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INTERCULTURALITY AND ETHNODIVERSITY IN POST-COMUNIST ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The forms of inclusion required by the goal of accommodating ethno-diversity, although varied, often reproduce situations of democratic deficit generated by the assimilating character of implemented policies. Despite the dissolution of the communist regime and the building of a new Romania under the rule of law, the political and legal initiatives that followed failed the nationalist ideology of decision-makers. In the context of interethnic relations, the Hungarians in Romania have constituted themselves in the most vocal and active actor, while equally fuelling attitudinal and behavioural expressions from the dominant culture, most fierce expressions, both negative and positive (the latter encountered most often among Romanian intellectuals). The political and societal reconstruction project undertaken by the Romanian state has finally succeeded to introduce legislative instruments and to implement an institutional mechanism capable of regulating the situation of minorities in Romania; but their effectiveness has proven to be far from what it was envisaged).*

Keywords: *post-communism, minority, inter-community relations, minority legislation, Hungarians*

1. Introduction

While absorbing immigration values (and not only), the contemporary societies have inevitably become areas of ethnic interference; they have often resulted in unjust and hostile attitudes from the majority community towards those communities that do not share the same value system in all its aspects of organizing the collective mind. The “deep trauma” (Hermet, 2005: 23) that these minorities have suffered as a direct effect of *differential policies* (read: *discriminatory practice*) resulted since the ‘70s in a major paradigm shift in assessing intercultural relations. By repositioning minorities against authority decision-makers, with the legitimization of their cultural particularism and the limited autonomization, it was sought to perpetuate a model of “civic identity based on some values of universal scale, especially that of freedom of personal fulfilment of each individual” (Hermet, 2005: 23). This path of managing the cultural heterogeneity leads in

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a procedural sense towards a framework of national fragmentation that however does not necessarily translate in state disintegration.

The multiculturalist model¹, for example, is a viable option to accommodate ethno-diversity, its theoretical evaluation employing a set of principles emanating from the modern theory of nation, citizenship, democracy, diversity, tolerance and, last but not least, culture, generating a permutation in the rhetoric of identity, both individual and collective. In deciding on policies for minority integration, the state must use the principle of ethno-cultural equity; nevertheless, its institutionalization is far from happening as long as a decision emanates from a practice committed to the majority. This principle of implementation, typical to representative democracies, often induces the “feeling of servitude” (Salat, 2001: 81) among the ethno-cultural minorities.

Beyond the legal identification framework, by implementing a multicultural policy or a policy of openness towards cultural pluralism, there is the rethinking of judgement standards whose inconsistency can sometimes lead to taking real acknowledgement for a regime of tolerance. The ethical character of identity representation corresponds to the impossibility to evade reconstruction, in the subsidiary of our activities, of our pre-existing particularities within our nature: “nobody is above race, ethnicity and language, no one is simply human”. (Cornell & Murphy, 2002: 436)

Within the political context generated by the transition from a dictatorship towards a democratic regime, the ethno-diversity factor actively contributes to the development of this process, the democratization of post-totalitarian societies being closely related to the methods of adjustment and response to claims of existing ethno-cultural groups within these societies.² If we refer to Romania, the perpetuation of a positive historical tradition of peaceful coexistence has generated a certain degree of tolerance and recognition of communities that together have built a foothold by promoting acceptable institutional arrangements.

In the light of the above, we will proceed to a brief account of the evolution of inter-ethnic dialogue during communism and during the period that followed the events of December 1989.

Termination of political pluralism along with the establishment of the communist regime brought significant disturbances in the ethnic and confessional structures. The communist state tried to replicate the same system in these structures, too. The state tried to homogenize the population. Decisions were taken to ban churches such as the Greek Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, Adventist, etc., much of this population returning to the Orthodox Church. At the same time, with approval from the state, a large part of the

¹ In the spirit of fairness it should be noted that many theorists have perceived multiculturalism as a divisive measure in the context of domination of nation-states, the national project often consisting of a single cultural dimension, later transformed into a political instrument. Common identity, institutionalized through universal citizenship, provides viability to a state structure, being the source of social cohesion and informing on the level of convergence of individual.

² In this respect, Levente Salat states: “In these countries, liberated or for the first time in history constituted as independent and democratic state formations, the diverse ethno-cultural groups use the prerogatives of democracy, get mobilized from the ethno-political point of view, and how they try to promote their own interest often comes in conflict with the priorities of the democratic consolidation in a post-totalitarian or a post-dictatorial situation.” [Lucian Nastă / Levente Salat (eds.), *Relații interetnice în România postcomunistă*, Fundația CRDE, Cluj-Napoca, 2000 Symposium: “Modelul românesc de relații interetnice. Ultimii zece ani, următorii zece ani”, Bucharest, 7-8 July 2000), p. 9].

Hebrew, German and Hungarian ethnics emigrated, thus significantly reducing their number in the region.

Far from being lacunar, the internal law of minorities during the communist period reflects the need to provide a legitimate character to an already established regime, a legislative support capable to sustain the entire socio-political structure envisaged by the court decision-makers (in theory at least). Without insisting on procedural forms or on contents specifics of legislative norms (set out in the spirit of recognition of all national identities residing on Romanian territory), it should be noted that their application was never the ultimate goal of their preparation; the adoption initiative of a new Constitution in 1948 and in 1965 was not at all supported by the establishment of effective implementation structures or of bodies for control and administration of interethnic relations, the regime being a *de facto* dictatorial one, whose purposes naturally disregarded any concern for ensuring the rights guaranteed by the legislation in force.

The Constitution of 1948 guaranteed simultaneously the freedom of conscience and the religious freedom despite the inherent contradiction generated by the state's refusal to recognize all existing religions in Romania (it is the case of the Greek-Catholic Church and some of the Protestant/Neo-Protestant denominations) (Chiriac, 2005: 14). The disagreement between the normative text and the reality of the Romanian communist period, especially in matters of religion, is illustrated by successive measures imposed by the state, ranging from nationalization to the termination of the Concordat with the Vatican (a direct blow to the Greek-Catholic community), and dismissal and subsequent arrest of the misaligned; the dialogical State-Church relationship is based on the reiteration of the same forms of assumed and exercised subordination, common among individuals, the control over religious denominations offering a clear explanation for the lack of visibility and limited nature of these actions. Despite a legal framework for the exercise of religious rights, religion was, in practice, submitted to an excessive control generated also by the tendency to atheism, easily identifiable in the subsidiary of all bias initiatives, probably fuelled by the incompatibility between the religion welcoming an individual and the cult of the leader, which was the basis for an entire social life.

The post-communist period brought with it a restoration of democratic principles and values. The fall of communism meant the end of the deprivation of religious rights in Romania. This led to profound changes in the religious structure. Recognising the right of free religious practice for 23 religious denominations and associations prepared a new period of religious transformation within the Romanian state. The reestablishment of the Greek-Catholic Church and the emergence of many other denominations are important events. These events, together with opening the borders, corroborated with political acts in this field have led Romania to enter a much larger process of integration in a world more open to intercultural values. We note without hesitation that political events, both national and international, are highly important in determining the ethnic and confessional composition. It is not only the political factor that influences this structure. We can distinguish other factors, among which we name the social, economic, cultural, geographical etc. factors.

The new Constitution of Romania, adopted on 21 November 1991 and revised in 2003, proceeds to the reinstatement of all religions that had been outlawed by the communist regime, and initiates the procedure for the return of goods wrongfully confiscated from organizations and individuals, in process to regulate the patrimonial situation, process whose completion is still to be seen (perhaps in consequence of the fact

that the legislation in force is not compensatory, only reparatory, and this is an aspect capable in itself to generate multiple conflicts).³

Amid dismantling the communist regime, domestically and in the context of excesses of nationalism recorded in the ex-Soviet space, Romania will introduce a series of instruments to make the programme for inclusion of ethnic minorities operational; these instruments are capable in theory to meet all the needs and demands of the minority communities. Under international pressure particularly exercised by the US and the EU, interested in maintaining stability in this part of Europe (see the riots in Targu Mures in March 1990), Romania will effectively adopt an electoral law (92/1990) whose provisions will promote measures of positive discrimination with reference to ethnic minorities (Chiriac, 2005: 101). With a very important activity for both the Hungarian community, and for other ethnic communities, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), founded in 1989, will unquestionably contribute to the change the status of minorities in Romania, especially after 1996 (the year when UDMR joined in governing).

This socio-political pace, powered and maintained by the Romanian authorities in the spirit of obedience to the main state and supra-state actors in the region (and not only) was the determining factor for the favourable criticism addressed to Romania by President Clinton, in 1999, in San Francisco; President Clinton proposed Romania as a benchmark for other states in the region in terms of building democracy and respecting the ethnic minority rights. (Rosapepe, 2000: 20). The problem occurs when membership in most international instruments of protection of human rights and minority rights applies the traditional Romanian principle of forms without substance, in the exacerbation of some data of political compromise that sometimes do not go beyond the notional and discursive frameworks.

2. Ethnoconfessional realities after 1990

The absence of spectacular changes in the ethnic and confessional structures in 1992-2002 (representing the period between the latest two published censuses⁴) shows the relative stability trend of the Romanian population. As we will see, only in the case of some minority communities, there were modifications that may be considered significant changes in the long-term (in the case of religious communities there was 0.5% growth in only ten years, which could be important if the trend maintained in the next period). Simultaneously, the evolution of the number of inhabitants of the country is downward, and maintains in direct correlation with the process of demographic aging. Notwithstanding Romania's ethno-confessional structure, this reality can lead to a series of consequences in the future, such as an excessive emigration of Romanians (and Hungarians) in relation with the often false statements about their ethnicity (a phenomenon that is particularly encountered among the Roma community) evoking at the ideational level, the possibility of major changes in the proportion of nationalities in the

³ Marian Chiriac, in the aforementioned work, identifies various sets of problems within the process of property return of religious cults in Romania, as follows: incomplete legislative framework, delays due to the lack of an unitary legal framework, slow pace in the process of property return, late adoption of norms for Law 501/2002 for approving the Government Emergency Decision 94/2000 on the restitution of real estate that belonged to religious cults in Romania, opposition of local authorities to respecting the law, irregularities of legal system.

⁴ The data of the census carried out in the autumn of 2011 have not yet been centralised and made public.

period ahead.⁵ In the light of this reality, Levente Salat said: “it is expected that the role currently played by the “Hungarian problem” on the agenda of public debate would be taken gradually, in a not too distant future, by the disputes about the relations maintained by the Romanian state institutions with the Roma communities.” (Salat, 2005: 156).

In presenting the ethno-confessional structure of Romania, we will operate with data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in the final report on population and housing census in 2002.⁶ Thus, the ethnic composition of the population in Romania did not significantly change against the results recorded by the 1992 census, the ratio being in favour of Romanian majority, accounting for 89.5% of the total population. Among other ethnic groups, ethnic Hungarian population has the highest share in total population (6.6%), followed by Roma (2.5%) and Germans and Ukrainians (0.3% each). Other ethnic groups have low weights in the total population (less than 0.2%).⁷

Relating to the structure by religion, the Orthodox religion remains predominant, accounting for 86.8%, followed by the Roman Catholic religion representing 4.7% of the total (down by 0.4 percentage points since 1992), the Reformed religion (3.2%, down by 0.3 percentage points) and the Pentecostal (1.5% - up by 0.5 percentage points since 1992).

The weights of other religions vary from 0.9% Greek Catholic, to 0.3% for Unitarian and Muslim, namely less than 0.1% for Mosaic or Augustan Evangelical.⁸

3. Romanian model for integration of minority communities: diagnosis and perspective

It is known that both European legislation and practice promote the idea of coexistence, in the sense of social value, consisting of accepting diversity and alterity, comity of different ethnic groups within the same territorial community, and staying open to communication or cooperation. There is a point of view recognized by both the majority of political leaders and civic leaders, and by the specialised literature in the country and abroad, that postulates a national existence of the “Romanian model of interethnic relations”, intercultural model based on the values of comity and cooperation, seen as the European standard for granting minority rights⁹.

⁵ In this respect, Gabriel Andreescu, *Schimbări în harta etnică a României*, Edit. CRDE, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 35: “Romania’s ethnic map of today differs considerably from the ethnic map of the interwar Romania and even from the ethnic composition after World War II. The latest census from 2002 shows a population where minorities tend to have a peripheral place. The only increase is the number of Roma. [which] is much larger than the census data shows, the number of those recorded as such is probably a third of the real number.”

⁶ The electronic version can be accessed at:

http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/index_rpl2002.htm (last accessed on: 16.01.2011)

⁷ For information purposes, 20 different ethnic groups were recorded to live in Romania, namely: Romanians, Magyars, Roma, Ukrainians, Germans, Russians, Lipovan, Turks, Tatars, Serbs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Greeks, Hebrew, Czech, Polish, Italian, Chinese, Armenian, respectively Csango.

⁸ According to the 2002 census, Romania has the following denominations: Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, Reformed, Pentecostal, Greek-Catholic, Baptist, Seventh-Day Adventist, Muslim, Unitarian, Brethren Assemblies (same as Plymouth Brethren or Open Brethren), Old Rite Christian, Lutheran Synod-Presbyterian, Evangelical, Augustan Evangelical, Mosaic.

⁹ <http://www.amosnews.ro/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=238134&theme=Printer>, last accessed on 28.03.2008

3.1. Legislative and institutional framework for protection of national and confessional minorities

In the context of the issuance of more than 200 laws regulating “in various fields, the rights of national minorities and the framework for ensuring and preservation of linguistic and cultural identity of their members,”¹⁰ one can identify a real concern of the Romanian authorities for improving the situation of minorities, whether ethnic or confessional¹¹; the problematic aspect of these measures is, on the one hand, the manner of implementation (in particular the inefficiency of existing legal instruments and, simultaneously, their insufficient number) and, on the other hand, the need to review the contents of some of these acts in consequence of elusion, at the level of the recipient, other than the Hungarian and Roma minorities.

We will proceed to list the main rights that the members of national minorities particularly have (Chiriță & Săndescu, 2008: 119), rights that come to add the rights guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution and the Framework Conventions on human rights and fundamental freedoms, of all Romanian citizens: the right to non-discrimination in exercising a legitimate right, the right to use the mother tongue in relations with the administration, within the judicial system, within public and private relations, as well as the right to study in their native language, the right of free political association and representation in the Parliament.¹²

The main institutions active in the segment of national minority rights that promote good interethnic relations and fight anti-discrimination are: the Department for Interethnic Relations (DRI) which cooperates with the Council of National Minorities (the latter brings together three representatives of national minorities represented in Romanian Parliament), the National Agency for Roma (ANR), Institute for Research on National Minorities (SPMN), National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), the People’s Advocate, together with the ministries that have departments for minority issues. (Janosi, 2008)

The minorities institutions, totalling 1804 units¹³, with predominant activity within culture, protection / promotion of human rights, education / science and religion¹⁴ actively contribute to the formation of an overview of civil and social engagement of minority communities; we will not try to fight the case examples given by the jurisprudence for the violation of minorities rights, especially on instances of property return in cases of

¹⁰ In accordance with the information provided by the programme CRDE *Baze de date – Acte normative privind drepturile și protecția minorităților naționale în România*, coordinated by Gabor Adam, http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?project_id=53 (last accessed on 16.01.2012)

¹¹ The Constitution of Romania, art. 29 (3): All religions shall be free and organized in accordance with their own statutes, under the terms laid down by law; and (5): Religious cults shall be autonomous from the State and shall enjoy support from it, including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, in hospitals, prisons, homes and orphanages.

¹² According to the Constitution of Romania, art. 62, para. 2: “Organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, which fail to obtain the number of votes for representation in Parliament, have the right to one Deputy seat each, under the terms of the electoral law. Citizens of a national minority are entitled to be represented by one organization only.” In addition, there is a requirement for obtaining a number of votes equal to at least 5% of the average number of votes validly expressed for election of a Deputy (Law for electing the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate no. 68/992).

¹³ In accordance with the data supplied by the Institute for Research on National Minorities

¹⁴ Kiss Denes, *Sistemul instituțional aș minorităților din România*, Workshop Studies, Research of national minorities in Romania, http://ispmn.gov.ro/uploads/ISPMN_34_X_t.

religious cults in Romania, but to the extent that such activities are not only promoted, but also financed (limited, it is true, and often insufficiently). We can say that the Romanian state has committed, indeed, to provide a framework for the development of intercultural dialogue, stating that the enforcement of norms continues to be poor, either because the authorities do not fully respect them, or because of existing uncertainties in both the body of law and the powers established for the various institutional structures.

3.2. Critical approach of the Romanian model of interethnic relations

Amendments to the Constitution, electoral law, restitution of property belonging to organizations or individuals, reforms in education and in local government, and other initiatives of the Romanian State are clear landmarks for its receptivity in relation to the claims of various ethnic groups (in this case, the Hungarian fraction), but typical manifestations of a dominant culture, constructed and reproduced in the nation-state logic (justified by the imperatives of stability required from the international community) have never ceased to manifest themselves, the time that has passed in the rigors of the post-December new societal model only contributes to refining them and to give them more clear meaning. The regime of national minorities rights in Romania and, simultaneously, of confessional rights, is regulated by a series of laws aimed at (in the subsidiary of its stated objectives) a harmonization (mandatory, in fact) with the laws of supranational structures, namely the European Union, which Romania joined. Without disregarding the moral value of such initiatives it should be noted that the inefficiency of the implemented framework arises from the haste introduction of laws setting out general non-discrimination clauses and provisions on minority rights aimed more at the agreement and appreciation of those structures to which the Romanian state joined than the actual welfare of the categories concerned.

In a study carried out by Radu Chiriță and Anca Săndescu on the existing normative acts, as well as on the implementation mechanisms, the authors say: “even though, unlike other areas of study, the internal legal framework does not know contradictions between several legislative provisions, and the international legal provisions have been transposed into national law with much fidelity, the established legal system fails to create the necessary legal instruments to ensure full compliance with the rights enjoyed by members of national minority communities. (Chiriță & Săndescu, 2008: 121) As it was reiterated in the conclusions of many studies on minority issues (e.g. Marian Chiriac, *op. cit.*), the absence of a law specifically defining the status of national minorities in Romania is a major impediment in developing a legal framework to reproduce ethno-political legitimacy for non-dominant cultures without direct prejudice or compromise of the state’s efforts to increase the degree of internal cohesion. In this respect, Kelemen Hunor, leader of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania, launched the call for the reintroduction on the party’s political agenda for 2012 the draft Law on national minorities, which would provide new perspectives for the development of interethnic relations in Romania.

The method of positive discrimination, noted in the access to the Parliament granted to minorities, also has a number of shortcomings caused mainly by falsely assuming a minority identity in order to get a political seat, or by accepting one political organization as an exponent of the entire minorities community (result of a hostile attitude against minority political pluralism).¹⁵

¹⁵ In this light, Lucian Nastasă, Levente Salat, *op. cit.*, p. 13: “On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that [...] the cardinal elements of the Romanian model - representation of

The institutional framework implemented in order to protect national minorities in Romania shows the same deficiencies identifiable also in the measures of the legislative nature applied by Romanian authorities. Beyond the technical issues that these structures have been facing, often cumulated to the lack of infrastructure or human resources, there is also a communication problem that occurs at both inter- and intra-institutional levels, and especially regarding the visibility of these organizations, not so much among relevant civil society, but especially among unaffiliated minorities.

Furthermore, relating to the degree of organization, both social and political, there is an obvious disproportion generated, most likely, by the tradition that has shaped these minorities and by the number of each minority members. Perception of own needs, together with an unequal apparatus to fight discrimination, have generated the assumption of a completely separate development for different ethnic groups in Romania. If Hungarians display a claiming attitude based on real structures to combat discrimination, the Roma minority, for example, the second large minority in Romania, despite the many political organizations established to defend its interests, fails to build a model for addressing their issues in a unified, coherent and reasoned manner. On the other hand, the general pushing to the periphery of minorities against the majority population, namely Romanians, sometimes triggers claim-release from any minority group of any political connotation, the affirmation of national identity being based wholly on reproduction within the community of specific forms of cultural tradition; this is the case of small minorities in Romania. At this level, the institutional mechanism should promote, in a more active, more participatory manner, the idea of intercultural communion, the multicultural education being a decisive factor for achieving the desired degree of complementarity for the modern cultural and societal political project of post-totalitarian Romania.

3.3. Hungarians in Romania: outline of intercultural analysis

The Hungarians in Romania represent a particular case within the majority-minority relation, the weight among the total population giving them status as the largest minority in the State. But the specificity of intercommunity dialogue is not based at all on the numerical value of the entities involved, but rather on a certain attitude and mobilization capacity of the Hungarians in the spirit of very well-defined principles that permanently evoke (and access) the assertive forces of democracy for the progressive liberalization of the host society. It is the transition from the idea of a host society to a space governed by the rule of law for development and cultural reproduction that has been the objective pursued constantly, by steps which the Hungarians have been taking after the fall of the communist regime; the fact that the discourse, often purely symbolic and false, of the Romanian authorities collided with the Hungarians' fervent discourse, often built inappropriately and in a false manner, in the light of ethno-historical aggressiveness of the Hungarian representatives, has not at all facilitated the dialogue between the two parties. Moreover, this placed it in the undesirable corner of the ethnic conflict (of course, much less serious than the harsh expressions recorded in the neighbouring Balkan region), the first years after the Revolution representing for the relations between Romanians and

minorities in Parliament, the existence of a Council of National Minorities or the very presence of representatives of one of the major minorities in the government – do not automatically solve all problems. [...] The dialogic framework should be maintained with care and beyond, so that the presence of representatives of minorities in these structures would not remain a formal presence, invoked in times of balance, but a real participation, effective and efficient in those decisions relating to destinies of the communities which they represent.”

Hungarians a period of combative actions and excesses likely to completely prejudice the chances of a final peaceful development and to the benefit of both communities.

The core of the physical confrontations (with the necessary terminology reserve) were the events of 19 March 1990 in Targu Mures¹⁶ triggered against the background of claims mainly relating to an education plan launched by the Hungarians wishing to study in their mother tongue and, therefore, affiliated to the idea of reopening Hungarian schools. In his study on the role of civic organizations in the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation, Gabriel Andreescu accused Romanian initiatives of the *Vatra Românească* type or of the Romanian Nation Unity Party (PUNR) type as sources of turning discriminatory practices against the Hungarian community into permanent state treatment policy; the instrumentalization of Hungarian claims in the light of an irredentist phenomenon raised the whole of negative meanings attached to their movement, already being accused of intention of ethnic segregation and corruption of the democratic system (of convenience, we say) intended to be implemented. In such conditions, the discrepancy between the reality promoted by the political discourse and the reality in the territory is increasing more and more; in this sense, Gabriel Andreescu said: "The Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation, consistently mentioned in international meetings by the Romanian Government and the President of Romania, in an attempt to show the democratic progress made by Romania, viewed from inside the country, look quite awkward." (Andreescu, 2000: 90)

In a study of public policy for national minorities in Romania, Dan Oprescu identifies three important features relating to state policy on minorities before 1996, namely: "the annexation of national minority organizations, other than those of Hungarians', to the government policy; granting privileges to these organizations, especially by the electoral law (but not exclusively), to provide a certain image abroad of the governing politicians; focusing criticism only on the UDMR's critics, accused of anti-Romanian trends, attitudes and even actions". (Oprescu, 2000: 73)

The activism of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania proved effective, by judging the success recorded in the case of their effective co-opting to governing¹⁷, and especially in the implementation of protective linguistic measures undeniably designed to preserve the Hungarian cultural identity.¹⁸ These remedies employed by the Romanian state to alleviate the democratic deficits, as Levente Salat put it, generated by the existence of minorities, do not necessarily converge towards an improvement of the situation, but rather becomes a game of false compromise: the

¹⁶ Gabriel Andreescu, "Momente din reconcilierea româno-maghiară. Rolul organizațiilor civice (1989-1999) in Lucian Nastașă, Levente Salat, *op. cit.*, p. 95: "Groups of Hungarians and Romanians (the latter being brought by buses of neighbouring local authorities, armed with bats manufactured only days before) fought in the town's main market. Five people died and hundreds of Romanians and Hungarians were wounded."

¹⁷ Although this measure has certain shortcomings, as stated by Levente Salat in Lucian Nastașă, Levente Salat, *op. cit.*, p. 13: "With reference to the participation of representatives of the Hungarian minority in government, for instance, despite the undeniable positive consequences, one cannot overlook, as Bela Marko noted, that some problems have not been solved in accordance with what is included in the coalition programme. From this point of view, the exercise of the Hungarian minority participation in government will probably end with the conclusion that there are still discrepancies between the level Hungarian minority level of expectation and the availability of the majority."

¹⁸ See the Emergency Order no. 22/97 on modifying Law 69/1991 about the local public administration, and Emergency Order no. 36/1997 on modifying Law 84/1995 of education.

substantive claims systematically pushed by Hungarians are answered with a formal commitment to the pledged cause and a textual rectification (as appropriate) without great practical implications, with consistent display of effects of still existing prejudice.

This radicalization of political discourse, tempered only by the inherent hope of any emerging state to access supra-state regulatory structures for the society and stage of international relations, often manifested in an unequivocal manner, finding in the Hungarian community the irrefutable example of ethnic mobilization against the *dominance system* of the majority (of course, perceived as a distinct light by its members who saw the system as the living expression of unity and social cohesion); this way of interpreting the situation has brought a significant change in the discourse, the Hungarians turning into the main recipient of state chauvinism.

As anyone would expect, this situation did not last enough as to gain a pathological form, the legislative and institutional arrangements provided a development framework that both sides perceived favourably; however, the principles that were used for explaining the *Romanian model* of minorities protection, especially among politicians, come from nationalist rhetoric whose revolutionary character informs about the degree of emancipation and democratization of the Romanian society. Dan Oprescu stated that “from a “culture” of unilateral claims and of conflict, we will have to move to the one of negotiations and compromise; but it is first necessary to clarify our options, to delimit general interests from specific interests.” (Oprescu, 2000: 82) Moreover, the establishment of a mutual distrust, fuelled not only by the incompatibility between ethno-political objectives of each party, but rather by the generalized *structures of prejudice* (Levente Salat), bear a major role in stopping the intercommunity dialogue, the resources of collective imaginary being multiple and often difficult, if not impossible to remove.¹⁹

4. Conclusions

The Romanian society in post-communist period has been deeply influenced by the changes brought by removing the totalitarian communist regime. National minorities are reported to the majority from a different angle. The post-communist modernization and democratization were linked also to this process of assuming a model of management of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations, model that was to bring a proper relationship between the majority community (Romanian / Orthodox) and the minority communities. In this context, the legal framework of minority rights has undergone a process of renewal which allows the alignment to the required standards imposed by the European integration process, but also by achieving the goal relating to human rights in Romania. Despite this legal framework, considered to be an ideal one, the Romanian space still has multiple problems awaiting resolution in the future. Challenges and prospects of building a multicultural society require priority solutions on some of the most striking and current issues of managing inter-ethnic relations: the problem of discrimination against Roma and the dispute relating to granting of some form of autonomy to the Hungarian community within the centre of the country. Reducing

¹⁹ Levente Salat, in his study “Perspectivele minorității maghiare...”, p. 169 states the following: “how members of these two communities see themselves and appreciate the ones in the other community has highly important functions in the case of both communities: on the Romanian side, it justifies and reproduces the mobilization towards the imagined threat in which the presence, behaviour and objectives of Hungarians translate, and on the Hungarian side, it justifies and reproduces the distrust in Romanians that inevitably leads to autonomy claims, in the context of which a great part of the interactions could be spared”

discrimination against Roma is proving to be a challenge not only for Romania but also for Europe. These, as well as identifying solutions of compromise regarding the issue of local autonomy, are debate topics requiring attention of both the Romanian authorities and the civil society.

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