

Hungarian Dissent in Romania during the Ceaușescu Era

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The article aims to show a little-known chapter in the history of the Romanian communism, the anti-regime activities of dissidents from the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. It argues that the growing repressions of the Romanian authorities against ethnic Hungarians caused the protest activities of their representatives not only within the RCP structures, but also from the intellectual environment. The particular dissidents from the Hungarian community performed their opposition attitude in the beginning mainly at the domestic level. After they did not meet any constructive reaction from the Romanian state, they tried to draw attention on their situation abroad. However, none of these activities met any real success, especially because it was almost impossible to develop any form of organized and coordinated dissent in such a harsh political environment, like the one existing in Ceaușescu's Romania.

[Romania; Hungarian minority; Transylvania; repressions; dissent; opposition]

Situation of the Hungarian Minority in Romania until 1971

The critical attitude towards the communist regime in Romania from the side of members of the national minorities, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, went hand in hand with the deteriorating conditions of the Romanian population in general and, particularly, also with the striking violation of minority rights by the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu. In comparison with other minorities, ethnic Hungarians were the most active minority group regarding the manifestations against the communist regime.

During the troubled period after the World War II, the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party (henceforth RCP) came to an agreement with the Hungarian Popular Union (*Uniunea Populară Maghiară*

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– UPM), an organization representing the Hungarian minority with an open Marxist-Leninist orientation.¹ The main point of the agreement was that the UPM would support installation of the communist regime in Romania, whereas the RCP, in return for this, would recognize not only the individual, but also collective rights of the Hungarian minority.² Therefore, the UPM acted as a satellite formation of the RCP, whose main aim was to make the communist ideas attractive among members of the Hungarian minority. The Union existed until 1953, when it was dissolved by the state power.³

Meanwhile, the Hungarian Autonomous Region (*Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară* – RAM) was created in 1952, on the basis of the recommendation of the Soviet Union.⁴ The establishment of the RAM, with its capital in the Transylvanian city Târgu Mureș, was considered as a decisive step towards the final solution of the minority issue in Romania. The existence of RAM was officially incorporated into the new Constitution of the People's Republic of Romania, adopted in September 1952.⁵ The RAM was administrated by a Popular Council, which was, anyway, merely a façade. In practice, the region did not enjoy self-government of any kind and the only distinguishing features of

¹ UPM was established in October 1944 by transformation of the interwar leftist organization of ethnic Hungarians, so called Hungarian Workers Union (*Magyar Dolgozók Szövetsége* – MADOSZ). S. BOTTONI, *Transilvania roșie. Comunismul român și problema națională 1944–1956*. Cluj-Napoca 2010, pp. 68–73.

² *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România. Raport final*, București 2006, p. 525.

³ During the years 1952–1953, when the RCP seized an absolute power in Romania, it ordered a dissolution of all former satellite parties and groups, including the UPM. The leadership of ethnic Hungarians went on the way to integrate the entire minority into the RCP structures, based on the class criteria. *Ibidem*, p. 527.

⁴ In a memorandum sent to the Romanian leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej on September 7, 1952, Soviet advisors, who were responsible for the administrative problems, recommended a creation of the Hungarian Autonomous Region in Transylvania. It was established by uniting the districts (*raioanele*) Mureș, Sfântu Gheorghe, Toplița, Ciuc, Gheorgheni, Odorhei, Târgu Secuiesc, Reghin and Sângeorgiu de Pădure. However, other regions with a significant Hungarian population, like Cluj, were not incorporated into the newly established RAM. S. BOTTONI, “Înființarea regiunii autonome maghiare în anul 1952”, in: Á. OLTÍ – A. GIDÓ (eds.), *Minoritatea maghiară în perioadă comunistă*, Cluj-Napoca 2011, pp. 265–266.

⁵ *Constituția Republicii Populare Române 1952*, articole 18–20. Online see <http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/constitutie/constitutia-republicii-populare-romane-1952.php> [2016–11–29].

its existence were that most of its representatives were ethnic Hungarians at the official posts, that the Hungarian language could be used in the state institutions and in the court and that bilingual Hungarian and Romanian signs were put up on public buildings.⁶ However, the first period of existence of the RAM was characterized by a high degree of cultural autonomy of the Hungarian minority, where the cultivation of Hungarian cultural and language traditions was not only tolerated, but even officially promoted by the Romanian authorities through granting financial support to the minority education and cultural institutions.⁷

The Hungarian uprising in 1956 and its reflection among the ethnic Hungarians in Romania (especially the reception of the Hungarian events at the Transylvanian universities, such as Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara or Târgu Mureș) influenced negatively the policy of the Romanian state towards the minority. It had an impact especially on the education system, from the elementary schools to the universities, where the so-far-existing educational system in Hungarian was replaced by a bilingual one.⁸ This policy can be documented on particular measures, especially merging Hungarian schools with the Romanian ones, or the establishment of sections with instruction in Romanian language at the Hungarian schools. On these bases, no more instruction in Hungarian language has been performed at the Agronomical Institute in Cluj-Napoca since 1955.⁹

The most important step towards a radical restriction of the Hungarian education was undertaken in June 1959 in Cluj-Napoca, where the previous Vincențiu Babeș University with the instruction in Romanian was merged with the Hungarian János Bolyai University. Since then, the unified Babeș-Bolyai University has been existing. This event was preceded by a strong campaign in favor of unification, organized by the Ministry of Education, which began in early 1959. An opposition of part of the academic staff and of the leadership from the Hun-

⁶ R. KING, *Minorities under Communism. Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States*, Cambridge 1973, p. 152.

⁷ BOTTONI, *Transilvania roșie*, pp. 179–189.

⁸ Hungarian language education was also seriously affected by dissolution and nationalization of religious schools in 1948, immediately after the communist régime definitely seized the power. A. CĂTĂNUȘ, *Vocația libertății. Forme de disidență în România anilor 1970–1980*, București 2014, p. 215.

⁹ *Comisia prezidențială...*, p. 533.

garian university did not bring any important results. Two members of the pedagogical community, Professor László Szabédi and Vice-Rector Zoltán Csendes, even committed suicide after a series of coercive measures introduced by the police organs against them.¹⁰

In 1960 a re-organization of the existing Hungarian Autonomous Region was carried out, in order to further weaken its “autonomy”. Two districts, Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc, were extracted from the HAR and became part of the Braşov Region, which was predominantly Romanian from the ethnical point of view. The percentage of ethnic Hungarians within the region decreased from the original 77 % onto mere 61 % and from this moment the modified territory was called Mureş – Hungarian Autonomous Region (*Regiunea Mureş – Autonomă Maghiară*).¹¹

After his ascension to power, Nicolae Ceauşescu proceeded to the administrative reform in Romania in 1968. The up-to-now valid administrative division on regions (*raioane*), which was introduced in 1952 in accordance with the Soviet model, was dissolved and the original country’s division to counties (*judete*), used also during the inter-war period, was re-established. At the same time the Mureş – Hungarian Autonomous Region was dissolved in 1968 as well. This step necessarily met negative reactions within the Hungarian minority. In order to calm the situation, the Ceauşescu regime undertook several measures to keep the representation of Hungarians in the state administration, as well as maintaining the cultural autonomy of the minority.¹²

The Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality (CWHN) was created in November 1968 with two main purposes: in order to integrate and mobilize the Hungarian minority in accordance with the official policy of state and the RCP, and for the consultative role when solving particular problems of ethnic Hungarians – right to use mother tongue on the local administration level, Hungarian language instruc-

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ BOTTONI, *Transilvania roşie*, pp. 275–289.

¹² Z. C. NOVÁK, “The Year of the ‘Liberalization’. The Impact of 1968 on the Hungarian Policy of the Romanian Communist Party”, in: A. G. HUNYADI (ed.), *State and Minority in Transylvania, 1918–1989. Studies on the History of the Hungarian Community*, New York 2012, pp. 612–613.

tion, publishing of books in Hungarian language, or representation of Hungarians in the state organs).¹³

Another evidence of the interest manifested by Romanian authorities in preserving the Hungarian cultural traditions was the creation of several Hungarian-language media. The *Kriterion* Publishing House, which publishes till nowadays books predominantly in the minority languages (most frequently in Hungarian), was founded in the end of 1969 in Bucharest under the leadership of writer Géza Domokos.¹⁴ The printing of the Hungarian weekly cultural revue *A Hét* (*The Week*) was launched in 1970. Its first editor-in-chief became Zsolt Gálfalvi, an important literary critic and essayist from the Hungarian minority. The Hungarian-language programs of Romanian television started to be broadcasted as well.¹⁵

However, together with the change of the general character of the Ceaușescu regime and introducing the so-called “small cultural revolution” in 1971 according to the Chinese pattern, the CWHN quickly lost its consultative role and became a mere propagandistic instrument and ideological mouthpiece of the RCP. The minority policy of the Romanian state changed step by step towards the planned assimilation of the “co-inhabiting nationalities”.¹⁶ This fact had a consequence in emerging different forms of dissent among the Hungarian population.

While dissidents from among the Hungarians in Romania advocated minority rights, the Romanian communist regime considered them as traitors manipulated from Budapest. The claims of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania represented a reaction to Ceaușescu’s policy of assimilation, which affected especially this community. However, Ceaușescu never acknowledged openly that he aimed at build-

¹³ F. ŠISLER, “On the Way to Liberalization: Policy of the Ceaușescu’s Regime towards the Hungarian Minority in Romania 1965–1968”, in: *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 19, 2, 2015, pp. 139–141.

¹⁴ E. ILLYÉS, *National Minorities in Romania*, New York 1982, p. 255.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

¹⁶ In Romanian: *naționalități conlocuitoare*. This notion indicated the subordination of national minorities to the Romanian founding nation. It was used almost during the entire period of the existence of the communist régime in Romania, in order to make the planned assimilation of national minorities in Romania easier. The term “co-inhabiting nationalities” appeared for the first time already in 1945, but officially it started to be used in documents issued by the RCP organs since 1948. B. KOVRIG, “The Magyars in Rumania: Problems of a ‘Co-inhabiting Nationality’”, in: R. SCHÖNFELD (ed.), *Nationalitätenprobleme in Südosteuropa*, München 1987, p. 213.

ing an ethnically homogenous nation using such measures. On the contrary, he continued to talk about the equality of all internal ethnic groups. This policy was of course perceived as assimilationist among the Hungarian minority, as it hindered its cultural development.¹⁷

The existence of the Hungarian dissident activities against the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu can be divided into two main phases: (1) phase of elaborating and sending memorandums of protest and disobedience to the Romanian authorities, which is characteristic for the period of 1970s; and (2) phase of printing samizdat publications and creation of different discussion circles and groups, typical for the 1980s.¹⁸

Activities of the Particular Hungarian Dissidents in Romania

The resistance against the coercive treatment of the Hungarian national minority in Romania took in the first phase a form of memoranda, reports or letters. These materials were often elaborated by persons who held important positions in the state administration or in the representative organs of national minorities. In general, all these documents openly contested the violation of rights of ethnic Hungarians, especially in the domains of education, language and culture. Moreover, they claimed granting a wider local autonomy to the territories inhabited predominantly by the Hungarian population. Basically, many different ways of protest were used, including appeals to the international organizations like UN or OSCE, in order to persuade them to denounce the repressive and assimilationist policy of Bucharest.¹⁹

Analyzing the documents submitted by dissidents, we may observe that when calling upon respecting minority rights from the side of the Romanian state, the level of the entire minority community is accentuated over the level of single persons. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that, besides the different forms of dissent coming from the representatives of the Hungarian minority, the support of Kádárist Hungary towards the rights of Hungarian communities liv-

¹⁷ C. PETRESCU, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote. Resistance and Dissent in Communist Romania*, București 2013, p. 183.

¹⁸ CĂTĂNUȘ, p. 218

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

ing in neighboring states sometimes also played an important role concerning this issue.²⁰

The first attempt to internationalize the problems faced by the Hungarian minority occurred in 1971, before the initiation of Helsinki process. Its author was Károly Király, the ethnic Hungarian, who was placed very well within the communist hierarchy because of his position as alternate member of the Political Executive Committee of the RCP, former chairman of the CWHN and the first secretary of the RCP in Covasna district. Király addressed to the Romanian communist leader a first memorandum, which enraged Ceaușescu, who had hitherto considered Király as one of his power pillars.²¹ This memorandum had absolutely no effect and its only consequence was the marginalization of Károly Király.

Another similar memorandum was composed by Károly Király in 1977. He addressed this document to three members of the supreme RCP leadership – Ilie Verdeț, János Fazekas and János Vincze. In its text he openly admits his dissatisfaction with the regime policy towards the Hungarian minority. He spoke about the purely symbolic role of the CWHN, about the restrictions regarding the access to the Hungarian-language education, replacing Hungarians working on the leading positions by ethnic Romanians, removing bilingual signs on the streets, roads and administrative buildings and the election of

²⁰ PETRESCU, p. 193.

²¹ Considering his close relation with Ceaușescu, Király might have hoped to negotiate this issue easily. However, the general secretary was shocked by his letter. While in institutions, such as army or the Securitate, and in the diplomatic corps no members of ethnic minorities could ever get to the highest positions, the ethnic composition of Romania was always carefully reflected in the party apparatus. Thus, the apparatchiks from non-Romanian ethnic groups, whom the leadership considered trustworthy, had much better chances of promotion within the party hierarchy. Király appeared as a prominent figure after his appointment in 1968 as local first secretary of the RCP in the Covasna district, one of two districts in Romania with an overwhelming Hungarian majority (over 90 %). According to the former high-ranking Securitate general Ion Mihai Pacepa, Ceaușescu was very satisfied with Király, who was a passionate hunter like himself and always managed to organize the hunts in his district in such a way, that the general secretary could return to Bucharest with impressive trophies. Király was therefore appointed as alternate member of the Political Executive Committee at the Tenth Party Congress in 1969, allegedly after Ceaușescu brought down the biggest bear he had ever shot. I. M. PACEPA, *Red Horizons*, Washington 1990, pp. 143–144.

Romanian mayors in the predominantly Hungarian cities of Târgu Mureş and Sovata, who, moreover, did not speak Hungarian at all.²²

Since the direct appeal to Ceauşescu or other members of the RCP leadership did not reach any success, Király decided to change his strategy through advocating the problems of his ethnic community by addressing it to relevant international institutions. In January 1978 he managed to transmit across the border a protest letter describing the discriminatory measures used against the Hungarian minority, which focused especially on disadvantages in education and employment. Although influential western newspaper, such as *The Times* or *The New York Times*, published articles commenting his letter, Király's protest had little long-term impact at the international level. In this time, Ceauşescu was still credited in western countries as a "black sheep" of the Soviet bloc due to his more independent foreign policy, and therefore his repressive and assimilationist domestic policy was silently overlooked. As a consequence of his conduct, Király had to face repressions from the side of regime. In February 1978 he and his family were forcibly moved to Caransebeş. But shortly after several months he was allowed to return back to his hometown Târgu Mureş.²³

Despite his limited success, Király remained a symbol of the Hungarian resistance to Ceauşescu's nationalist policy until the end of the communist regime. Worth mentioning is the private meeting between Király and Mikhail Gorbachev in May 1987, which took place when the Soviet leader visited Romania. After this meeting, the former Hungarian prominent and dissident at that time addressed another open letter to Nicolae Ceauşescu, in which he criticized not only the situation of the Hungarian minority, but also the character of the communist regime itself.²⁴ He accused Romanian leader of being responsible for the catastrophic economic and social situation of the country and he openly declared that Ceauşescu and the circle of his closest collaborators are "a group of careerists led only by their personal ambitions,

²² Arhivele Naţionale ale României (henceforth ANR), fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 128. Romanian Situation Report of RFE/RL from July 22, 1980.

²³ D. DELETANT, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate. Coercion and Dissent in Romania 1965–1989*, Armonk 1995, p. 128.

²⁴ ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 151. Gorbachev met with ethnic Hungarian dissident, June 11, 1987.

who completely lack any sense of duties and responsibility".²⁵ Concerning the Hungarian minority, Király appealed to Romanian authorities to immediately stop the forced assimilation. He tried to point on the similarity of defending minority rights of ethnic Hungarians with the manifested interest of the Romanian state in the Romanian-speaking population in Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Király argued that these two issues needed to be considered in a close connection with one another.²⁶

Another consistent letter of protest was elaborated in 1977 by Lajos Takács, a lawyer, former rector of the János Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca between 1947 and 1952, and vice-chairman of the CWHN. From the perspective of the positions he shared, Lajos Takács wrote in his report about the real representation of Hungarians within the CWHN. He accentuated the fact that because of the structure and the actual role of this organ, the Hungarian members did not enjoy any respect among the population, and because of the RCP leadership they were slowly, but obviously losing confidence of masses.²⁷ The report of Lajos Takács set aside an important space for the education issue, when he pointed out the radical restrictions of the Hungarian-language instruction during the last six years. In order to prove his statements, he attached selected legislative acts regarding minority education, adopted by the Romanian government during several previous years.²⁸ Among the most important relevant documents Takács emphasized the Decree No. 278/1973, which determined, in order to establish a class with the minority language instruction, that it is necessary to get together at least 25 pupils at the elementary school and at least 36 students in case of secondary school. On the contrary, no such minimum number was requested for Romanian children. This decree also presupposed establishment of sections with the Romanian as language of instruction in all localities, where Hungarian schools existed.²⁹

²⁵ Ibidem, dosar 128. Romanian Situation Report of RFE/RL from July 22, 1980.

²⁶ CĂTĂNUȘ, p. 223.

²⁷ ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 129. Translation of the letter of Lajos Takács, entitled "The state of the Hungarian nationality in Romania", May 19, 1978.

²⁸ G. SCHÖPFLIN – H. POULTON, *Romania's Ethnic Hungarians*, London 1990, p. 130.

²⁹ Decretul nr. 278/1973 privind stabilirea normelor unitare de structura pentru instituțiile de învățământ, Monitorul Oficial nr. 67, May 13, 1973, p. 818.

Lajos Takács also wanted to draw attention of Romanian authorities on grievances of Hungarian children and students about the insufficient cultural and professional training, caused by the absence of instructions in mother tongue.³⁰ In the same measure, his report dealt with the issue of higher education in Hungarian language, as well as restrictions over the cultural rights, especially over the very limited number of Hungarian publications.

Worth mentioning is also the letter of 62 intellectuals from Hungary, which was elaborated in May 1978 and subsequently addressed to their Romanian colleagues. In this document, they pointed on the discriminatory measures which were applied on the Hungarian minority in Transylvania.³¹

Western countries started to express their growing interest in the issue of Hungarian minority in Romania only in the late 1970s. During this time reports of different organizations defending human rights started to be published regularly, assessing inter alia the situation in Romania. Concerning this, the Amnesty International Report from 1977/1978 brought first particular examples of the violation of rights of members of the Hungarian minority.

The first protest against the treatment of the Hungarian minority in Romania, which emerged from outside the RCP structures, was initiated by three Hungarian intellectuals, namely writer and essayist Antal Károly Tóth, philosopher and journalist Attila Ara-Kovács and poet Géza Szócs. In December 1981 they launched a first samizdat journal in Romania, a Hungarian-language review *Ellenpontok* (*Counterpoints*). The review has been published in Oradea, a city close to the border with Hungary. The editors elaborated a memorandum that stressed the dismal situation of the Hungarian community in Romania and that was subsequently published in *Ellenpontok*. The authors spoke about the intensive effort of Romanian state to romanianize Transylvania and to suppress local Hungarian culture, particularly in the form of restrictions of the minority education and intentionally organized migration of Romanian population to the localities inhabited predominantly by ethnic Hungarians. Complaining about the fact that Hungarians were treated as citizens of second category, Tóth, Kovács

³⁰ DELETANT, p. 120.

³¹ ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 130, Translation of the Letter of 62 Hungarian intellectuals, June 27, 1978.

and Szócs stated that the Hungarian community was deprived both of their individual and collective rights, which were perceived as inseparable and inalienable. Together with the memorandum, the authors sent a list of proposals how to improve the situation of the Hungarian minority and with the general requirement of granting equal rights to all ethnic groups in Romania.

The dissident group around *Ellenpontok* was the first which used the Helsinki framework to internationalize its program. In February 1982, they sent their memorandum to the meeting of CSCE in Madrid.³² The document epitomized the shift in approaching the problems of the Hungarian community, which the editors already announced in the journal. While previous generations advocated the preservation of the Hungarian cultural identity, but asserted at the same time their loyalty to the Romanian state, the authors of the memorandum considered the Hungarians in Transylvania as an integral part of the Hungarian ethnic corpus.³³ Therefore, the document stressed the importance of collective rights in the protection of identities of the minority groups and in the preservation of their cultural values. Based on this fact, they felt a strong need to develop close relations with Hungary, especially on the institutional and personal level, without any restrictions. They also required a need to establish an institution based on ethnicity, which should be responsible for the Hungarian culture and minority schools, controlling the policy of cadres associated with the minority problems and also protection of the Hungarian historical monuments in Transylvania.³⁴ More precisely, the memorandum asked for cultural autonomy, which should have been guaranteed by the constitution and the relevant legislation. This presupposed the establishment of a separate education system from kindergartens to universities, the development of Hungarian publishing houses in Romania, the liberty of

³² This was the second meeting of CSCE after signing the Final Act of Helsinki. Its negotiations took place in Madrid between November 1980 and September 1983. CĂTĂNUȘ, p. 221.

³³ George Schöpflin observed that this was a real turning point in the attitude of the Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania, represented in a response to the Romanian intolerance and xenophobia, according to the editors of *Ellenpontok*. G. SCHÖPFLIN, "Transylvania: Hungarians under Romanian Rule", in: S. BORSODY (ed.), *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation*, New Haven 1988, p. 142.

³⁴ ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 153. Memorandum of Hungarian dissidents from Romania sent to plenum of the CSCE meeting in Madrid, April 6, 1982.

the Hungarian media to deal with the real problems of the community and the autonomy for Hungarian churches.³⁵ The authors exceeded the cultural issue, when they demanded the re-establishment of the administrative autonomy for regions inhabited predominantly by the Hungarian population, and also ceasing the intentional migration of Romanian to these areas.³⁶

Based on the program of the editors of *Ellenpontok*, we can draw following conclusions. First, these requests were self-limiting, as most of dissident criticism, which did not deal with the communist system, but with the policies of the communist regimes. Second, these requests were strictly limited to particular problems characteristic to the Hungarian minority and failed to mention problems of more general concern. Because of the aforementioned facts, the immediate influence of these documents was limited, as it was obstructed by the representatives of Romanian at the Madrid conference and ignored by the Hungarian representatives at the same time. Maybe the greatest obstacles encountered by dissident groups, which attempted to address the Helsinki framework of international collaboration, were caused by the concept of this framework. It envisaged an inter-state dialogue, which took into consideration civil society groups only for the evaluation of human rights, but didn't allow them to participate actively in the official debates. Therefore, the rights of the Hungarian communities living abroad could have been regarded either by Hungary or by their homelands. Attempts of dissident groups to internationalize the problem of the Hungarian minorities finally met a very limited success on the international field.³⁷

Because the attempt of the *Ellenpontok* editors to find international support was not very successful, the Romanian authorities started persecution and harassment of Attila Ara-Kovács, Antal Károly Tóth and Géza Szócs. They were finally forced to leave Romania and all of them settled in neighboring Hungary.³⁸ Based on the initiative of Ara-

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ The eighth issue of *Ellenpontok*, published in October 1982, reproduced the memorandum which the editors addressed to the CSCE meeting in Madrid. Worth mentioning is that the re-establishment of the administrative autonomy in the majoritarian Hungarian regions was requested on the basis that a precedent had been created after the communist takeover. SCHÖPFLIN, pp. 148–150.

³⁷ PETRESCU, pp. 187–188.

³⁸ ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 143. Report on treatment of Géza Szócs, Attila

Kovács, the Hungarian Press of Transylvania (*Erdélyi Magyar Hírügynökség*) was established in Budapest in 1983. During the six following years this bulletin supplied the western press agencies with the news and information regarding the situation of Hungarians in Ceaușescu's Romania. However, it did not cover only the problems of the Hungarian community, but reported also about issues which affected all people living in Romania, such as the gradual worsening of the economic and social situation. Moreover, it managed to distinguish between the Romanian communist regime and the Romanian ethnic community. Whereas *Ellenpontok* considered the traditional Romanian nationalism as the cause of Ceaușescu's assimilationist policy and implied that Romanians approved its xenophobic nature, the *Erdélyi Magyar Hírügynökség* avoided such views and left the door open for the inter-ethnic collaboration. This change of perspective might be justified by the fact that the second bulletin was addressed primarily to the western audience. However, it reflected a shift in the tactic of the Hungarian dissidents as well, as they understood that an alliance with Romanian dissidents would have brought them assets.³⁹

In 1988 another samizdat journal, *Kiáltó Szó* (*Desperate Cry*) appeared in Cluj-Napoca. Its editors renounced any claim to pursue a narrow group interest, aiming the journal for "bringing together Romanian and Hungarian goals" and serving as a forum for popularizing each other's artistic values. The target group of this journal were not ethnic Romanians but "majority forces which continue, both covertly and openly, to promote and assert discriminative and chauvinistic minority policy and fuel anti-Hungarian sentiments by misleading and turning otherwise honest Romanians against us".⁴⁰

In November 1984 Géza Szócs, one of the editors of *Ellenpontok*, send a memorandum to the Central Committee of the RCP, where he outlined several recommendations how to improve the situation of minorities in Romania. In this document he came with the require-

Ara-Kovács and Antal Károly Tóth, October 21, 1985.

³⁹ V. SOCOR, *Dissent in Romania: The Diversity of Voices*, Background Report of Radio Free Europe, June 5, 1987.

⁴⁰ Romanians realized more and more that the minorities' quest for freedom and rights should be shared by them. The first issue of *Kiáltó Szó* published an article entitled "Beyond the Ceaușescu era", with a long for such political system, in which individuals and ethnic minorities would "enjoy the fruit of democracy". DELETANT, p. 141.

ment to incorporate the collective rights of minorities into the constitution, together with recognition of Hungarians and Germans from Transylvania as an “ethnic historical groups”. Szőcs also suggested organizing a broad discussion forum with the aim to re-establish the dissolved Hungarian institutions and educational system and to stop the distortions of history.⁴¹

The first memorandum sent by Szőcs remained, however, without any response from the Romanian authorities. Therefore, he elaborated another letter during March 1985 and sent it to the CC of the RCP again. In this document Szőcs pointed on the striking underrepresentation of the ethnic Hungarians in the Great National Assembly,⁴² as well as on the level of local party councils. He also repeated the whole series of problems outlined by other dissidents: situation of the Hungarian-language education, expelling the Hungarians with higher education degree away from the Hungarian regions and replacing them by ethnic Romanians, or total ban of the Hungarian-language programs in the Romanian television in 1984. In the very end of this letter, Szőcs came with the proposal to establish an international organization for minorities under the auspices of the United Nations, which would contribute significantly to the growing prestige of Romania abroad.⁴³

Beside these two letters, Géza Szőcs also drafted a memorandum to the United Nations. Although this document did not meet greater success, it is worth mentioning because it represented the first petition drafted by a Hungarian intellectual from Romania, onto which also a

⁴¹ The second aim was the reaction on publishing of the essay entitled *Cuvânt despre Transilvania* (*Word on Transylvania*) written by novelist Ion Lăncrăjan in 1982. It represented an open offensive against Hungarians, accusing them of all evils and problematic moments of the history of Transylvanian region. ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 146. Translation of the letter of Géza Szőcs to the CC of the RCP, February 14, 1985.

⁴² Name for the Parliament of the Romanian Socialist Republic.

⁴³ According to the proposal of Géza Szőcs, this organization should guarantee the “conceptual representation of minorities”, contributing hereby to the development of minority identities based on the awareness of equal rights. The organization should not adopt particular measures in order to penalize those countries that violated the minority rights, but it should play an important role in formation of public opinion and in accepting a system of laws leading to the diminishing of ethnic tensions within nationalities. ANR, fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi, dosar 151. Analysis of the second letter of Géza Szőcs to the CC of RCP, May 6, 1985.

Romanian dissident added his signature. Not only Szőcs, but also the important Romanian dissident Dorin Tudoran endorsed this memorandum. Unfortunately, this joint protest did not manage to create an alliance between Hungarian and Romanian dissidents and it remained only an individual, isolated event.⁴⁴

The last personality worth mentioning in this brief overview, which acted openly in favor of the Hungarian minority, was László Tőkés, pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Timișoara. He published an article in *Ellenpontok* in 1982, which was dealing with the abuses of human rights in Romania. This led to the harassment against him, performed by the Securitate. In 1985 he initiated a wider campaign of Hungarian writers from Transylvania in order to gather statistics about education facilities with the Hungarian language of instruction. During the following years, Tőkés challenged his believers to oppose the “systemization” planes of the Bucharest government. Because of this activity, he was forcibly transferred into a small backward town in northern Transylvania.⁴⁵

László Tőkés gave an interview to the Hungarian television on July 24, 1989, where he denounced the “systemization” policy, which, according to him, would lead to the total eradication of Hungarian culture and traditions in Transylvania. After that he was interrogated by Securitate again and then released from his function. A group of members of his parish office tried to help him in his difficult situation by supplying him secretly with food and wood for heating. A decision to move Tőkés away from his hometown Timișoara gave rise to a general revolt of both Romanians and Hungarians in the city. The subsequent events finally led to massive protests and demonstrations against the oppressive regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu and eventually caused the fall of the communist dictatorship in Romania in December 1989.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Because of the very nature of the Ceaușescu’s regime, which was utterly harsh and restrictive towards its own population in comparison with other communist regimes in the Soviet bloc (with the sole exception of Albania) and which could reach almost total control over the

⁴⁴ PETRESCU, pp. 188–189.

⁴⁵ DELETANT, p. 145.

⁴⁶ CĂTĂNUȘ, p. 223.

Romanian population by the feared Securitate, the dissident movement lacked suitable conditions to develop any significant coordinated activity. The same thing is also valid for the dissent coming from the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, which was limited to single, isolated activities, without any chance for bigger success. Even the attempts of the Hungarian dissidents to transfer the minority issue to the international level and to draw attention of western countries on the joyless situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania, did not meet any considerable success. The only reaction usually came in a form of some collective denouncement of the repressive policy of the Romanian regime, but that was all. On several concrete examples, this article aimed to illustrate the activity of dissidents from the community of ethnic Hungarians, who tried to defend the interests of this nationality within Romanian state, striving for the gradual assimilation of all minorities and creating the ethnically homogenous Romanian nation. Despite the fact that in this measure of activities performed by the Hungarian dissidents there was a little chance to reverse the situation more in favor of ethnic Hungarians, the minority issue, together with the general dissatisfaction of the entire Romanian population with the terrible economic and social situation in the country, eventually contributed to the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu and collapse of his personal dictatorship.