.²⁹ has introduced changes regarding its policy towards ethnic minorities. The Party's new direction concerning the nationality issue was presented in the so-called *Resolution regarding the problem of the nationalities* in December 1948. On a theoretical level, once the resolution drafted, the dominant idea regarding the issue was that the political integration of the ethnic minorities of Romania is

²⁷ Nagy, "Protejarea intereselor...", 156.

²⁸ *Minorități etnoculturale: Mărturii documentare. Evreii din România, (1945-1965)*, eds. Andreea Andreescu, Lucian Nastasă and Andrea Varga, Coord. Lucian Nastasă (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2003), 199-200.

²⁹ After the merger with the Social democratic Party, P.C.R. was using the name of Romanian Workers' Party (P.M.R.) until 1965.

going to be realized on an individual level, giving up the collective rights of minority groups.

The P.M.R.'s resolution regarding the problem of nationalities has been structured into six chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical side and underlines the importance of the Soviet model in this regard. Harmful and exaggerated nationalism, the major obstacle to peaceful cohabitation was presented as a product of the capitalist system: "Nationalist, racist, chauvinist policy used by the imperialists to undermine the international solidarity of the working masses in their fight against imperialism, and for democracy and socialism and leads nations to losing their national independence and sovereignty."³⁰ The second chapter underlines the Party's loyalty towards the U.S.S.R. and towards the Soviet model, and respectively condemns the Yugoslavian Communist Party.

Chapter three lists the achievements of the P.M.R. regarding its policy towards nationalities. It underlines the importance of land reform and the law that "suppressed all ethnic, racial discriminations and has given equal rights to all nationalities, creating material possibilities for exercising these rights."³¹ It also condemns nationalism coming from both the Romanian majority, as well as from the ethnic minorities. In this chapter the so-called theory of "national unity" was also attacked, mentioned as well in Luca's article from 1947. In place of the "old national unity" the concept of *class struggle* was introduced. The organizations of the minorities were "urged" to stop representing the specific problems of a certain ethnic community and to embrace and intensify the struggle against class enemy: "The comrades, who are active within the cohabiting nationalities, do not carry out consequent enough struggle against their own nationalist bourgeoisie that defame the working people. The

³⁰ ANR, Fund CC al P.C.R. Cancelarie, folder. 230/1949, file 2.

³¹ Ibid., file 4.

comrades who work within the mass organizations and democratic committees of the nationalities must consider themselves as Party activists within those organizations and committees, and must guide firmly them under Party leadership and in the spirit of class struggle.”³²

In chapter five, Party policies towards nationalities are presented, separately for each of the more important minorities of the country. In the case of the ethnic Hungarians the theory of “national unity” was criticized as well as the so-called “tendency of isolation” of the Hungarian bourgeoisie from some cultural and economic state institutions. “National unity” was condemned in the case of the Jews as well. Thus, the Zionist movement was considered harmful for the socialist cause. Regarding the German community, the granting of rights after a troubled period was underlined alongside with the importance of educating the German youth in the socialist spirit. For serving the socialist integration of the German population, a democratic committee, the German Antifascist Committee (C.A.G.) was set up. In the case of the Russian and Ukrainian community, made up mostly of peasants, their loyalty towards the socialist regime was underlined, but also the harmful activity of the kulaks. The issues of the Serbian and Greek communities from Romania were closely linked to international ties. In the case of the Serbs the dangers coming from Yugoslavia have been highlighted, while regarding the Greek community, the issue was the harmful effect of the Greek civil war.³³ Having become a document that defined a program, the P.M.R. resolution laid the foundations of a new policy towards the issue of nationalities. The document denounced the “collective guilt” of the minorities and stated that the issue of the cohabiting nationalities must at all times be subordinated to the priority tasks of the proletariat. According to the logics of

³² ANR, Fund CC al P.C.R. Cancelarie, folder 230/1949, file 6.

³³ Ibid., files 7-12.

Marxist theory, all efforts of the minorities to maintain their own institutions can be considered as attempts of isolation, just as the effort of minority leadership to preserve their own institutional systems. The paradigm according to which the rights of the ethnic minorities must be represented as collective rights backed by their own institutional network (culture, Church, economy), was replaced by the socialist model, that emphasized individual integration. The changes in the discourse of the P.C.R. brought significant changes in the lives of the most important minority organizations. In accordance with the Soviet model, the P.M.R. continued to operate with these existing structures (for 5 more years, until the spring of 1953), but with a different ideological content compared to the one from the transitional period. After publishing its resolution, the P.M.R. has restructured the existing minority organizations, and in the case of those minorities that up to that moment had not had their own organization, except the Serbs, the Party established new political structures, the “democratic committees,” structures that beginning with the moment of their foundation came under full Party control.³⁴ From this moment on these organizations have lost the right to represent the collective rights of their communities, their sole purpose was the disseminations of communist doctrine.

Conclusions

Immediately after the end of World War II, “democratic committee”- type organizations of the minorities have played a special role in the lives of the respective ethnic minorities. Having

³⁴ For more details see: Ioana Boca, *Politica P.M.R. față de minorități la mijlocul deceniului 6*, Presentation at the International Conference *Stalinist Policy toward National Minorities: The Case of Romania and Hungary. Politica stalinistă privind minoritățile naționale: România și Ungaria*, Historisches Seminar Abt. für Geschichte Ost-und Südosteuropas, Ludwig Maximilian Universität, München and Institutul de Cercetări Socio-Umane of Sibiu, Sibiu, 20 - 22 June 2003.

evolved in a close relationship with the P.C.R. (P.M.R.), organizations like the C.D.E., U.P.M., CDB, C.D.T.T., etc. pursued the political integration of the given minority, by adapting to challenges of the country's political evolution. The activity of these organizations set up before 1948 (C.D.E., U.P.M.) has two distinct stages. During the first stage (1945-48), the leaders of both organizations pursued the socialist type of integration of their communities by respect for the collective rights specific to a certain minority. During this period, in spite of the fact that there was a close link with the P.C.R., both the C.D.E. and the U.P.M. backed the preservation of their own institutional system. Another common feature was the fact that both organizations have regarded themselves as the sole legitimate political structures for representing the Jewish and Hungarian communities, doing everything in their power to stop potential political adversaries. In this stage of their existence neither the C.D.E., nor the U.P.M. could be regarded as mere creations and attachments of the P.C.R., but they represented those bodies of the Jewish and Hungarian communists, which were the adepts of integration into the Romanian society, and which have maintained their ethnic and religious origins precisely for the purpose of creating institutional relationships between minority groups and Party. Starting with 1948 the internal political changes have put their mark on the activities of these organizations. Having seized all power, the P.C.R. has radically changed the mission of the existing and the two newly created organizations.³⁵ Implementing another model of integration (integration on an individual scale), the P.M.R. gradually transformed the existing organizations from

³⁵ The changes in the political missions of these organizations were reflected in their names as well. Except for the UPM, at the orders of the Party, all minority organizations used the term democratic committee in their names. A term that symbolized the fact that from now on their mission is to disseminate the communist ideology and not an activity characteristic to a "union" in safeguarding and representing the specific rights of the nationalities.

representatives of the specific issues of the minorities into simple “transmission belts” between the Communist Party and the masses of the ethnic groups. The newly created organizations – C.D.P.R.U., C.A.G. – were given this mission from the very beginning. To lead these mass organizations, existing or just created, the P.M.R. has installed “minority” elite, carefully chosen from a political point of view. The Party promoted those activists or veteran, loyal social-democrats, who have already been politically active within party or state structures. In the case of the Germans, for example, they have selected a few illegalists and promoted new cadres with “healthy” origins and the same applied to the Russian and Ukrainian communities. Within the organizations founded before 1948, there was a major wave of purification and “political cleansing” with the active participation of their own communists. Throughout the ‘40s purifying the minority organizations from “unhealthy elements” was something of the ordinary, then Vasile Luca’s 1947 campaign for the abolition of the “national unity” direction, has given this process a new momentum. A significant part of the old elite and fellow companions have been expelled from these organizations and most of them have been tried and sentenced. At the beginning of the ‘50s all democratic committees have been under the direct supervision of the P.M.R., having the function of “propagandistic megaphones.” “ ... You should avoid becoming interventionists in matters of the individual. Sure, those who appeal to the committee with complaints shall not be rejected, but they should be shown the right path where they must appeal, and when there are issues of general interest you shall ask the Party,” - Miron Constantinescu underlines during a C.D.P.R.U. meeting in 1950.³⁶ Their mission was seemingly very simple, but very difficult from a practical point of view, namely: the political integration of a

³⁶ ANR, Fund Comitetul Democrat al Populației Ruse și Ucrainene, Roll I-106-41-86-1389.

certain community into Romania's new political regime. According to the Soviet paradigm, the integration of the ethnic minorities into the communist movement, the communization of the regions where these communities dwelt had to be done by their own elite. Thus, the democratic committees have been operating as propagandistic bodies where mobilization has been done in their mother tongue. These committees were responsible of translating, disseminating and presenting the Party's political program. They were also organizing propaganda activities and mobilization. In this process the elites had the right to use their mother tongue and to turn to the "progressive traditions" of these minorities.³⁷ Depending on the possibilities and the elite's orientation, the majority of the committees have tried to act in their mission as "transmission belt" and as representatives of some specific issues, such as: education and other issues regarding culture in their mother tongue. These attempts have been more visible in the case of the larger ethnic communities, such as the Hungarians, Jews or Germans and especially during the period before 1948. From the Party policy point of view, the existence of these committees was a success, in spite of the fact that in 1953 they underwent "self-dissolution," which was explained with their inefficiency. Practically, with a few exceptions certainly, during the transitional period, but after that, during the takeover of power as well, and when introducing the Soviet model, the Party did not encounter any serious opposition on behalf of these minority groups. During the transitional period, though backed by Soviet presence, the Party did not have all the possibilities to disseminate its ideology in every segment of the Romanian society. It needed partners, "companions." In this process the mass organizations (of different ethnic or social groups) have become its main partners. The newly created mass organizations (including those of the

³⁷ The so-called "progressive traditions" contained all the cultural and historical elements that could be used by the communist propaganda.

ethnic minorities) have become the major organs that have created the link between the Communist Party and the social group or ethnic minority. During this phase, these organizations have acted as representational quorums for the minority's collective rights. Through these organizations, P.M.R. has managed to manipulate and to successfully channel the options and wishes of the given minorities through their own elite. Elite, whose legitimacy was changing from one period to the other. In the beginning, in the case of the U.P.M., C.D.E. and C.D.T.T., these organizations have enjoyed some sympathy among the respective minority, giving a theoretical chance of a common representation of their specific issues. After the purges of 1947-48, or, in the case of the newly founded organizations, there was an issue of legitimacy. For the Jews aliyah became much more important than the vision offered by the P.M.R. and the C.D.E. elite. In the case of the ethnic Hungarians, the U.P.M. has lost a great number of members, and in the case of the other organizations, especially the Germans, as it is already known, C.A.G. and the other organization have not managed to completely fulfil their mission, especially regarding the mobilization of their communities. From the minorities' point of view, the existence of these organizations was at first beneficial. Even though they were leftists, from a minority individual's point of view they have met some major principles, such as: advocacy for a minority group's specific interests, organization and maintenance of a cultural institutional network, supporting the ethnic minority's rights within the political quorums. In spite of the fact that these elites were thinking in terms of communist ideology, they had envisioned a left wing regime that in the case of the ethnic minorities would ensure a "national background," especially in terms of institutions and language (the use of their mother tongue and own cultural institutions). In terms of representing their communities, these democratic committees had a promising start and an end in failure. At the point of their dissolution they were mere propagandistic

tools of the ideology. Their old and desired mission of representing the specific interests of a community did not exist anymore. The old elites have been substituted by the new cadres, loyal to the Party, cadres that, just like in the case of communists in general, did not have any legitimacy on behalf of their communities. Even if these organizations have had a leftist orientation, as shown above, and there was a relatively large number of Party members from within the ethnic communities, the Soviet-type regime, nationalization, class struggle did not satisfy the majority of the ethnic communities. In their “struggle” for keeping their national identity, the recognition of their collective rights is a very important pillar in their mentality. The practice of the Party to put the emphasis on individual integration and class struggle, and as a consequence the dissolution of minority organizations, had a negative effect on the minorities. Having fulfilled their mission, at the beginning of the ‘50s, the exigency of these organizations was considered useless by the leadership of the P.M.R. Under these conditions, in 1953 all mass organizations, including those of the minorities have been abolished. On January 14, 1953, during the meeting of the politburo of the P.M.R.’s Central Committee they have debated the *Report on the situation and measures needed to be taken under the current circumstances, regarding the organization Frontul Plugarilor, UFDR, U.P.M. and the Democratic Committees of the national minorities*. Petre Borila has characterized the activity of the minorities’ organizations: “... they have even become an obstacle in carrying out our Party’s work, they have become an obstacle in the way of education of the masses in the spirit of the proletarian internationalism and patriotism. On the contrary, they began inciting people against people.”³⁸ The most dangerous minority organization was considered to be the Jewish one, which according to Party

³⁸ ANR, Fund CC al P.C.R. Cancelarie, folder. 2 /1953. file 20-21.

leadership was dangerous because of the English-American espionage. The trials of the doctors and the anti-Semitic tendencies within the U.S.S.R., the effects of the Slansky trial from Czechoslovakia have been felt in the activity of the P.M.R. Chisinevski himself had a very radical opinion regarding the Jews: "There are two communities, one of Spanish rite, and this one is an extremely dangerous agentur, beheaders, and I am convinced that our obligation to our state is to continue firmly, with that care that we must have."³⁹ In the case of the ethnic Armenians the dilemma was rather big, as they were the ones who distributed the Soviet press.⁴⁰ Under these conditions the meeting of the PB closed with the following decision: "U.P.M., C.A.G., C.D.E., C.D.P.R.U., C.D.A., C.D.G., C.D.B., C.D.S., C.D.P.T.T. and the cultural organizations 'Polish House' and 'Czechoslovakian House' will cease their activities."⁴¹ The question is what has made the communist power to take such a decision that would dissolve its own structures within the minority communities? After all it was the Communist Party that instructed, controlled, and directed these organizations. These were from almost the very beginning the tools of official policy. Beginning with the '50s the Party did not need those transmission belts between power and minorities. In fact, within these organizations, after the purifications of 1947-48, there were loyal members devoted to the cause, proving an iron discipline regarding the directives of the Party. They conducted a virulent propaganda and did not deviate one inch from the official policy. These organizations have been purified from those that had other ideologies: Zionists and bourgeois Jews, kulaks, the bourgeoisie, "reactionary" priests and Hungarian, German, Serb, Bulgarian, etc., fascists. At the beginning of the '50s the process of

³⁹ Ibid., file 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., file 27.

⁴¹ By this decision the other organizations such as the Frontul Plugarilor or UFDR have been abolished.

transforming the Romanian society was well under way. Starting from 1948 there were many socio-cultural and economic (in education, nationalization, the beginning of collectivization etc.) reforms, a new constitution was published, modelled on the Stalinist constitution of 1936. The administrative reform of 1950, that, again on Soviet model, has adopted the system of regions, has deepened the process of Sovietization. Terror, successfully combined with the mobilization of certain social layers, has ensured the P.M.R.'s power. Under these conditions the Party has revised its policy towards the nationalities and considered that their existence is useless, just as in the case of the other mass organizations. Having total control over society, the Party did not need the mass organizations as links with certain social layers (Frontul Plugarilor, women's organizations, national minorities, etc.) any more. A similar process has taken place in the other socialist countries like Bulgaria, Hungary or Czechoslovakia, except Yugoslavia. After gaining total control, the Communist Parties have abolished mass organizations, increasing the pace of centralization. In Czechoslovakia, at the end of the '40s, the so-called national councils have been abolished.⁴² Yugoslavia having partially abandoned the Stalinist paradigm followed its own path regarding policies towards the nationalities. Nations such as the Serbs, Croats, etc. have enjoyed republics, nationalities like the Albanians, Hungarians, etc. had so-called collective cultural rights or autonomy, and ethnic groups, such as Jews, Vlachs enjoyed some cultural rights.⁴³ These organizations, just like the minorities they represented, as much as they wanted to adhere to party structures, they still were some islands of otherness. As the

⁴² For more details on this phenomenon: Robert R. King, *Minorities under Communism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973). Romsics Ignác, *Nemzet, nemzetiség és állam Kelet-Közép és Délkelet-Európában a 19. és 20 században* (*Nation, Nationality and State in East-Central and South-eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th Century*) (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2004), 285-317.

⁴³ Romsics, *Nemzet, nemzetiség ...*, 296-303.

minorities always have a load of specific issues, their own socio-economic structures, cultural and historic sensitivity, which are hard to level. Then the totalitarian regime is hostile towards all kinds of otherness. In a system where control is permanent and absolute, there is no room for sympathy towards areas of difference that creates the impression of hard-to-control spaces. Other than political propaganda, these organizations were dealing with the specific issues of the minorities: education using their mother tongue, the culture and history of a certain minority. Then again these issues did not fit the templates created by communist ideology. Minority structure may produce a space parallel to that of the Power. This parallel space was hard to integrate into the scheme that the Party devised for the entire society. The Leninist paradigm of integration by elites and organizations has been abandoned, except in the case of the ethnic Hungarians, which from 1952 on has enjoyed a special status, gaining the Hungarian Autonomous Region that played a major role especially from a cultural point of view.⁴⁴ From the minorities' point of view, this analysis shows that during 1944-1953 there have been changed not only the methods and possibilities of expressing national consciousness/awareness, but also most of the institutions specific for the existence of a minority have disappeared. The Communist regime has abolished the whole system of cultural and economic institutions. With the disappearance of the small bourgeoisie, of their values and with the abolishment of the multi-party system, keeping national values in a minority setting has become even harder. It should not be neglected however the fact that by total submission towards the U.S.S.R. and by destroying traditional values the Romanian society has been affected the same way.

⁴⁴ The Hungarian Autonomous Region (RAM) has been established in 1952 at the "request" of the Soviets, comprising the ethnic Hungarians from the former Szekler counties.