

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

*Béla Pomogáts***Transylvanian collaboration – on the margin
of a news item**

In the 23rd September issue of the weekly *Erdélyi Riport* I have read that Sabin Gherman, the young Romanian politician, not unknown in Hungary, turned to Béla Markó, the president of the Hungarian Democratic Association in Romania, with the idea of a joint Hungarian-Romanian political action in Transylvania. Gherman became known as the leader of the former Transylvania-Banat Ligue, at present the president of the Christian Democratic Party as well as the author of the pamphlet *I am fed up with Romania*. The pamphlet was directed against the Great-Romanian nationalism, which ruling high above the nations of Transylvania has constantly prevented the conciliation between Romanians and Hungarians for 80 years. I met the young Romanian politician of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) in Budapest at the end of the 1990s and reacted to his plans and reasoning with interest, though without feeling hopeful.

Sabin German now suggests the Hungarian Democratic Association in Romania to open up for the Romanian and German supporters of the Transylvanian regionalisation and form a loose political association under the name Hungarian Democratic Association in Romania – Transylvanian-Block Regional Association. This forum could then represent all the inhabitants and ethnics and fight for the reshaping of the Romanian state on the basis of a kind of autonomy for the historically developed regions in opposition to the traditionally centralising and homogenizing policy of the government in Bucharest. In aid of the work of the association, as the paper informs, there would be a so-called 'Transylvanian assembly' as a consulting body, consisting of one third each of Romanian, Hungarian and German advisors. This group would support the parliamentary work of of the Association by bills, provisions of law and its expertise. Gherman's suggestions do not aim at destroying the unity of the Romanian state and they are not about changing the legal status of Transylvania within the state either; what it suggests is, in accordance with the European principle and the practice of the European Union, that the Romanian state should conform to the wish for extensive construction of regional autonomies and through these to fulfil the demand for the Romanian – Hungarian reconciliation in Transylvania so frequently declared (and unfortunately always let fail).

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

I must confess, I was excited about the news of Sabin Gherman's endeavours; partly because there is a tradition in the Transylvanian political culture of the collaboration of the Transylvanian nations and cultures and assertion of interests mutually agreed upon, partly because the political strategy of regionalisation aims at the territorial, administrative and cultural arrangements which in the 21st c. Europe have already proved successful in the western regions of the continent. In Central Europe it could serve the redressing of the ethnic conflicts amassed and having caused so much common pain in the 20th c.

Let us analyse the first consideration. The old historical Transylvania has many traditions, which could serve as the forerunner of the social arrangements, nowadays called 'multicultural'. Multiculturalism allows the various ethnic groups, religions and cultures to develop fairly freely (more freely than the legal system and political practice of Europe of the times). The development formed a certain system of ecclesiastical and cultural autonomies. Indisputably, Transylvania had an enormous role in the improvement of Hungarian culture or even in the foundation and maintaining of Romanian national culture. Transylvania protected a European heritage, which later blossomed through European liberalism.

The tradition of Transylvanian liberalism was acknowledged and held up as a model to be followed by Hungarian politicians and Transylvanian authors like Zsigmond Kemény, who described the preservation of European liberal and 'leftish' traditions as the major force of Transylvanian politics, as he explained in his treaty *Erdély közéleté* [Public life in Transylvania]. He wrote: 'Concerning new ideas, Transylvania occupied the far left among the European blocks of states. What had been introduced here was the radicalism of the times which started to break away from the traditions of the past... Its constitution – as we regard the *Approbata* and *Compilata* – was more democratic-aristocratic than monarchic.'

During the time between the two world wars, the multicultural and liberal traditions of Transylvania revived mainly in the Transylvanist ideology, which was represented by the literary, and partially by the political life of Transylvania and in the 1920s (and up to the time of Hitler's seizing the power and the 'Great German' ideology reaching Transylvania) the Transylvanian Saxon intellectuals and more sporadically the Romanian intellectuals also joined forces. The repeatedly surfacing thought of the Transylvanian regionalism could not, however, take root in the public life and administration; Transylvanianism as a form of consciousness, an identity-forming factor came through among Hungarians and especially in litera-

 Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

ture, among writers who gathered around *Erdélyi Helikon* [Transylvanian Helicon] and *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* [Transylvanian Guild of Arts].

During the period between the two wars the founders of the Transylvanian Thought developed a kind of strategy for multiculturalism; thus Károly Kós with the greatest publicistic effect and artistic force in his *Erdély – Kultúrtörténeti vázlat* [Transylvania – an outline of its cultural history], published in Kolozsvár in 1929. Kós depicts Transylvania as a special geographical, historical and cultural unit, whose peoples: Hungarians, Romanians, Germans do not only maintain close relationship with their mother countries but through the traditions of several hundred years of coexistence, developed lively cultural contacts among each other too. The relative balance of the three peoples of Transylvania made possible their autonomous cultural development.

The three Transylvanian cultures constantly influenced each other, as Kós remarked: 'the outstandingly different cultures of different origin, belonging to peoples with different minds were branded by the marks of the constant coexistence, contact, common joy and grief, which already in the times of the princes, the time of the democratic widening and public intensification of the intellectual life became noticeable.' The author followed up the process, the interaction of Hungarian, Romanian, Saxon cultures; by introducing the three Transylvanian peoples and their three cultures in their autonomous but at the same time reciprocal development, Károly Kós defined and laid down the principles of the historical attitude of the Transylvanists.

The Transylvanian multicultural model was delineated by other authors too, e.g. by Aladár Kuncz, Jenő Szentimrei, Lajos Áprily, Jenő Dsida, who always represented the idea of the Transylvanian culture: the joining forces and cooperation of Hungarians, Romanians and Saxons. Their periodical, *Erdélyi Helikon* regularly published the works of Romanian and Saxon authors in Hungarian translation; the literary approach was the aim of the publishing house *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* directed by Károly Kós, which published a selection of Romanian folk ballads entitled *A havas balladái* [The ballads of the alps], translated by Imre Kádár in 1932. In 1934 five Romanian plays by Caragiale, Goga, Elftimiu, Minulescu and Sadoveanu were translated by Imre Kádár with the preface by Miklós Bánffy.

Similar initiatives aimed at the Hungarian -- Saxon cooperation, the works of the eminent Transylvanian German authors, e.g. Meschendörfer, Zillich, Folberth and others were regularly published in Hungarian

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

periodicals. In 1933, one of the classics of Transylvanian German literature: Meschendörfer's *Corona (Die Stadt im Osten)*, about the history of Brassó was published in the translation of Károly Kós.

The Transylvanianist idea of cooperation of the nations of Transylvania was not foreign for the representatives of the Romanian and German literary life at least in the 1920s. Several authors could be mentioned who were agreeable to the 'Transylvanian thought' which propagated cooperation and regionalisation. Thus the Romanian Emil Isac, Corneliu Codarcea, Avram P Todor, Ion Chinezu who wrote about Hungarian literature; the German Adolf Meschendörfer, Ernst Wittstock, Otto Folbert, whose *Die drei Durchbrücke – Eine Vision der siebenbürgischen Landschaft* is an essay on the importance and possibility of the cooperation of Transylvanian peoples and cultures. There were several Hungarian, Romanian, German periodicals which were ready to maintain the cultural relations, like the Hungarian *Erdélyi Helikon*, the Romanian *Idea* and the German *Klingsor* The *Aurora* published in Nagyvárad in Hungarian and Romanian in 1922-23, the *Cultura* in four languages (Hungarian, Romanian, German and French) in Kolozsvár since 1924, already proclaimed and served the idea of Transylvanian multiculturalism and the cultural approaching of the peoples of Transylvania.

Indeed the idea of the regional cooperation of the nations of Transylvania and a kind of Transylvanian autonomy was not alien to the Transylvanian Romanian and Saxon intellectuals. It was first of all attractive to the Saxons who had an old tradition of autonomy going back to the Middle Ages; they were able to preserve their cultural independence and national organisations in Hungary following the compromise with Austria of 1867. The 'enlarged association committee of the Saxon folk association accepted the union with Romania at Meggyes on the 8th of January 1919, the general assembly of the Swabians of Banat joined the resolution. The German minority of Transylvania, however, wanted to preserve their political, social and cultural institutions, and referring to the Resolution of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Julia) as well as the minority contract of Paris, strove for real autonomy.

The meeting of the Germans of Romania held at Temesvár on the 6th September 1919, which agreed upon a mutual political party and a uniform electoral program, delineated the main aims of the German minority: 'a constitution has to be drawn up that would ensure the Germans of Romania forever to organise themselves politically as a uniform nation; it would enable them to reach their national, cultural and economic aims.'

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

The same resolution insisted upon the introduction of regional administrative autonomy, wide ranging school system and the right for the minorities to elect their own office-holders. The Saxons, and the Germans of Romania in general did not aim at the autonomy of all the peoples of Transylvania only for the German minorities: Transylvania Saxons, Banat Swabians and scattered groups in Bukovina and Regat.

On the other hand there were some inclination for supporting the idea of Transylvanian autonomy among the Romanian intelligentsia and especially among the office-holders of the National Party founded still in earlier, minority circumstances. Some leading personalities of the party, especially the representatives of the north-Transylvanian Romanians following the Greek Catholic faith, had been suspicious of the policy of Bucharest and especially of the corrupted government of the liberal followers of Bratianu; *Patria*, the official organ of the party frequently called attention to the conflict between the politics of Transylvania and Regat. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod pointed out several times that he and his comrades were against the strong centralisation introduced by the Bucharest government after the union, and they were of the opinion that the government should better recognise the special political traditions and interests of Transylvania. His aim was: 'national unity on the basis of decentralisation, i.e. regionalism instead of despotic, forced centralisation.'

The striving for decentralisation of the politicians of the national party did not go as far as to consider seriously the realisation of the Transylvanian autonomy, even less the autonomy of the minorities, though it was Vaida-Voevod who signed the minority treaty of Paris in the name of the Romanian government. The proclamation of the Transylvanian autonomy served only as a political weapon in the battle against the liberals and when they were to form the government after the elections in 1928, they continued the policy of centralisation started by Brateanu. The leaders of the democratic movements of the Hungarian minority, however, trusted the party with Transylvanian background more than the liberals representing the interests of Regat.

The idea of Transylvanian regionalisation based on the cooperation of the three nations could not become a real political strategy. The Transylvanian Saxons, who were on friendly terms with the Hungarians in the 1920s, in the 1930s and especially after Hitler's Nazi party seized the power in Germany, committed themselves to the idea of Great Germany and gave up the idea of the Transylvanian solidarity. It was sealing the fate of the Transylvanian Germans: in 1944–1945 the great majority of

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

German men were deported to Soviet labour-camps, very few of them returned. The Transylvanian Saxons and the Banat Swabians could never again represent their national interests in organised form. Their associations were absorbed by the dictatorial system; in the 1970s there started the exodus to the GDR and by now the earlier German towns and villages are either completely empty or changed.

The Romanian political elite also gave up the idea of the Transylvanian solidarity and regionalism since the political life was greatly influenced by the idea of keeping the territories gained (conquered) after WWI by all means, partly as an answer to the Hungarian aspirations toward revision in the 1930s. The policy was to abolish all the historical, cultural as well as identity characteristics, which developed within the Romanian nation. The 'national homogenisation' later, in the Ceausescu-era became the single leading strategy and every other considerations were subordinated to it. The traditions of the Transylvanian 'multiculturalism', the possibilities of the Transylvanian regionalism and the solidarity of the Transylvanian peoples based on Transylvanian patriotism was destroyed in the historical sense, it became the victim of Great Romanian nationalism. Sabin Gherman's present propositions may prepare the 'revitalisation' of these traditions and strategies left forgotten for so long.

Let's see now the second consideration. This is just as important and promising as the first one discussed above. As I have pointed out earlier, the young Romanian political thinker's suggestions about the Transylvanian regionalism correspond in general lines to the strategical concepts accepted and realised in the European Union. These propagate the revitalisation of the historical regions, which were formed in their time by various economic and cultural factors and shape Europe's structure in the future through the free development of these regions. Naturally we have to consider the legacy of the 20th c. not altering the existing structures of states but re-establishing the natural and traditional organisations and identities.

I am fully aware of the fact that the governing policy of Bucharest, which always wanted to homogenise the country (and the dictatorship, overthrown in 1989, used aggressive methods in order to realise it), is traditionally rejecting the idea of internal regionalisation. The European integration can and will demand the revitalisation of the traditions in the historical regions in Romania; it also may fill the special Transylvanian traditions with new content. European integration has already gone hand in hand with the revitalisation of cultural regions and I hope this process would not leave out

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

Romania. In this respect Sabin Gherman's appealing suggestions do not seem to belong to romantic visions with little chance of coming true. The events at the end of the 20th c. have revealed that the Central European states constructed after WWI. Were not as stable as was expected by the treaty-makers of St. Germain and Trianon. The 'quasi-integrational' systems and reasons of states, which were mainly artificially constructed, have disintegrated, e.g. Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia. Both state-ideology and state-construction were artificial result of outside decisions. Neither Czechoslovakia nor Yugoslavia were held together by historical traditions and real national interests though both claimed to have been 'nation-states' when entering European politics, in the case of the first it were the Czechs in the latter the Serbs whose national supremacy stood out.

In reality the states created to replace the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were multinational (with the exception of Hungary defined by the treaty of Trianon and Austria by that of St. Germain); the only difference was that in contrast to the Monarchy which was on its way toward federation, the new one strove with every possible means to become nation-states. This is also true of the system of the Romanian kingdom and later the People's democratic republic. The two Slav countries formed after WWI. Were always insecure by inner tensions and the moment they lost the guarantee of outside supportive powers, became unstable, rifted in two or blew to pieces; thus they proved the inner insecurity and fragility of the European order set down after WWI. And reinforced after WWII.

Today the only remaining successor-state integrated according to the treaty of Trianon is Romania. The Romanian state is not lacking inner tensions. Great-Romania created in 1918-1919 consists of three territories: Moldavia (and Bessarabia) with eastern Slav (Russian and Ukrainian) historical traditions and political culture; Wallachia representing the southeastern traditions, the mentality and political culture of the Balkans; and Transylvania with its European patterns culturally belonging to the west. Even the Romanian civil and cultural and religious life (because of the Greek Catholic church which adhered to Rome) in Transylvania differs greatly from the political culture and religious traditions of Regat. Romanian is at the point of impact of three regions of European civilisation and history. And this should have directed the development of the state created after 1918 and reinforce in 1945 toward democratic federal arrangements. Only dictatorships (ultra-right or ultra-left) have been able to guarantee the stability of the system and an eventual democratic development must reveal the inner 'fault lines' of the state-system.

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

The Hungarian territories annexed to Romania after WWI. (in addition to Transylvania, part of Banat, the region of the River Körös and Máramaros) did not belong

To the eastern, southeastern region either historically or from the point of view of its cultural and mental history, to the region which was the place of origin of Romanian culture and mentality. Transylvania had its own independent political profile, culture and identity, which under more fortunate circumstances could have been the starting point of a development similar to the one in Switzerland. Unfortunately these traits have faded away and changed considerably by the Romanian imperialism, by the loss of the Jewish and German population, by the radical change in the proportion and political power of the Hungarians and through the great number of Romanian settlers coming from Regat. These changes mutilated and pushed into the background the western type (mostly Latinate) mentality of the Transylvanian Romanian intelligentsia. On the altar of unification of nation and state the values of western type of political culture have been sacrificed.

In spite of 80 years of aggressive and cunning manipulation of the Bucharest politics. Romania has not become a homogeneous nation-state and it will be even less likely to be one if the union planned with Bessarabia (Moldavian Republic) will eventually happen. There are great rifts behind the facade of the Great-Romanian state, which tries to present itself to be a whole and homogeneous national unity; the causes are not only the presence of the minorities, not even the millions of Gypsies, but because of those differences which appear among the Romanian inhabitants of the various regions developed and developing in different ways.

The Oltyans, Moldavians, Transylvanians differ in many ways; the Romanian Greek Catholics want to their being different from the Orthodoxes who have received state assistance and are in favourable position; and those living in the northern and western regions (in Transylvania and Banat) have (and will have) different interests than the inhabitants of eastern and southern areas. The former most probably would approach Central Europe economically, what comes from their geographical situation in relation to the European Union; the latter would approach the Balkans as is indicated by their traditions and long standing interests. The Romanian society is on the threshold of changes, the monolithic state that was the creation of the Ceausescu-dictatorship has to be given up; the still existing communist nomenclature and Securitate-groups,

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

though having lost of their power, still adhere to the preservation of the monolithic construction, probably they would retreat by themselves under the pressure of economically motivated changes.

The politics of the Bucharest government and Great-Romanian powers are still being directed by the vision and myth of the nation-state. The Romanian nation has not yet acquired the experience necessary to become a nation-state that could creditably be based on the inner solidarity and unity of mentality in a community of several 10 millions of people. Sabin Gherman's critical remarks refer to this problem; he questions the political rhetoric about 'national unity'. The constant reference to 'national unity' has only tactical and propaganda aims and there is no real strategic strength in it. The Bucharest government and the ultra-right – ultra-left (they are about the same in Romania) want to strengthen nationalism through it that is necessary and useful to them in maintaining their power; on the other hand they want to find arguments in favour of the Romanisation of the ethnic minorities.

The inner democratic development of Romania and its trying to find its place in Europe is rendered more difficult by the fact that the nationalist idea of creating a nation-state permeates the majority of the Romanian society and political life; even those political forces cannot free themselves from it that otherwise are susceptible to the requirements of a democratic society; who are democratic and broadminded and try to approach the European political culture. The Romanian democrats are forced to adapt themselves to the nationalistic ideology that have predominated Romanian history for 100-150 years; that were intensified to paranoia by the dictatorship fallen 15 years ago and that were cynically maintained and applied by the post-communist system in order to preserve its power. This is the tragedy of every democratic and liberal policy: the politician who is not satisfied by Great-Romanian nationalism and wants to direct Bucharest politics towards more democratic forms, either is compelled to join the nationalistic public opinion (and give up the important aims of democratisation) or becomes isolated from the majority of the public.

Hungarian intelligentsia and politics have to try to find their way to reach these different strata: the diverse regions, the Transylvanian Romanians, the democrats, the liberals (who are not always the same as the Bucharest liberals), all the 'Sabin Ghermans' so to speak who are interested in the westward orientation and closing up, want the economic and political integration of the Central European region. It is evident the

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

regional concept and policy must appear within the Romanian state sooner or later, since the idea will play an ever growing role on the continent and especially in Central Europe – and not in individual states but in traditional, historically developed economic and cultural regions. One of the prerequisites of the closing down of the post-Trianon era is the regional development and consciousness. The ideology of the nation-state will hopefully be abandoned in Romania too, the Romanians have to do away with the harsh and aggressive results its ideology, the same way as communism has been failed. This is in the interest of the Hungarians, of Central Europe and the Romanians too.

The nation-state structures of Europe that played such an important role earlier – they were responsible for two world wars caused by their imperial competitiveness – since the turn of the century, the millennium are proceeding towards loosening up. It is the result of the development of the institution- system of the European Union and the stabilisation of its inner cohesion on the one hand, and the revival of the regional traditions and identities on the other. Both processes go hand in hand with certain manifestations, e.g. the nation-state can assign some aspects of sovereignty to the organisations of the Union or that of the regions. There are regional institutions that are the creations of these welcome processes that serve as intermediate governing structures between counties and the central government – as the so-called Euroregions which play a role in the interregional relationships of economy and culture (e.g. between Alsace in France and Baden Württemberg in Germany).

In the Central European area the regional organisations and regions reaching over state borders can gain importance in the future. There already exist such 'Euroregions' e.g. in the area of Miskolc–Kassa–Ungvár–Szatmárnémeti, or Szeged–Arad–Temesvár–Szabadka, or Szombathely–Zalaegerszeg–Lendva–Maribor–Graz. These regional integrations, however, are not yet comparable to the western patterns in their functioning. They are confined to limited economic cooperation and to the efforts of well-intentioned intellectuals; the regional meetings and consultations indicate the usefulness of real regional cooperation, how it could release the national conflicts inherited from our past.

Without doubt, democratisation in the region has shown results since the developments in Central Europe at the end of the 1980s; these are indicated by the various changes in governments and power groups. The regional comparisons, the recognition of mutual interests, however, are still to come. First of all because it seemed impossible to get rid of the

Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

myth of the nation-state, the ruling systems which hindered political integration and caused national-ethnic conflicts in the region. 'Intermediate Europe' could not shake off the forms still stamped by the eastern-type political culture. The mutual requirement of the European integration could open roads toward reconciliation and cooperation as has successfully been accomplished in the western part of Europe. The regional organisations would promote cooperation within the area and further Central European and through it European integration.



**Minorities
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