

On the Way to Liberalization: Policy of the Ceaușescu's Regime towards the Hungarian Minority in Romania 1965–1968

Filip Šisler

Since the late 1950s the Soviet bloc countries accentuated more and more the unitary national state. At the congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in Moscow between October 17 and 31, 1961, the following concept was formulated: “Regarding the national problem in the socialist conditions, two directions were outlined, that are closely connected with one another. Firstly, we can observe an extremely fast and multilateral development of all nations, together with the growing of the power of Soviet federative and autonomous republics. Secondly, under the auspices of the proletarian internationalism, the socialist nations are continuously converging each other, enriching themselves reciprocally.”¹ Besides this, active tendencies towards homogenization also appeared, which culminated with the idea of creating a “new socialist man, a Soviet individuality”. In close relation with that, we can observe an intensive penetration of the Russian language among the non-Russian ethnics and growth of its influence as well. Analogous trends appeared also in socialist Hungary, where it was proclaimed in 1962 that the national question has been solved. In the Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia, the existence of the Czechoslovak nation had been emphasized, in the framework of which “the Hungarians are closely linked to the state, even though they form a separate national entity”.²

In Romania, after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej on March 22, 1965, Nicolae Ceaușescu became a new First Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român*) (henceforth RCP).³ On July 19 — July 24, 1965, the Ninth Congress of the RCP took place, during which new basic principles of the politics and economy were outlined by the party leadership. The most important were the following ones: the socialism reached a full victory in entire country and came to a new era of its development. At this congress the idea was formulated that in the future, during the new era of the building of socialism, the administrative reform, “systemization”

1 Z. C. NOVÁK, *Politica națională a PCR la sfârșitul anilor '60 și începutul deceniului următor*, in: Á. OLTÍ — A. GIDÓ (Eds.), *Minoritatea maghiară în perioada comunistă*, Cluj-Napoca 2009, pp. 190–191.

2 Ibidem.

3 Between 1948 and 1965, the official name of the ruling party in Romania was the Romanian Workers' Party (*Partidul Muncitoresc Român*).



OPEN ACCESS

of the countryside and the improvement of the economic planning would occur.⁴ Regarding the problem of nationalities, a conception was elaborated, according to which the fundamentals of the evolution of the communist society would be assured on the basis of the state and socialist nation. Concerning the relation between the Romanian state and the national minorities, a concept of the “socialist nation” appeared, which subsequently ushered in a change of the RCP approach towards the minority ethnics. By means of a relevant interpretation of this term it was possible to consolidate the “autonomy” of the Romanian nation within the Soviet bloc, which influenced the RCP national policy as well. It defined the existing relations between the majority Romanians and other nationalities living in the country, and, in the same way, their future and expectations within the Romanian socialist state.⁵

Already in the late 1940s a text called “*Order of the socialist state. Flourishing of the socialist nation. Bringing together of the people and co-inhabiting nationalities*” appeared. It dealt with the conceptual problems of Romania in connection with the nations and its evolution. The document emphasized the nation and state and perceived the internationalist approach as rather secondary.⁶ According to the definition that appeared in the final version of this text, a nation is “*a human community, among whose members the linguistic, territorial, economic and spiritual links exist. Herewith, a nation becomes a strictly social phenomenon, with neither ethnic nor racial attributes. The Romanian state is a national, unitary state. Except of the Romanians, there live also co-inhabiting nationalities⁷ in the country. These groups do not form any particular entities, but they live together with Romanians in different regions of the country. The presence of the co-inhabiting nationalities does not change the national character of the Romanian state. Unlike the capitalist nation, the socialist one has a unitary social structure, in which no social classes with adversary interests exist. In the socialism a new homogenous culture had been formed, which, together with other transformations, liberated the so far suppressed social energies.*”⁸

Shortly after adopting the conclusions of the Ninth Congress, a new constitution of the Romanian Socialist Republic was passed by the Grand National Assembly⁹ on

4 A. BURAKOWSKI, *Geniusz Karpát: Dyktatura Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965–1989*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 70–77.

5 A. ANDREESCU — L. NASTASĂ — A. VARGA (Eds.), *Minorități etnoculturale, mărturii documentare: Maghiarii din România (1956–1968)*, Cluj-Napoca 2003, p. 65.

6 F. SOLOMON, *Comunism și minorități etnice în România după cel de-al doilea război mondial*, in: Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A.D. Xenopol” Iași, Vol. 45, Iași 2008, p. 160.

7 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.

8 Z. C. NOVÁK, *Politica PCR față de minorități naționale 1948–1975*, Ph.D. Thesis, București 2010, pp. 182–183.

9 The Grand National Assembly (*Marea Adunarea Națională*) was the supreme executive body of both Romanian People’s Republic in 1947–1965 and of the Romanian Socialist Republic in 1965–1989.

August 21, 1965. In the theoretical level, it provided ostensibly adequate safeguards for the rights of ethnic minorities. The constitution's Article 17 guaranteed equal rights in all fields of economic, political, juridical, social and cultural life to all citizens irrespective their nationality. Article 22 assured the co-inhabiting nationalities free use of their mother tongue and cultural, educational and public services in their own languages.¹⁰

In January 1966 a session of the Section of Propaganda and Agitation of the PCR took place. The discussions basically went on several levels. The participants wanted to elaborate a theory which would define the position of the RCP within the Eastern bloc. For this reason the issue of the national sovereignty was discussed. The session unanimously refused the creation of a supranational institution and they came to agreement that the socialist nation was made of the entire population of the country. Ion Iliescu, a leader of the session, gave a concrete example that according to his opinion, a *"Hungarian from Arad has many more common treats with a Romanian from the same city than with a Hungarian from Hungary"*.¹¹ The participants emphasized a necessity of the integration of national minorities into the socialist nation. Some participants operated even with a more radical step, as they claimed the assimilation of national minorities. Valter Roman noted that the homogenization and integration needed to be realized in the same way in case of all nationalities: *"We simply cannot separate one from another. Let's consider, for example, the Hungarian nationality. If we perceive the problem only from the current viewpoint, we will make a mistake. In the past you will find out that this nationality formed a part of the bourgeois Hungarian nation: but what kind of historical process was realized till today? We obviously cannot say that this nationality forms a part of the Romanian nation. Probably in the nearer or more remote future it will occur like this, and so we need to find some dialectic answers yet."*¹² This statement was, however, contested by the majority of participants, who shared an opinion that the way of integration into the socialist nation would be different in case of each minority. *"The problem if this or that national minority forms a part of the unitary socialist nation, must be resolved in different ways. Some of them do, more or less, others still don't, but they will be integrated step by step. An integration process has even started in case of such a compact population, as the Hungarian one is."*¹³

Although the presence of different nationalities was recognized, the fundamental principle of the relation between the Romanian nation and the co-inhabiting nationalities denied a necessity of the collective minority rights. Through promoting the

10 *Constituția Republicii Socialiste Române 1965*, articole 17 și 22. Online see <http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/constitutie/constitutia-republicii-socialiste-romania-1965.php>, [cit. 2015-08-31].

11 Arhivele Naționale ale României (henceforth ANR), fond Comitetul Central (CC) al PCR, secția Cancelarie, dosar 180/1966, fila 34.

12 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 180/1966, f. 10.

13 The declaration about the integrated nationalities referred to the smaller communities like Serbs, Turks, Tatars, Ukrainians or Albanians etc. The reason of the easier way how to incorporate them into the socialist nation was mainly the lack of their own institutional system, with the exception of several elementary schools and individual secondary school classes. *Ibidem*, f. 14.

theory of Daco-Roman continuity, the national minorities were positioned into the category of “strangers”, of those who settled in the homeland of Romanians and because of this fact they could be classified as people of the second category.¹⁴ Besides the negation of their collective rights, using of the concept of the socialist nation also served the idea of an inevitable incorporation of the co-inhabiting nationalities into the majority Romanian corpus, which offered an ideological basis for the social, economic and cultural homogenization of the country in the long term. *“Nationalities underwent similar social, economic and cultural transformation process as the Romanian nation did. It is an important fact that the developments of the Romanian nation, as well as of the co-inhabiting nationalities, have a common economic and social foundation. Moreover, the cultural life of both Romanians and the nationalities have the same basis as well. In the new phase of the socialist development the appropriation of Romanians and nationalities will become more profound and a new common culture will be created.”*¹⁵

The theory of the socialist nation and its interpretations represented essential means to legitimize the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Since the 1970s they were already often associated with the concept of homogenization. As we can read in official documents: *“In our country the difference between town and countryside, as well as among different social categories will be eliminated. The homogenization of the society will be realized together with the consolidation of the relations between the workers’ and peasants’ class and between the intelligence and other social classes.”*¹⁶

From the viewpoint of the policy towards the minorities, comparing it with the last years of Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime, the new RCP leadership manifested an obvious interest in the national issue. Here we refer to the possibilities which didn’t exist during the previous period. In 1965 a special commission dealing with the national minorities was founded under the auspices of the RCP. Its main scope was to help RCP in spreading the communist ideology within the minority groups. Nevertheless, the representatives of the minorities had a possibility to point out the particular problems of the respective communities, especially the education issue.¹⁷

The Romanian leadership endeavored to implement the new direction of the minority policy, approved at the Ninth Congress, but simultaneously they did not want to lose the existing confidence and devotion of the Hungarian cadres. As an ideal place where to promote these ideological changes, the Mureș-Hungarian Autonomous Region¹⁸ was chosen, where the Hungarians represented more than 60 % of

14 NOVÁK, *Politica națională a PCR...*, p. 196.

15 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 180/1966, f. 25.

16 NOVÁK, *Politica PCR...*, p. 186.

17 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 27/1965, ff. 48-71.

18 The Hungarian Autonomous Region (*Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară*) was established in 1952 in accordance with the Soviet administrative model proposed to Romania. It consisted of whole historic region of Szeklerland (Rom. *Ținutul Secuiesc*, Hun. *Székelyföld*), which means the nowadays counties of Harghita and Covasna and a part of Mureș County. Almost 78 % of the Region’s population were Hungarians. Even though officially in the name of the HAR the word “autonomous” was contained, it possessed neither political nor economic autonomy. However, the HAR benefited from particular cultural rights, and so the local Hungarian population had a possibility to develop its own socialist culture in

the local population. On August 12–13, 1965, the RCP leadership headed by Ceaușescu paid an official visit in this region, where they presented the conclusions of the Ninth Congress — close link between the Romanians and the co-inhabiting nationalities, elimination of all conflicts between social classes or “re-discovering” of some key moments, personalities and symbols of the Romanian national history.¹⁹ During the last day of the visit, a discussion about different plans of the development of the city of Târgu Mureș was organized in the local Palace of Culture.²⁰

Based on research undertaken by the commission, the activity of the cultural and educational institution of ethnic Hungarians in Cluj-Napoca and Târgu Mureș was examined. The subsequent measures undertaken shortly thereafter were ambiguous, because on the one hand the education in Hungarian language had not been limited, but, on the other hand, an agreement about the necessity of strengthening the education in Romanian language in these regions was reached.²¹ The RCP leadership approved a future plan to dissolve the Department of the Hungarian History and Literature at the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca in a suitable moment.²²

The year 1968 brought an important moment in the policy of Ceaușescu’s Romania towards the Hungarian minority. The country’s administrative reform and its active role in foreign policy could be carried out only with a stable hinterland. In this regard, the relations between the Romanian leadership and the minorities played a very important role. During this short period three important events from the viewpoint of the Hungarians took place: the administrative reform, the Ceaușescu’s meeting with Hungarian intellectuals and the establishment of the Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality (*Consiliul Oamenilor Muncii de Naționalitate Maghiară*).²³

DISPUTES OVER THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM AND ITS IMPACT ON ETHNIC HUNGARIANS

In order to consolidate his power, Nicolae Ceaușescu proceeded to the administrative reform of his country. 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 (*județe*), used also during the interwar period, was re-established. At the same time the Mureș — Hungarian Autonomous Region was dissolved in 1968 as well.²⁴ The system of counties was re-in-

the mother tongue. For more information see S. BOTTONI, *Transilvania roșie: Comunismul român și problema națională 1944–1965*, Cluj-Napoca 2010, pp. 95–129.

19 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 104/1966, ff. 176–178.

20 Ibidem, f. 180.

21 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Propagandă și Agitație, dos. 7/1966, ff. 1–3.

22 Ibidem.

23 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, p. 612.

24 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 Se-

roduced especially in order to make the industrial development more efficient and transparent, because the counties were smaller and more easily administrable than regions. At the same time, the re-alignments occurring during the reform resulted in a large-scale movement of cadres as well, during which the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) leadership put in functions elite groups, on whose loyalty it could rely in the long term.²⁵

The implementation of the 1968 administrative reform played an important role in the RCP nationality policy as well. From this point of view, the fact of re-introducing of the counties continued to follow the main principle of the Romanian minority policy after 1956, according to which the nationality question in the country had been solved and thus the existence of minorities didn't have to be dealt in particular. A complicated issue represented the eventual re-distribution of Szeklerland (*Ținutul Secuiesc, Székelyföld*), which was inhabited predominantly by ethnic Hungarians and belonged to rather backward regions considering the level of economic and social development.²⁶

Basically three proposals how to deal with Szeklerland were discussed during the preliminary debates: either the restoration of the pre-1950 counties in the region, or the establishment of the large Szekler county or a variant of a smaller Szekler county, where the districts of Sfântu Gheorghe (*Sepsiszentgyörgy*) and Târgu Secuiesc (*Kézdivásárhely*) were supposed to be added to the Braşov county.²⁷ The representatives of these three options also formed an ideological cleavage within the RCP. The most obvious dispute emerged between Nicolae Ceauşescu and Alexandru Drăghici, the former Interior Minister of the Gheorghiu-Dej era, who actually represented the most serious concurrence to Ceauşescu during this time. Drăghici was in favor of the first proposal, as he unambiguously refused the idea of taking the minority issue into consideration in this case. He considered the territory of Szeklerland as a ghetto, which should be eliminated by the way of industrializing it, and not by artificially increasing its area.²⁸ The supporters of the third mentioned possibility argued that the districts of Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc were closely economically tied to the city of Braşov. At the session, Ceauşescu himself supported the suggestion to create a large Szekler county, which was originally proposed by János Fazekas, a Hungarian member of the Politburo of RCP and a close collaborator of the Romanian leader in that time.²⁹ Ceauşescu stated inter alia: “*It would be really natural for Sfântu Gheorghe*

cuiesc, 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*). BOTTONI, pp. 275–289.

²⁵ NOVÁK, *The Year of the...*, p. 613.

²⁶ Z. C. NOVÁK, *Anul posibilităţilor? 1968 în România şi problema naţională*, in: *Partide politice şi minorităţi naţionale din România în secolul XX*, Vol. 4, Sibiu 2009, p. 304.

²⁷ ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cămară, dos. 191/1967, f. 20.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 35.

²⁹ János Fazekas (1926–2004) was a Romanian Hungarian politician. He grew up in Cristuru Secuiesc and joined the RCP in 1945. Firstly he was active in the UTC and subsequent-

and Târgu Secuiesc to belong to the Braşov County, nevertheless, the proposals were premised on the point of view of nationality, namely, that we create an opportunity for the Szekler population to remain in a single administrative unit."³⁰ Several important members of the RCP, including Gheorghe Apostol, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Chivu Stoica, Leonte Răutu and, of course, János Fazekas as the one who proposed it, unequivocally expressed their support to the statement advocated by the Romanian leader.³¹

The plan for the administrative reform was introduced to the public on January 14, 1968. When working out the points of the reform, the RCP had mostly acted through its customary centralized system. However, concerning various details of a local level, it also asked for the opinion of the population. This partial liberalization of the conditions caused a large-scale activity among the ordinary citizens, when within one month 10 606 individual or joint proposals were registered.³² Among the Hungarian minority in Transylvania the possibility of organizing Szeklerland into one administrative unit implied excited reactions, as the memory of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, abolished in 1960, was still strong. In order to obtain the most advantageous position possible after the reform, an internal struggle occurred among the three major local elite groups: that from the city of Miercurea Ciuc (*Csík-szereda*), which was planned to become county seat in case of creating the large Szekler county, and those of Odorheiu Secuiesc (*Székelyudvarhely*) and Sfântu Gheorghe, because both aforementioned cities had an important historical tradition as the seats of administrative units.³³ The final decision was expected to be taken from the upper echelons of the RCP hierarchy, where the most important Hungarian representative was János Fazekas, who himself originated from the Szeklerland.

During the following discussions within the Central Committee (CC) of the RCP, one of the hottest issues was the fate of the Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc districts, which were removed from the Hungarian Autonomous Region in 1960 and unified with the Braşov County. The party leadership of Braşov showed a big effort in order to retain the two districts, mostly by lobbying at the meeting of the CC, but also by striving for obtaining the support of some of the Hungarian cadres in Sfântu Gheorghe, which feared the possibility of losing their positions.³⁴ By sending reports

ly he continued his career in Bucharest. Between 1954 and 1984 he was a member of the RCP Central Committee. During the years 1961–1965 he was Minister of the Food Industry, and then vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers (in fact, Deputy Prime Minister). Between 1975 and 1980 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Romanian government. In addition to his political activity, he was intensively involved in finding a solution of the minority issue in Romania as well. Since the mid-1980s he was marginalized. For more information about János Fazekas, see Z. C. NOVÁK, *În slujba naţiunii şi a partidului: Dubla identitate a unui activist maghiar: Exemplul lui János Fazekas*, in: *Partide politice şi minorităţi naţionale din România în secolul XX*, Vol. 5, Sibiu 2010, pp. 316–328.

³⁰ ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 191/1967, dos. 190/1967, ff. 5–6.

³¹ *Ibidem*, dos. 189/1967, f. 10.

³² ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 4/1968, ff. 8–111.

³³ Z. C. NOVÁK, *Impactul reformei administrative din 1968 asupra politicii PCR faţă de minoritatea maghiară*, in: Á. OLTÍ — A. GIDÓ (Eds.), *Minoritatea maghiară în perioada comunistă*, Cluj-Napoca 2009, p. 308.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

to the central organs in Bucharest, it wanted to prove that the population of the region unanimously supported the annexation to Braşov. However, the reality was different, because the RCP leadership in Târgu Secuiesc eventually decided in favor of belonging to the large Szekler County.³⁵ Local cadres, opposing their counterparts in Braşov, attempted to announce to the higher level the abuses used by Braşov, which influenced the opinion of local people using promises and threats and by silencing some of the “unwanted” speakers. Two prominent Hungarian intellectuals from this period, writers András Sütö and Gyözö Hajdú, also drew attention of János Fazekas to these abuses and wanted him to intervene by Nicolae Ceauşescu, so that those two districts would not merge with the Braşov County. They sent a letter to Fazekas, stating that “those who agitate in favor of Braşov think that the administrative changes will negatively affect their positions and their jobs. [...] They put all their hopes on their former connections in Braşov, ignoring the interests of the community.”³⁶

The plans and debates on re-introducing the system of counties only deepened mutual tensions and suspicions between Romanians and Hungarians. Those arguing in favor of the large Szekler County were accused by local Romanians of separatism, since the Romanian-speaking population logically opted for the Braşov County. On the contrary, for the majority of Hungarians the plan of annexation to Braşov meant nothing else than a new attempt to divide the Szeklers and to enable the headquarters in Braşov to exploit the predominantly Hungarian region. Two Hungarian members of the RCP leadership, Károly Király and Sándor Koppándi (both ethnic Hungarians), were sent from the Bucharest headquarters in order to calm tensions.³⁷ It became more and more obvious that a majority of the population of the region and local intellectuals definitely did not long for the annexation to Braşov. A compromise solution started to be thought about, namely a plan of creating a new county outside the Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc districts. On February 10, 1968, the CC officially announced that a new Covasna county would be established without those two districts. The final adoption of the new plan took place at the RCP plenary session four days later.³⁸

The establishment of Covasna County was not the only issue of the debates concerning the new counties within Szeklerland. Before the RCP plenary session on February 14 took place, demonstrations occurred in Miercurea Ciuc with the purpose of supporting the interests of this town in order to become the seat of the newly proposed Harghita County.³⁹ Another option for the county seat was Odorheiu Secuiesc, whose inhabitants hoped in the support of János Fazekas and tried to convince him about the advantages of this city. They argued that Odorheiu was more developed and having a higher percentage of ethnic Hungarian inhabitants, it can fulfill the duties of the county seat in a more efficient way.⁴⁰ Yet because in the meantime the creation of Covasna County with the county seat in Sfântu Gheorghe was approved, the RCP leadership duly changed its idea regarding the county

35 NOVÁK, *Anul posibilităţilor...*, p. 307

36 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 4/1968, ff. 132–134.

37 NOVÁK, *Politica PCR...*, p. 204.

38 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 4/1968, ff. 132–134.

39 NOVÁK, *Impactul reformei...*, p. 309.

40 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 4/1968, f. 135.

seat of Harghita, without any consultations with the locals. A new official version designated Odorheiu Secuiesc as the county seat. The official documents reported a positive atmosphere during the inaugurating session, but it was a public secret that people from Miercurea Ciuc were not satisfied at all with this decision — on the contrary, they felt humiliated.⁴¹ The RCP Committee in Târgu Mureș, which was the seat of the still existing Mureș — Autonomous Hungarian Region, reported to Bucharest that the mood in the district of Miercurea Ciuc was tense. Workers from various local factories openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the new situation and on February 13, 1968, they assembled in front of the building of the local RCP Committee. The demonstrations continued overnight and a delegation from Bucharest, formed by Mihai Gere and Vasile Patilineț, was sent there, in order to negotiate with the workers. After long discussions, they finally reached an agreement, according to which the representatives of the demonstrators were invited to be officially received by Nicolae Ceaușescu.⁴²

The meeting of the Romanian leader with the workers' delegates took place on February 14 in Bucharest.⁴³ The demonstrators were represented by István Orbán, the secretary of the executive committee of the popular council in Miercurea Ciuc, further by Ovidiu Muntean, manager of the wood-processing plant in the same city, economist Imre Pataki and director of a secondary school Pál János. On the other part, Ceaușescu was joined by Ion Gheorghe Maurer, János Fazekas and Vasile Patilineț.⁴⁴ The host group tried to explain their guests the reasons of choosing Odorheiu Secuiesc as the county seat, especially because of its suitable economy and infrastructure. Ceaușescu promised far-reaching economic investments to Miercurea Ciuc and that some of the future county's institutions would be moved right there. István Orbán contradicted that Miercurea Ciuc had been originally designated to become the county seat and that nothing at all justified changing this.⁴⁵ Ovidiu Muntean and Imre Pataki tried to explain to the Romanian leader the economic circumstances being in favor of Miercurea Ciuc,⁴⁶ whereas Pál János argued with its historical and cultural heritage and traditions.⁴⁷ The CC representatives considered these arguments as more or less convincing and they promised the delegates from Miercurea Ciuc that the CC would re-consider the request of the delegation. Probably after the subsequent consultations with representatives of other towns in the proximity of Miercurea Ciuc, like Gheorgheni (*Gyergyószentmiklós*), Bălan (*Bálanbánya*) or Cristuru Secuiesc (*Székegykeresztúr*), which confirmed the statements of the delegation from Szeklerland, the plenary session changed its decision and eventually approved that Miercurea Ciuc would become the county seat.⁴⁸ So, the demonstrations and the visit of the local del-

41 Ibidem, f. 142.

42 Ibidem, f. 144.

43 It is worth to note that just at the same time the RCP plenary session was under way and Ceaușescu interrupted it to negotiate with the workers. NOVÁK, *The Year of the...*, p. 621.

44 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 220/1968, ff. 2–4.

45 Ibidem, ff. 5–6.

46 Ibidem, ff. 7–9.

47 Ibidem, f. 10.

48 NOVÁK, *Anul posibilităților...*, p. 309.

egation in Bucharest brought its fruit. The local elite from Miercurea Ciuc was also considered by the RCP headquarters as a partner for negotiating.

Another point of the negotiated compromise was that the two disputed districts — Târgu Secuiesc and Sfântu Gheorghe — were not merged with the Braşov County, but incorporated into the newly established Covasna County with an overwhelming Hungarian majority. The fact that those two districts didn't end up as a part of the Braşov County, although both the RCP leadership and the Braşov regional and Sfântu Gheorghe district leadership considered this to be economically justified, can be counted as a significant success of the Hungarians of Transylvania.⁴⁹ In this case the preference was given to the nationality criteria from the economic ones. Influenced by the street demonstrations and very resolute arguments of the Hungarian delegation, Ceauşescu and his collaborators decided to change their original plans.⁵⁰

THE MEETING OF THE ROMANIAN LEADER WITH HUNGARIAN INTELLECTUALS

During the night from August 20 to August 21, 1968, the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies to Czechoslovakia occurred. It is a well-known fact that the Romanian troops did not participate in this military operation and Ceauşescu harshly denounced it as an inadmissible interference in the internal affairs of Prague. As the Romanian leader feared the potential possibility of the Soviet intervention to Romania because of the already since the mid-1950s continuing independent foreign policy of his country towards the Soviet bloc, he realized that he needed more than ever before the support of all the Romanian citizens. For this reason, he significantly increased the number of meetings between the RCP leadership and various intellectual groups, as well as visits to the important counties.⁵¹

This series of tactical gestures did not omit the Hungarian minority in Transylvania either. By means of an "agreement" with the population the RCP systematically prepared itself for penetrating with these a bit more liberal measures among the members of the Hungarian community as well. The nationality question was brought into the highest party forums and often discussed there. János Fazekas was charged to mediate with the Hungarian intellectuals in Romania, and the committee responsible for the minority policy was continuously drawing up documents with relevant information for the RCP leadership. Statistics were elaborated concerning the state of minority education, the number of nationality students and their opportunities for obtaining a university degree and getting employed afterwards.⁵² In his letter to Ion Gheorghe Maurer from the summer of 1968, János Fazekas already anticipated some problems regarding the Hungarian intellectuals. He mentioned, among other things, the underrepresentation of Hungarians in various state, party and cultural institutions, a necessity of

49 NOVÁK, *Impactul reformei...*, pp. 312–314.

50 *Ibidem*, p. 314.

51 M. RETEGAN, 1968: *Ve stínu Pražského jara: Črta k rumunské zahraniční politice*, Praha 2002, pp. 150–153.

52 ANR, f. CC al PCR, sect. Propaganda și Agitație, dos. 18/1968, ff. 98–102.

re-consideration of the constitutional and legal status of the Hungarian minority, the demand of new periodicals, radio and TV channels in Hungarian language and the request for the creation of a new organization defending minority interests.⁵³

One of the steps undertaken on purpose of re-gaining the confidence of the Hungarians represented the meeting between the top RCP leadership and the Hungarian intellectuals, which took place on June 28, 1968 in Bucharest. More than 50 representatives of the Hungarian intelligentsia of Transylvania (writers, poets, editors, painters and teachers) received an invitation.⁵⁴ However, the problem was that they were notified about the upcoming meeting only few days ahead, so they were barely able to meet together and coordinate their tactics in advance.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the problems brought up by Hungarian intellectuals, which according to them required an urgent solution, were quite clearly outlined. The most important problem was the representation of the Hungarians in state and party organs, which was considered by the Hungarian part as insufficient. Similarly as János Fazekas already outlined in the aforementioned letter, they emphasized a need for elaborating a minority statute that would regulate both particular and collective rights of the Hungarians, and a state agency which could be able to coordinate the minority's cultural life. Among the legal issues discussed was the rehabilitation of Hungarian intellectuals convicted during the Stalinist era on the false charge of treason against the homeland and the nation⁵⁶, re-introduction of the bilingual signs removed during the early 1960s or use of the minority languages in the state administration.⁵⁷

Concerning the education, the Hungarian delegation pointed out that almost no technical schools with the Hungarian language instruction existed at that time. Further complaints regarded the discriminatory measures against Hungarian students during the process of admission at universities, lack of textbooks written for the minority students, lack of Hungarian publications in general or the difficult process of integration of the graduate Hungarians into the working life. According to the majority of speakers the role and position of the minorities in Romanian scholarly life reflected neither the proportion of the nationalities nor the quantity and quality of the activity performed by the latter in scholarship and cultural life.⁵⁸

53 NOVÁK, *The Year of the...*, p. 625.

54 The most significant among them were Géza Domokos, János Szász and Pál Bodor from Bucharest, Ernő Gáll, János Demeter, Lajos Jordáky, Lajos Kántor, István Nagy, Gyula Csehi, Sándor Fodor, Sándor Kányádi and Elemér Jancsó from Cluj-Napoca, Győző Hajdú, András Sütő and Zsolt Gálfalvi from Târgu Mureș and Ernő Sisak from Timișoara. On the other hand, the RCP Central Committee was represented by Nicolae Ceaușescu, Paul Niculescu Mizil, Leonte Răutu, Mihai Gere and János Fazekas. ANR, f. CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 47/1968, ff. 1-53.

55 ANDREESCU — NASTASĂ — VARGA, pp. 908-911.

56 The majority of those convicted at that time were released from prisons in 1963 and 1964. However, both central and local RCP organs tried to hinder them when they endeavored to return to their former positions or to find a new job. The Hungarian intellectuals also asked the RCP leadership during this meeting to change this unfavorable situation. NOVÁK, *Politica PCR...*, p. 224.

57 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Organizatorică, dos. 47/1968. ff. 36-38.

58 ANDREESCU — NASTASĂ — VARGA, p. 66.

This meeting was an extremely important moment in the minority policy of the RCP. After the instauration of the communist regime the party representatives declared that the minority issue had been solved and the freedoms listed in the Romanian constitution from 1948 were completely sufficient and because of this the minorities didn't have any mandate to demand more rights. Before 1968 in fact the RCP didn't use to consult such a big amount of issues with the minority representatives. The meeting was apparently one of the evidences of the partial liberalization of the political and cultural life in Romania during the early Ceaușescu period. It was a perfect moment for the speakers to make the Romanian leadership aware of the problems of national minorities. The interesting fact of these talks is that the economic issues were not raised at all, and the economic and social backwardness of the two newly established counties with the predominantly Hungarian population, Harghita and Covasna, was perceived as an acknowledged fact.⁵⁹

However, results of this meeting were only partially positive for Hungarians of Transylvania. Their request concerning the elaboration of a legal status of the nationalities was immediately rejected by the Romanian leadership. The same fate met every potential kind of demand which could have resulted in the recognition of collective rights of the national minorities (not only the Hungarian one). On the other hand, many promises were made from the side of the RCP, mostly regarding administrative changes and introducing several ethnic Hungarians into different positions in the state sphere.⁶⁰ The changes proposed with regard to language use, street names and bilingual signs generally became lost in the tangle of the state bureaucracy. Even though some classes with Hungarian as the language of instruction were introduced, the history and geography of Romania was not taught in the languages of minorities again, and neither were special Romanian language and literature textbooks prepared for students from the ranks of national minorities.⁶¹

At the same time it is necessary to state that this meeting enabled Hungarians, after long time of being ignored, to confront their most urgent problems with the RCP leadership. Subsequently, soon after the meeting, the Hungarian cultural life began slowly to develop. The *Kriterion* Publishing House, which publishes till nowadays books mostly in the minority languages (most frequently in Hungarian), was founded in the end of 1969 in Bucharest under the leadership of writer Géza Domokos.⁶² 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- and German-language programs of Romanian television started to be broadcasted. Especially in the newly established counties of Harghita and Covasna (but in others as well) Hungarian statues, monuments and local museums were allowed to be erected or constructed.⁶³

59 NOVÁK, *The Year of the...*, p. 627.

60 ANDREESCU — NASTASĂ — VARGA, p. 66.

61 E. ILLYÉS, *National minorities in Romania*, New York 1982, p. 181.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 255.

63 *Ibidem*, p. 244.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL OF WORKERS OF HUNGARIAN NATIONALITY

During the first three years of his rule, Ceaușescu succeeded in achieving the trust and sympathies of a significant part of the Transylvanian Hungarian elite, because of his “flexibility” during the process of the administrative reform, his dialogue with Hungarian intellectuals and last but not least also because of his interest expressed during the meetings and visits. The Hungarian representatives were co-opted into the CC and other RCP institutions. Because of the Czechoslovak events in 1968, Romanian leader felt a strong need to assure a balance and unity not only in the foreign, but also in the domestic policy.⁶⁴ For this reason, he paid several countrywide visits during the autumn 1968. Among the regions he chose to visit personally were those with the Hungarian minority population (Szeklerland and Cluj-Napoca), because they were considered to be important from the viewpoint of propaganda and securing the internal peace.⁶⁵ In order to prove the Ceaușescu’s pragmatic approach it is worth to mention that five days after he strictly condemned the military intervention in Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968, he paid a visit to the two newly established counties, Harghita and Covasna.⁶⁶ It was his second visit in Szeklerland since his ascension to power in 1965.

In comparison with his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, Ceaușescu considered the relatively frequent working visits as important, especially during the critical situation around the Czechoslovak crisis, when he feared a similar Soviet intervention to his country. His frequent visits to Szeklerland signaled a hope of the local population that the Romanian leader intended to solve their problems. He really acknowledged the economical backwardness of the region and promised large-scale investments. He also reasonably used symbolic gestures, through which he managed to attract the Hungarian minority even more — at the end of his speeches he saluted the local population in Hungarian. For example, during his visit in Miercurea Ciuc he uttered in Hungarian: “*Long live Harghita, long live the Hungarian Communist Party!*”⁶⁷ The Hungarians in Harghita and Covasna assured the RCP leadership of their trust and support, emphasize their loyalty, condemned the intervention to Czechoslovakia and stressed the importance of “common patriotism”, which they considered to be one of the basic principles of the socialist nation’s doctrine.⁶⁸

On August 30, 1968, Ceaușescu visited the Cluj and Sibiu County. In the speeches he delivered at the popular rallies in Cluj-Napoca, Turda and Sibiu, he stressed the importance of RCP unity and he also used this opportunity to promote the major political acts realized during precedent years — partial liberalization of the regime, more independent foreign policy and economic decentralization. In the similar way, Paul Niculescu Mizil, a secretary of the CC visited the counties of Timișoara, Arad and Oradea and met the local representatives of the Hungarian minority.

64 BURAKOWSKI, pp. 110–115.

65 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 136/1968, f. 39.

66 O. KOLAR, *Rumänien und seine nationalen Minderheiten 1918 bis heute*, Wien / Köln / Weimar 1997, p. 346.

67 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 136/1968, f. 39.

68 *Ibidem*, f. 48.

At the RCP Central Committee plenary session on October 24–25, 1968, a need of reviving the party's diminished capacity to mobilize the masses was discussed. The plenum came to the conclusion that there was “a strong need to set up a permanent political organ, which would have ensured on the national level a regular cooperation of the local RCP organizations with its headquarters”. This is how the Front of Socialist Unity (*Frontul Unității Socialiste*; henceforth FSU) was established in late 1968. It aimed to embrace Romanian society on every level and in every area. In the organization's structure the Central Council represented the highest level, followed thereafter by the county, municipal, town and communal councils.⁶⁹

At the same plenary session the RCP leadership decided to establish similar organizations for the non-Romanian nationalities as well, which would be integrated into the FSU. For those organization, the name Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality (*Consiliul Oamenilor Muncii de Naționalitate Maghiară*)⁷⁰ was chosen.⁷¹ The RCP leadership rejected the proposal of Lajos Takács, one of the CC members, that the new organ could have been called simply Hungarian Nationality Council, because this name appeared as too “national” and did not sufficiently emphasize the fact that these organizations had been established for “nationality workers” and were not intended as separate nationalities' agencies. The establishment of the councils of nationalities perfectly fitted into the RCP minority policy. On the purpose of keeping balance in domestic policy, the RCP created a new means of mobilization with a particular attention to the minorities, especially their political and intellectual elites.⁷²

The creation of nationality councils within the FSU brought several important tactical, propagandistic and practical advantages for the RCP. By way of this decision the party indicated to the population that it was willing to solve the problems of national minorities. Speaking about the ethnic Hungarians we must note that since the abolition of the Hungarian People's Union (*Uniunea Populară Maghiară*),⁷³ an organization representing the minority between 1944 and 1953,⁷⁴ there was no separate organ or forum advocating the interests of the Hungarians. The appearance of the Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality (henceforth CWHN) filled the Hungarians with optimism and in return for it they guaranteed their loyalty towards the regime. However, the councils, lacking any independent legal status or decision-making jurisdiction, remained fully under the control of the RCP, which hereby effectively supervised the minorities.⁷⁵

The CWHN was not established primarily in order to defend the collective rights of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and exercise any real influence, but rather

69 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 178/1968, ff. 47–56.

70 In Hungarian, *Magyar Nemzetiségű Dolgozók Tanácsa*.

71 Similar workers' councils were established also for the German, Serbian and Ukrainian minority (*Consiliul Oamenilor Muncii de Naționalitate Germană, resp. Sârbă, Ucraineană*). ANR, fond Consiliul Oamenilor Muncii de Naționalitate Maghiară din România (henceforth COMNMR), dos. 1/1968, f. 10.

72 *Ibidem*, f. 14.

73 In Hungarian, *Magyar Népi Szövetsége*.

74 See BOTTONI, pp. 68–73.

75 NOVÁK, *The Year of the...*, p. 634.

to serve as a transfer lever between the RCP policy and the respective minority and also to prevent Soviet Union from exploiting national differences in Romania.⁷⁶ As Ceaușescu stated during his speech at the plenary session: *“It will be one of the main tasks of the councils to contribute to the activity of political education, which the RCP has carried out for promoting socialist patriotism and socialist internationalism, for commitment to our new system, for the common homeland, for the development of communist ethics, against all sorts of outdated and nationalist conceptions and manifestations, for the continuous raising of the socialist consciousness of the masses.”*⁷⁷

At the same time, besides its integrative role, the CWHN was intended to contribute *“to stimulating scholarly, artistic and literary creation in the mother tongues of the co-inhabiting nationalities, in close union with the creative works of the Romanian people and with the socialist spiritual progress of the entire country”*.⁷⁸ Also the hope to resolve — at each level — the specific problems of the minorities was incorporated in the interpretation, according to which the CWHN would have a role *“in evaluation of the Hungarian community and of the particular problems of the local population, in order to find the best solutions, always in obedience with general interests of the socialist society and of the citizens from the minority groups”*.⁷⁹

Concerning the organization structure, the headquarters of the CWHN was set up in Bucharest and its members were nominated by the county councils of the Hungarian workers. The council had an elected bureau, the main task of which was to organize the daily activities. In those counties where a numerous Hungarian community lived, county councils were established as well. Their members were nominated by the representatives of the workers from the minority population. In practical terms it meant that those persons were nominated on the recommendation of and with the agreement of the representatives of the local RCP organs. The county councils were headed by a chairman and 3–4 vice-chairmen, there was also one secretary.⁸⁰

The establishment of the CWHN national organization took place on November 15, 1968, in the Romanian capital. Academician István Péterfi became chairman of the Central Bureau. Lajos Takács, Károly Király, József Méliusz and Tibor Maros assumed the posts of vice-chairmen. The elected members of the bureau became László Bányai, János Demeter, Anna Dukász, Zoltán Kovács, Sándor Egry, Magdolna Fábrián, Mihály B. Kovács, Julianna Márton, Sándor Nagy, András Sütö, József Valter and Dezső Szilágyi.⁸¹ On Friday, November 8, constituent sessions of the county councils were held in the following Transylvanian counties: Alba, Arad, Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Maramureș, Mureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj, Sibiu and Timiș. Their formations were held not only in the presence of Hungarian delegates, but also of the RCP local leadership. The members of the county councils were in ma-

76 A. BRAUN, *Structural Change and Its Consequences for Nationalities in Romania*, in: R. SCHÖNFELD (Ed.), *Nationalitätenprobleme in Südosteuropa*, München 1987, p. 188.

77 ANR, fond COMNMR, dos. 1/1968, f. 19.

78 ANR, fond CC al PCR, sect. Cancelarie, dos. 178/1968, ff. 148–156.

79 Ibidem.

80 ANR, fond COMNMR, dos. 1/1968, f. 15.

81 In 1971 the Central Bureau of the HWC was completed by other 24 members. Ibidem, f. 33.

majority workers of the Hungarian nationality, but besides them also local intellectuals, teachers, writers or economists were co-opted into them.⁸²

CONCLUSION

Although the trends in the Romanian policy towards the Hungarian minority during the first three years of the Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime might indicate that the new leadership really wanted to provide ethnic Hungarians with full minority rights, the reality was different. The Romanian leader's attitude was purely pragmatic. In order to realize his personal ideas about how his country should look like and function, he needed a close collaboration of the entire population, including the minority ethnics. This is why the relevant legislation approved during these years seemed to be very liberal, at least at the theoretical level. However, according to the conception of the Romanian leadership, basically the only way how to effectively secure the domestic policy for the future was the homogenization of the Romanian nation.

The administrative reform from 1968 brought at least partial satisfaction to the Hungarian minority, because instead of the former Hungarian Autonomous Region, which didn't dispose of any autonomy in practice anyway, two counties with the majority Hungarian population were formed. Yet, the rest of ethnic Hungarians remained scattered within several more counties, without any effort to solve this problem. Regarding the activities of the Hungarian minority, it was proven especially by the example of the arguments between the representatives of Miercurea Ciuc and Odorheiu Secuiesc about the seat of Harghita County that the Hungarian minority was internally split and its position was not strong enough in order to be an equal partner for the RCP leadership during negotiations.

When paying his frequent visits to the counties inhabited by the Hungarian minority, Nicolae Ceaușescu was well aware of the fact that promising a lot of advantages would bring him loyalty of ethnic Hungarians for a period necessary to realize his visions. But barely any of his previous assurances were put into force. The Hungarian request for legal status based on collective rights, which appeared ideal from the viewpoint of the minorities, was resolutely rejected. The Ceaușescu regime from its neo-Stalinist nature simply did not recognize particular rights in case of any national, religious or social group.

A similar situation can be observed in case of the Councils of Workers of Hungarian Nationality, initially assuming a multifunctional role in uniting the Hungarian political elite and intellectuals in order to mediate between their co-nationals and the Romanian leadership. The RCP hereby legitimized its minority policy, because the bilateral discussions occurred at the official level, through an official forum. However, the meetings of the CWHN always had a rather consultative character and its recommendations mostly got lost in the bureaucratic apparatus. Their role was further reduced in the early 1970s, in order to become the mere ideological mouthpiece and mean of the regime propaganda during the 1980s.

⁸² ANR, fond COMNMR, dos. 1/1968, f. 16.

**ON THE WAY TO LIBERALIZATION: POLICY OF THE CEAUȘESCU'S REGIME
TOWARDS THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN ROMANIA 1965-1968****ABSTRACT**

During the years 1965-1968 Nicolae Ceaușescu came to the partial liberalization of the communist regime in Romania, in order to find a clear position both in domestic and in foreign policy. This fact regarded also the minority policy, which had never been very tolerant since the very beginning of the communist rule. But at least partial steps were undertaken by the RCP leadership in order to win the support of the Hungarian population in Transylvania. The administrative reform in 1968 brought the creation of two new counties with the majority Hungarian population. The meeting of the Romanian leadership with the Hungarian elites, as well as the more frequent visits of Ceaușescu and other party representatives in Transylvania foreshadowed his increasing interest in dealing more intensively with the minority issue. The establishment of the Councils of Workers of Hungarian nationality brought the discussion at least temporary onto the top level of the RCP hierarchy.

KEYWORDS

Nicolae Ceaușescu; Romanian Communist Party; Minority policy; Hungarians in Transylvania; Administrative Reform; Councils of Workers of Hungarian Nationality

Filip Šisler | Department of Historical Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Tylova 18, 306 14, Plzeň, Czech Republic, sislerf@khv.zcu.cz