Ethnic groups in symbolic conflict: the "ethnicisation" of public space in Romania

Dragoman, Dragoș

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Ethnic Groups in Symbolic Conflict
The "Ethnicisation" of Public Space in Romania

DRAGOȘ DRAGOMAN

Following decades of communist rule and social atomization, Romania faces today numerous challenges in the process of rebirth of the public space. Whereas public space is defined as an autonomous space of dialogue, free of all kinds of constraints, a space of equality and commitment[1], we try to assess the importance of an essential factor that burdens the process of democratization in the region, namely ethnic nationalism. We are interested here in a special component of nationalism that is ethnic symbolism. The use of ethnic symbols by the two largest ethnic segments in the multiethnic province of Transylvania, ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians, ranges from the public use of Hungarian to the requirements for the Romanian citizenship and the special ties between the Hungarian diaspora and the kin state. The most striking symbolic crises that influence on ethnic relations in Transylvania are related to the naming of localities and the use of Hungarian in public local administration, to the education in Hungarian language, to the management of a multilingual university and even the creation of a separate Hungarian language university in Transylvania. But the struggle to symbolically dominate the public space is also visible in mixed urban areas. Street names and statues in Transylvanian cities stand as ethnic markers in ethnically divided areas.

As we will underline below, although essential for the democratization process in Eastern Europe, ethnic conflict has been initially neglected by the early transition literature. By comparing Eastern Europe to Southern Europe and Latin America, it soon become obvious that stateness and nationhood issues are to be added to the more classical earlier transitions that encompassed democratization and marketization[2]. Those factors could, in fact, more appropriately explain the slower democratization progress made by different societies in the region, especially emphasizing on the inchoate public space. In this respect, ethnic symbolism is a major obstacle in generating a neutral public space. Whereas recurrent crises between ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians stand upon a widespread use of ethnic symbols, the subsequent "ethnicisation" of the public space undermines the efforts made in setting up limited power-sharing agreements and, as some optimist scholars expect, in fostering a trans-ethnical identity that enables a future peaceful cohabitation of ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania.

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[1] Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge, M.A., 1989.
[2] Taras KUZIO, "Transition in Post-communist States: Triple or Quadruple", *Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2001, pp. 168-177.

ETHNIC CONFLICT, SYMBOLIC POWER AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

Despite their own definition of ethnicity, many researchers consider ethnic segments to be constantly in competition[1]. Though some early scholars of nationalism believe that ethnicity is a natural, organic, perennial, unitarian and culturally defined category[2], many other scholars contested this view and developed a "constructivist" conception of the nation as it is the outcome of the modernization, and therefore should be defined as a modern, mechanical, divided, crafted by cultural elites, mainly through mass communication mechanisms[3]. However nations are defined[4], they are competing entities. This is especially obvious in urban contexts[5]. As Bollens emphasizes, although we recently experienced an unprecedented economic integration with globalization and "mega-narratives" of modernization (high technology and education), we also bear witness to subversive "micro-narratives" that fuel oppositional movements[6]. It seems that social fragmentation has been a common companion alongside the economic integration, which is most visible in the inter-communal conflict and violence reflecting ethnic or nationalist urban fractures. In disputed cities ethnic identity and nationalism combine to create pressures for group rights. Sharing the same urban space generally forces the ethnic segments to adopt different strategies of coexistence: to try to dominate the public space when they consider powerful enough or to negotiate the division of the public space and the preservation of their community autonomy when they feel threatened by other ethnic groups. Though ethnic conflict and the effort to dominate the public space are not confined to urban areas, we will mainly focus on urban settings because cities are focal points of urban and regional economies dependent of multi-ethnic contacts, social and cultural centers and platforms for political expression, and potential centers of grievance and mobilization[7].

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[1] Rogers BRUBAKER, David LAITIN, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, 1998, pp. 423-452; M. BANTON, *Racial and Ethnic Competition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Ernest GELLNER, *Culture, Identity and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987; David HOROWITZ, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985.

[2] Hans KOHN, *The Idea of Nationalism*, Collier-Macmillan, New York, 1967; L. SNYDER, *The Meaning of Nationalism*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1954.

[3] Elie KEDOURIE, *Nationalism*, Hutchinson, London, 1960; Ernest GELLNER, *Thought and Change*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1964; Reinhard BENDIX, *Nation-Building and Citizenship*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1964; Gabriel ALMOND, Lucian PYE (eds.), *Comparative Political Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1965; Karl DEUTSCH, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1953; Karl DEUTSCH, Willam FOLZ (eds.), *Nation-Building*, Atherton Press, New York, 1963.

[4] Anthony D. SMITH, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

[5] S.A. BOLLENS, *Urban Peace-Building in Divided Societies: Belfast and Johannesburg*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1999; IDEM, "City and Soul: Sarajevo, Johannesburg, Jerusalem, Nicosia", *CITY: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2001, pp. 169-178; IDEM, "Managing Urban Ethnic Conflict", in R. HAMBLETON, H.V. SAVITCH, M. STEWART (eds.), *Globalism and Local Democracy: Challenge and Change in Europe and North America*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2002; IDEM, "Urban Governance at the Nationalist Divide: Coping with Group-based Claims", *Journal of Urban Affairs*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2007, pp. 229-253.

[6] S.A. BOLLENS, "Managing Urban Ethnic Conflict", cit., p. 109.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 109.

The symbolic domination of the public space relates, as we conceive it, to mechanisms of differentiation and power[1], as well as to banal nationalism[2]. In fact, those efforts of domination are banal nationalism, in the way it differs from hot, hard nationalism, based on violent and bloody conflicts[3]. In the same time, they are not material, but symbolic conflicts, as they tend to spatially mark the dominance of ethnic groups and by that to strengthen their very identity in a perpetual manner[4]. Our approach tends to combine these two perspectives as it takes into account the mechanisms of differentiation and power, largely invested by ethnic groups' elites, and soft, everyday nationalism, backed up by banal items as road signs and street names. The domination of the public space could therefore range from street names and road signs to flags and more specific buildings, such as churches, museums or foreign embassies[5]. In this respect, we are close to Brubakers' definition of ethnic groups as practical categories, classificatory schemes and cognitive frames and would like to unravel the "work" done by nations as competing actors in urban settings[6]. Therefore, the aim of our paper is twofold. First, we intend here to unravel the symbolic, non-material and power-marking elements of more broader conflicts in Transylvania, i.e. those over territorial design, linguistic rights and education, and not only to focus on more classical symbolic issues as buildings and statues. In fact, all of these symbols are parts of the effort made by national elites to consolidate national identity and to claim national hegemony in disputed territories[7] and to generally "invent a tradition" and elaborate a language of symbolic practice and communication[8].

Second, we intend to broaden the framework of the symbolic conflict and to stress on a new approach, which is the consequence of ethno-symbolism, namely the "ethnicisation" of public space. According to Habermas[9], the public sphere, or

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[1] Pierre BOURDIEU, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Routledge, London, 1984; IDEM, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994.

[2] M. BILLIG, *Banal Nationalism*, Sage, London, 1995.

[3] M. IGNATIEFF, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1994.

[4] Anthony GIDDENS, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction*. Macmillan, London, 1979.

[5] J. BORNEMANN, *Belonging to Two Berlins*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; M. AZARYAHU, "The Power of Commemorative Street Names", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1996, pp. 311-330; B.S.A. YEOH, "Street-naming and Nation-building: Toponymic Inscriptions and Nationhood in Singapore", *Area*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1996, pp. 298-307; M. AZARYAHU, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The Case of East Berlin", *Political Geography*, vol. 16, no. 6, 1997, pp. 479-493; Duncan LIGHT, "Political Change and Official Public Landscapes: Renaming Streets in Bucharest after 1989", *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, pp. 106-131; R. JONES, P. MERRIMAN, "Hot, Banal and Everyday Nationalism: Bilingual Road Signs in Wales", *Political Geography*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2009, pp. 164-173.

[6] Rogers BRUBAKER, "Rethinking Nationhood: Nation as an Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event", *Contention*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1994, pp. 3-14.

[7] B. GRAHAM, C. NASH, "A Shared Future: Territoriality, Pluralism and Public Policy in Northern Ireland", *Political Geography*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2006, pp. 253-278; J. NAGLE, "The Right to Belfast City Centre: From Ethnocracy to Liberal Multiculturalism?", *Political Geography*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 132-141.

[8] Eric HOBSBAWM, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.

[9] Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*…cit.

the public space, is the environment accepting the public political reasoning, an environment in which the individual can speak freely and where the arguments are not influenced by any political or social power. It makes possible for everyone to express itself regardless of any constraints on time, resources, participation or themes. It is the space created by the discursive interactions between private people willing to let arguments, not status or authority of tradition, to be decisive[1]. Thus, public sphere is a medium for political justification, for putting the decision-makers to account, as well as for political initiative, the mobilizing of political support. The public sphere not only enables autonomous opinion formation, but also empowers the citizens to influence the decision-makers[2]. Although public sphere is an essential feature of democratization, one of the main challenges is the definition of the community and of the public space itself. Deeply divided societies have, in this respect, greater difficulties in assessing the common grounds for political institutions and practices that rule society. Even democracy, as one might define it as majority rule, is questionable in these settings[3].

Finally, our approach intends to integrate a spatial perspective into the analysis of the public sphere and to unify the range of ethnic symbolic domination mechanisms in Transylvania. The "ethnicisation" of the public space that we unravel here is made by mechanisms of spatial domination that encompasses the use of spatial symbolic markers, but also by more subtle elements as citizenship and language. From a broader perspective, the way citizenship is conceived or minority linguistic rights accepted also defines the public sphere. In fact, nation can be broadly viewed as primarily defined by culture or by territory. The cultural or ethnic nation has ethnicity as the basis of membership and emphasizes on culture as its cohesive component. By contrast, the civic nation has territory as the basis of membership, while citizenship is the cohesive component. The civic nation is therefore a community relating to a given territory, the universal law and the broad political participation turning the community into a nation. In this respect, many new democracies have greater difficulties in both promoting equal rights and liberties and strengthening the ethnic cohesion of the dominant group[4]. These regimes are only selectively open regimes: they possess a range of partial democratic features that are political competition, free media and significant civil rights, although they fail to be universal or comprehensive in that the political regime refrains from interfering with the ongoing ethnicisation project of the ethnic dominant group. Defining nation and the use of ethnic symbolism in Romania largely impact on the construction of the public space, on what we have called the growing "ethnicisation" of the public sphere.

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[1] P. JOHNSON, "Habermas's Search for the Public Sphere", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2001, pp. 215-236.

[2] E.O. ERIKSEN, "An Emerging European Public Sphere", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2005, pp. 341-363.

[3] Arend LIJPHART, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968; IDEM, "Consociational Democracy", *World Politics*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1969, pp. 207-225; IDEM, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977.

[4] Sammy SMOOHA, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State", *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2002, pp. 475-503.

SYMBOLIC POLITICS AND THE "ETHNICISATION" OF THE PUBLIC SPACE IN TRANSYLVANIA

Before focusing on symbolic conflict, let us briefly present the ethnic context in Transylvania. Although it is a Romanian province today, Transylvania broke up from the Habsburg Empire in 1918. Even when it was a former Habsburg province, Transylvania was numerically dominated by ethnic Romanians, their ethnic group representing in the 19th century more than half of the province's population. At the age of the European nationalism, Romanian elites formed a strong political movement claiming cultural and political rights for the Romanian community[1]. The one hundred years struggle ended in Transylvania's secession in 1918 and the subsequent union with the Romanian national state. On the other hand, Romania proclaimed earlier its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877 and obtained the recognition of its independence and full sovereignty the following year, during the Peace Congress held in Berlin[2]. Excepting the Jewish and Gipsy communities, Romania was at that time almost ethnically homogeneous. The integration of Transylvania would reveal much more difficult, because it brought in large ethnic and religious minorities, with their own active and well-organized elites[3]. This time the struggle for nation-building was between Romanian rural background and Western urban modernity, since the province's cities were largely dominated by ethnic Hungarians and Germans.

As Bollens emphasizes, cities are suppliers of important religious and cultural symbols, zones of intergroup proximity and intimacy, and arenas where the size and concentration of a subordinate population can present the most direct threat to the state[4]. This is exactly the case of urban communities in Transylvania, after its union with Romania in 1918. These cities become the arena of harsh conflicts between local German and Hungarian elites and Romanian elites, strongly backed by Romanian central state authorities. Whereas the latter tried to bring under control and culturally homogenize the urban areas, the former made huge efforts to preserve their cultural institutions and identity[5]. This contradiction is to be found during the entire 20th century, regardless of the political system that ruled Romania. During the 1930's, the struggle between Romanian rural background and the Western-style urban modernity shaped the political activity and lead to the rise to power of the Romanian extreme-right[6]. Although the first decade of communist rule proclaimed itself as internationalist, the last two decades of Romanian communism turned into a fierce nationalist regime, which resembled more to inter-war public discourse and political

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[1] Keith HITCHINS, *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1780-1849*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1969; IDEM, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860-1914*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1999.

[2] IDEM, *Romania, 1866-1947*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

[3] Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1995.

[4] S.A. BOLLENS, "Managing Urban Ethnic Conflict", cit, p. 112.

[5] Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*…cit.

[6] Francisco VEIGA, *La Mistica del Ultranacionalismo. Historia de la Guardia de Hierro, Rumania, 1919-1941*, Publicacions de la Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra 1989; Leon VOLOVICI, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1991.

activity that to internationalist communism[1]. Yet nationalism was a suitable political vehicle even after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, as it was used by its successors in order to consolidate on power[2]. The claimed threat to state unity and sovereignty then was the ethnic conflict in Târgu-Mureș, where ethnic clashes could have triggered an ethnic disaster, more or less similar to those who have ravaged the former Yugoslavia. Since these events, ethnic politics strongly marked the political dynamics of Romania[3]. Although Romania followed a different path of exit from communism than Yugoslavia, post-communist transition did not exclude the use of ethnic tensions and of subsequent mechanisms of accommodation of ethnic segments in most of its heterogeneous urban contexts, like Cluj, for example. The economic and cultural capital of the Hungarians in Transylvania during the 19th century, Cluj was among the largest and most important cities of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. After the First World War and the union of Transylvania with the kingdom of Romania in 1918, Hungarians remained the majority of the city until the 1960's, when ethnic Romanians began to outnumber ethnic Hungarians. This was mainly due to the forced industrial and demographic policies of the communist regime that favored Romanian population influx into the city. After 1989, the city was ruled for 12 years by a Romanian nationalist mayor that raised the tensions between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians by numerous acts of ethnic provocation[4]. But all major cities in the region, like Târgu-Mureș, Oradea, Timișoara, Arad or Brașov turned into ethnically Romanian cities during communism and minorities' demographic share is still dropping[5].

Street Names and Statues in Ethnically Polarized Towns

The domination of public space is mainly related to symbolic items as street names and statues, but also to symbolic issues that can be analyzed from other perspectives, as linguistic issues by linguistic nationalism. Items as street names and statues generally stand for identity markers and express the willingness of ethnic groups to appropriate urban space[6]. Additionally, street names evoke specific historical eras by expressing

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[1] Elemér ILLYÉS, *National Minorities in Romania: Change in Transylvania*, East European Monographs, Boulder, 1982; Catherine VERDERY, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995; Juan J. LINZ, Alfred STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996.

[2] Tom GALLAGHER, "Nationalism and Political Culture in the 1990s", in Duncan LIGHT, David PHINNEMORE (eds.), *Post-Communist Romania: Coming to Terms with Transition*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001.

[3] M.E. MCINTOSH, M. ABELE MAC IVER, D.G. ABELE, D.B. NOLLE, "Minority Rights and Majority Rule: Ethnic Tolerance in Romania and Bulgaria", *Social Forces*, vol. 73, no. 3, 1995, pp. 939-967.

[4] Rogers BRUBAKER, Margit FEISCHMIDT, John FOX, Liana GRANCEA, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006.

[5] Gabriel ANDREESCU, *Schimbări în harta etnică a României*, Ethnocultural Diversity Ressource Center Press, Cluj, 2005.

[6] B.S.A. YEOH, "Street-naming and Nation-building…cit.".

the ideological dominance of political rulership[1]. Moreover, street names and statues commemoricate past events and heroes, and therefore strengthen collective identity by constructing and reconstructing history and tradition[2]. In particular settings, they help strengthen the feeling of belonging to the urban space, thus they are a key element for identity politics. As Transylvania moved from a given sovereignty to another and often switched the main ideology, few streets kept their names during the 20th century. As soon as the regime has changed in 1989, Hungarian community expressed his willingness to restore lost symbols, including street names, in a period marked by a general process of renaming streets in Romania. Changing street names was not a general purpose of the Hungarian party, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR), participation in central government between 1996 and 2000, yet achieving this goal in various local settings had to follow a complicated negotiation mechanism between Hungarian and Romanian parties. In the case of Târgu-Mureș, an ethnically mixed town in Transylvania, although DAHR councilors dominated local council, renaming streets and putting in place statues evoking Hungarian cultural heritage was subject to negotiation and approval of Romanian political parties in the city. On the other hand, putting in place the statue of the Romanian prince Michael the Brave, who conquered Transylvania for a short period of time at the end of 16th century[3], was conditioned by putting in place the statue of the Hungarian prince Francis II Rákóczi, crowned in 1704 in the city as prince of Transylvania[4].

The same symbolic conflict is to be noticed, on a larger scale, in Arad, another ethnically mixed town. The willingness of the Hungarian community to restore an ancient statue in town triggered one of the most vehement disputes during the governmental cooperation between DAHR and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The dispute concerned the renovation and public exhibition of the statuary raised by the Hungarians in 1880 in order to commemorate the 1848-1849 Hungarian uprising against the Habsburgs[5]. The monumental statuary, also known as the "Liberty Statue", represents the 13 Hungarian revolutionary generals executed for mutiny by the Austrian imperial army. Dismantled in 1924 by the Romanian authorities, it was deposited for decades inside the local city fortress. The restoration of the statue was paid by the Hungarian local community, yet the replacement was contested by the Romanian community, because during the 1848-1849 civil war there were numerous clashes between Hungarian and Romanian nationalists in Transylvania, who generally remained faithful to the Austrian emperor. Although the Hungarian community demanded that the statuary be replaced in a city square, the Romanian authorities refused as long as Romanian national symbols would not accompany

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[1] Duncan LIGHT, "Political Change and Official Public Landscapes…cit"; M. AZARYAHU, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names…cit"; IDEM, "The Power of Commemorative Street Names", cit.

[2] E. HOBSBAWM, T. RANGER (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; J.R. GILLIS (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996.

[3] P.F. SUGAR, P. HANÁK, T. FRANK, *A History of Hungary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994.

[4] Paul LENDVAI, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004.

[5] I. DEÁK, *The Lawful Revolution. Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848-1849*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1979.

the restored Hungarian statuary. Following years of political negotiations between DAHR and SDP local branches and the intervention of central government run by SDP, the common solution was to place those ethnic symbols into a "Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation Park" in the city, which was finally inaugurated in August 2005. An arch of triumph now stands alongside generals' statuary and symbolizes the Romanian revolutionaries in Transylvania. Moreover, some of the Romanian local parties in Arad would love to expand and to turn the park into a "Park of Ethnicities", diluting further more Hungarian symbolism.

Ethnic Commemorations in Transylvania

One of the most striking symbolic issues in Transylvania are ethnic commemorations. Every March the 15th, the commemoration of the 1848 Hungarian revolutionaries in Transylvania reminds ethnic Hungarians of their natural ties with the whole Hungarian community in the Carpathians Basin and the Hungarian state. Though commemorations are a special ingredient in recent Hungarian tradition and politics[1], Hungarian commemorations in Transylvania are a very sensitive issue for ethnic Romanians, as they raise not only Hungarian flags, but symbolic questions of belonging, allegiance, solidarity and national unity, because commemorations are rituals that remember fundamental myths and symbols to a given community. In return, Romanian parliament decided in 1990 to celebrate Romania's national day every December the 1st, in symbolical remembrance of the secession of Transylvania from Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War and its subsequent integration into the Kingdom of Romania.

As emphasized by Schöpflin, the myth is one of the ways in which collectivities (e.g. nations) establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own system of values, as it is a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself[2]. Myth provides the means for the members of a community to recognize that, broadly, they share a mindset. Through myth, boundaries are established within the community and also with respect to other communities, in a constant effort of 'imagining' the community[3]. The myth acts as means of standardization and of storage of information[4] and, therefore, it is one of a number of crucial instruments in cultural reproduction[5].

The endless question of nationhood, combined with daily nationalism and symbolic struggle in urban areas, might affect the rebirth of the public space in terms of neutral political institutions and practices that rule society. In fact, in socially

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[1] B. FOWLER, "Nation, State, Europe and National Revival in Hungarian Party Politics: the Case of the Millennial Commemorations", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2004, pp. 57-83.

[2] G. SCHÖPFLIN, "The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths", in G. HOSKING, G. SCHÖPFLIN (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, Routledge, New York,1997, p. 19.

[3] Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983.

[4] Norbert ELIAS, *The Symbol Theory*, Sage, London, 1991.

[5] Pierre BOURDIEU, "Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power", in N. DIRKS, G. ELEY, S.B. ORTNER (eds.), *A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994.

and particularly in ethnically divided societies, the use of myths almost invariably enhances the division, unless there are myths that unite the groups across the divide. It is possible to conceptualize myths of citizenship that transcend ethnicity, underlines Schöpflin[1], but these are rare (e.g. the Swiss case). Generally the myths of collective existence within the ethnic group are emphasized and a harder boundary is drawn against outsiders. This process is dynamic, imitative, and hard to break. If one group feels that it has to rely more and more heavily on myths of collective existence, the other will generally do the same. And on both sides symbolic politics fuel political discourse. The opposition between those two types of myths is best exemplified by the debate over the Romanian territorial design.

Ethnic Identities and Regional Design in Transylvania

The current debate on regional design opposes two main arguments: a trans-ethnical regional identity and a clear-cut ethnic regional divide. The first argument is strongly emphasized by the Romanian proponents of regionalization, a handful of Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals from Transylvania who, back in 2000, triggered the debate on a new territorial design and new political relationship between centre and periphery. Their prior arguments are not economic, but political and cultural. According to them, the existing local political organization and centralization in Romania come from an ethnic Romanian definition of the state, which is strengthened day-to-day by the Romanian-Hungarian conflict in Transylvania. Fearing the Hungarian threat to Romanian statehood, Romanian nationalists and centralists, those who support the second argument, always invoke the conflict as the perfect argument for hard centralization. Therefore, the key for building up a peaceful and prosperous region of Transylvania would be a trans-ethnic party, composed by the political elites of Romanian and Hungarian ethnic groups and motivated by a kind of "civic regionalism"[2]. Romanian regionalists strongly believe that assuming regional identities on a civic basis contributes, in a multi-ethnic region like Transylvania, to the development of a trans-ethnical identity, through which it is possible to transcend extremist-nationalist nostalgia, fears or escalation, as well as the veiled nationalisms that often make use of a civic and democratic phraseology[3].

Regional design was, in fact, a key issue in ethnic relations between ethnic Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania during the past century. The integration of new provinces in Greater Romania following the First World War brought in large ethnic and religious minorities. Thus organizing political space was a serious matter for Romanian elites who aimed to consolidate the new national state and unify the national culture[4]. The territory was then divided in 71 one counties that lasted until 1948. During the Second World War, parts of Transylvania were attached back to the Hungarian state, only to be recovered by Romania at the end of the war. In 1948, Romanian communists reformatted for the first time the territorial administration in districts and oblasts, having in mind the soviet-type of organization. By this type of

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[1] G. SCHÖPFLIN, "The Functions of Myth…cit.", p. 24.
[2] Gusztáv MOLNÁR, "Regionalism civic", *Provincia*, vol. I, no. 2, p. 7.
[3] Tom GALLAGHER, "Nationalism and Political Culture in the 1990s", cit.
[4] Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*…cit.

administrative organization, Hungarian minority in Transylvania enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in the general framework of an autonomous region. The 1968 reform of Romanian administration, that still works today, eliminated such autonomy and tried to homogenize again the territory according to nationalistic purposes[1].

The current regional design is today challenged by Hungarian nationalists in Transylvania. They oppose the Romanian unitary and centralized state by claiming the rights to self-govern in the framework of an autonomous region called "Szeklerland". The Civic Hungarian Party (CHP), a political organization of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania which opposes to the moderate DAHR that successfully represented the ethnic community during the last two decades, settled a Szekler National Council as a representative body of Szeklers in Transylvania. Its goal is to define the autonomy of the Szeklerland, including the use of ethnic symbols like the anthem, the flag and the arms of the county. Szekler National Council also intends to propose a law regarding the autonomous region of Szeklerland. Moreover, the Council already proclaimed a declaration on the regional design, stating that Szeklerland is a distinct and indivisible territorial unit that can not be merged into another territorial unit. Therefore, state authorities should take care when it comes to reshape territorial design in Romania and fulfill the distinct Szeklerland with greater autonomy. The reaction of Romanian nationalists was instant. Romanian hard-line nationalists demanded a national referendum with compulsory voting, which clearly shows the dominance and the willingness of ethnic Romanians.

The opposition of those two political projects, the regionalist and the ethnic nationalist ones, clearly demonstrates the importance of ethnic symbolism. The regionalists seem to conceive ethnic groups as largely constructed, while Romanian and Hungarian nationalists take them as natural entities in conflict. We think regionalists' project rely more on idealistic political models, like the working consociational democracies in place in Belgium or Switzerland, than on ground realities. The growing ethnic symbolism in Romanian turned into a large "ethnicisation" of the public space, since ethnic segments constantly struggle to dominate each other. Therefore, it seems unlikely for Transylvania to build up a trans-national regional identity, since more modest power-sharing arrangements are missing. In fact, there is no general legislative framework for the status of ethnic minorities in Romania, and therefore ethnic segments are forced to defend their interests in every separate area, ranging from education to public administration. Moreover, extended rights and liberties largely depend on political coalitions in Romanian parliament and government, forcing DAHR to strengthen its ethnic profile when it comes to negotiate with Romanian parties. Yet painful negotiations tend to maximize ethnic opposition between groups and to extend the ethnicisation of the public space on an unprecedented scale.

For a cross-national identity to arise on the basis of a civic regionalism, as Transylvanian regionalists dream to, it is first necessary for ethnic groups' elites to settle a pact on minorities' rights and to refrain from the use of symbolic power. Otherwise, public space, especially in ethnically divided cities, will finally completely turn into a battle ground marked by the imposing symbols of ethnic groups, like the city of Cluj in the 1990s. The elected Romanian mayor, an outspoken nationalist,

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[1] C. CHEN, "The Roots of Illiberal Nationalism in Romania: A Historical Institutionalist Analysis of the Leninist Legacy", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 166-201; Catherine VERDERY, *National Ideology under Socialism*…cit.

made then everything possible to assert the Romanian character of the city-center and to neutralize the Hungarian and Habsburg past[1]. He has threatened to move the historical equestrian statue of a Renaissance-era king of Hungary that dominates the central square, sponsored archaeological excavations in the square, designed to assert Romanian priority in Cluj, and erected towering flagpoles and flying Romanian flags on either side of the equestrian statue. Later he would replace white benches in the square with new ones painted in the Romanian national colors, in an endless effort to symbolically dominate Cluj city-center. Multiplying such symbolic battle ground at a larger scale in Transylvania could be a threat not only to a still idealistic civic regionalism that encompasses and levels ethnic identities, but it could be a direct threat to the previous efforts made for the minimum trust and cooperation between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians in the region.

ETHNIC STRUGGLE AND THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

The issue of language is a key issue of a special kind of nationalism that is linguistic nationalism. This doctrine that originates in the late 18th century, states that the promotion, development, enrichment and standardization of national language is an essential political concern[2]. In the same time, language is a very sensitive symbolic issue. As national identity is an imagination of belonging to a larger community, as emphasized by Anderson[3], the formation of language identity largely helps to strengthen the sense of national identity in many parts of the world[4]. As we are interested here in focusing on symbolic dimension of nationalism, we will not stress on other features of linguistic nationalism. Because issues of language cannot be easily accommodated within the standard framework adopted by western liberals in dealing with diversity, there is not a proven solution for the question of language, emphasize Kymlicka and Grin[5]. Whether western liberals solved the religious conflict by separating state and church and by "privatizing" religion, they have hoped to apply the same model to other areas of diversity, in particular to ethno-cultural diversity. There should be no official or established culture, no public support for the culture, practices or identity of any particular group; this is the liberal project of coping with ethno-cultural diversity. While this is an attractive model in theory, it cannot work in practice. There is no possibility of "privatizing" language issues. Therefore the state will always decide which will be the official language, which language will get the primacy and which one will be relegated to private life, and this fact is obviously in conflict with the liberal conception of freedom and equality[6].

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[1] Rogers BRUBAKER, Margit FEISCHMIDT, John FOX, Liana GRANCEA, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity*…cit., p. 3.

[2] A. PATTEN, "The Humanist Roots of Linguistic Nationalism", paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 2004.

[3] Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*…cit.

[4] C. HARVIE, *Scotland and Nationalism: 1707 to the Present*, Routledge, London, 1994; R. JONES, L. DESFORGES, "Localities and the Reproduction of Welsh Nationalism", *Political Geography*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2003, pp. 271-292.

[5] Will KYMLICKA, François GRIN, "Assessing the Politics of Diversity in Transition Countries", in Farimah DAFTARY, François GRIN (eds.), *Ethnicity and Language Politics in Transition Countries*, Open Society Institute, Budapest, 2003, pp. 1-28.

[6] IDEM, "Assessing the Politics of Diversity…cit.", p. 9.

The use of native language in Transylvania relates to public and road inscriptions, to teaching, as well as to the language to use when dealing to local administration. The use of native language is part of minorities' cultural rights, yet the implementation of these rights unravels subsequent ethnic tensions. According to surveys on ethnic issues conducted in Transylvania and the whole Romania[1], many ethnic Romanians disagree with the public use of Hungarian language. Though many of them consider that those of their friends who decided to learn Hungarian in order to keep in touch with ethnic Hungarian acquaintances are not to blame, they declare themselves offended by the public use of Hungarian and still believe that ethnic Hungarians willfully refuse to speak Romanian, despite the fact that, as Romanians think, they are fully capable to do so.

In early '90s, the new Romanian constitution, the Local Administration Act and the Act on Education clearly reaffirmed the official unilinguism in a period marked by ethnic tensions[2]. The debate then concerned teaching in Hungarian and the restoration of educational establishments to the Hungarian minority, involving removing Romanian pupils from ethnically mixed schools. In fact, it was the reluctance of the Romanian government to negotiate a compromise with the Hungarian minority over education that contributed to a sharp polarization of both ethnic groups and the outbreak of street violence in Târgu-Mureș on 18-19 March 1990[3]. Despite high ethnic tensions, concessions have been made only following 1996, when DAHR was part of the Romanian governing coalition. The linguistic policies then shifted from linguistic hegemony to an accommodation model, allowing the expansion of minorities' language use, but keeping intact the primacy of the official language and stating the use of minorities' languages as acceptable exceptions[4]. Romania now allows full education in minority languages, but also provides a minimum education in Romanian. Despite official unilinguism, the use of minority languages is allowed in local public institutions where the concerned linguistic minorities surpass a 20% threshold and encompasses official communication in Hungarian between local institutions and citizens and between elected officials themselves during local meetings, although official acts of those authorities continue to be issued in Romanian.

Language and Citizenship

Language is also related to citizenship, and citizenship shapes the way people conceive community, liberties and equality[5]. In a way, community is the object of

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[1] Gabriel BĂDESCU, Mircea KIVU, Monica ROBOTIN (eds.), *Barometrul relațiilor etnice 1994-2002. O perspectivă asupra climatului interetnic din România*, Ethnocultural Diversity Ressource Center Press, Cluj, 2005.

[2] Catherine KETTLEY, "Ethnicity, Language and Transition Politics in Romania: the Hungarian Minority in Context", in Farimah DAFTARY, François GRIN (eds.), *Ethnicity and Language Politics*…cit., pp. 243-266.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 251.

[4] István HORVÁTH, "Evaluarea politicilor lingvistice din România", in Levente SALAT (ed.), *Politici de integrare a minorităților naționale din România. Aspecte legale și instituționale într-o perspectivă comparată*, Ethnocultural Diversity Ressource Center Press, Cluj, 2008.

[5] Charles TAYLOR, "The Politics of Recognition", in A. GUTMANN (ed.), *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992; B. BARRY, *Culture*

struggle in which different moral geographies are imagined, since community is negotiated as particular constructions of citizenship are put forward[1]. In this respect, the Romanian Constitution reflects the ethnic tensions from the first years of post-communism by the willingness of the dominant group to express the dominant position of the Romanian demographic majority and language. Kettley stresses that some disputed points in the text of the Constitution, namely the proclamation of Romania as a national state, the subsequent sovereignty based on the unity of the Romanian people (as an ethnic definition of the community) and the mono-linguism, generated the protests of the Hungarian political elites[2]. In fact, the use of Romanian language proves to be an essential requirement for citizenship in Romania. When compared to other requirements for citizenship in Europe, the Romanian peculiarity lies in the lack of distinctiveness between the origin, the ethnic aspect and the civic aspect of citizenship and also in the emphasis on the language requirements[3]. Therefore, the claim of the Hungarian ethnic community to openly use Hungarian language in state administration and education is one of the most sensitive issues for Romanian ethnic majority.

Hungarian-Romanian political and ethnic relations have been seriously challenged in 2001 by an incident that unraveled the symbolic stake of ethnic nationalism in Transylvania. That was the Hungarian law designed to give a series of rights (seasonal working permits, social security provisions, travel, education and health benefits) in the kin country to Hungarian minority abroad[4]. The Hungarian law was received with fierce nationalist criticism by Hungary's neighbors[5]. Although the law explicitly stated practical issues, it was considered by Hungary's neighboring states rather a symbolic issue, an attempt to symbolically expand the boundaries of the Hungarian nation[6]. The political motivations of the Hungarian law are questionable. On the one hand, political parties in Hungary exacerbated the references to the past in their political rhetoric, the emotional appeals and the use of political identity campaigns and therefore encouraged symbolic populism in government[7]. Using Rajacic's

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and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2001; Will KYMLICKA, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001; G. VALENTINE, T. SKELTON, "The Right to Be Heard: Citizenship and Language", *Political Geography*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2007, pp. 121-140.

[1] L.A. STAEHELI, "Citizenship and the Problem of Community", *Political Geography*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2008, pp. 5-21.

[2] Catherine KETTLEY, "Ethnicity, Language and Transition Politics in Romania…cit.".

[3] Dragoș DRAGOMAN, "National Identity and Europeanization in Post-communist Romania. The Meaning of Citizenship in Sibiu: European Capital of Culture 2007", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2008, pp. 63-78.

[4] L.J. KULCSÁR, C. BRADATAN, "Politics without Frontiers: The Impact of Hungarian Domestic Politics on the Minority Question in Romania", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2007, pp. 301-314.

[5] K. DEEGAN-KRAUSE, "Uniting the Enemy: Politics and the Convergence of Nationalisms in Slovakia", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2004, pp. 651-696.

[6] S. DEETS, "Reimagining the Boundaries of the Nation: Politics and the Development of Ideas on Minority Rights", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 419-446.

[7] B. FOWLER, "Nation, State, Europe and National Revival in Hungarian Party Politics…cit."; A. RAJACIC, "Populist Construction of the Past and Future: Emotional Campaigning in Hungary between 2002 and 2006", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2007, pp. 639-660.

formula, this kind of national-populism was seeking the emotional mobilization of the electors by a cultural redefinition of the past[1]. On the other hand, contrary to the opinion that emphasizes on the symbolical willingness of the Hungarian political elite to strengthen the ties with Hungarian diaspora and symbolically unify the nation, other scholars argue that Hungary's decision was driven not by a growing ethnic nationalism in society, but by the party competition and especially by the party-building strategy of right-wing elites[2]. In fact, by creating and distributing Hungarian certificates, a sort of ethnic identity cards, the law made the Hungarians living outside the borders legal subjects of Hungarian legislation and authority. Yet the motivation of the law, despite the growing desire to protect the Hungarian diaspora from assimilationist pressures, can be fully explained only by the willingness of political elites affiliated with the Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) government (1998-2002) to utilize the Hungarian diaspora issue as a political resource to further their own ideological, organizational and long-term strategical political goals[3]. Despite the compromise between the Hungarian and Romanian governments that put an end to Romanian official criticism[4], namely the application of the law to Hungarian state territory only, eliminating ethnic discrimination in granting the working permits and removing visual highly symbolic items from the Hungarian certificates that could remind of the special political ties between ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania and the Hungarian state[5], the incident fully reveals the ethnic symbolic tensions ongoing in Transylvania.

Public Inscriptions in Hungarian

Public inscriptions are, alongside street names, one of the most salient ethnic markers. And the language alone is not the main problem, but the specific contents, since the use of ethnic Hungarian geographical denominations symbolically question the Romanian domination of the public space. As soon as new regulations were adopted in administration area following 1996 elections that brought DAHR into the governing coalition, Hungarian community claimed for widespread public inscriptions in Hungarian (road inscriptions, public institutions as schools, libraries, police departments), which triggered the response on nationalist Romanians who made great efforts to suspend the regulations[6]. The effectiveness of posting bilingual inscriptions varies from one district to another. On the one hand, many on the road inscriptions in Hungarian, for example, have been destroyed during night-time, but

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 642.
[2] M.A. WATERBURY. "Internal Exclusion, External Inclusion: Diaspora Politics and Party-Building Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 483-515; A. BATORY, "Kin-state Identity in the European Context: Citizenship, Nationalism and Constitutionalism in Hungary", *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 31-48.
[3] M.A. WATERBURY. "Internal Exclusion, External Inclusion…cit.", p. 484.
[4] C. IORDACHI, "The Romanian-Hungarian Reconciliation Process, 1994-2001: From Conflict to Cooperation", *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 1, no. 3-4, 2001, pp. 88-133.
[5] M. CHIRIAC, *Provocările diversității. Politici publice privind minoritățile naționale și religioase în România*, Etnocultural Diversity Ressource Center Press, Cluj, 2005.
[6] Gabriel ANDREESCU, *Ruleta. Români și maghiari, 1990-2000*, Polirom, Iași, 2001.

some Romanian inscriptions have been destroyed too. On the other hand, the lack of cooperation of many local elites and inadequate funding remain constant pitfalls. The responsiveness of local leaders generally depends on their political affiliation and on the degree of cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian political parties' elites and central leaderships[1]. The legal disposition was generally implemented only in the areas where Hungarians formed a majority or which had DAHR mayors at the time[2]. Local authorities refuse sometimes to put in place legal requirements, claiming that minorities do not trespass (anymore) the 20% threshold, and do not replace the bilingual inscription that have been destroyed[3].

Another highly symbolic issue in Transylvania are road touristic inscriptions that mark specific ethnic geographies. Covasna county-council, the governing body of Covasna county in Transylvania, decided to set up eight road touristic inscriptions at the county borders, marking the entry into the so called Szeklerland ("Szekelyfold" in Hungarian and "Ținutul Secuiesc" in Romanian). The denomination recalls the medieval administrative organization of Transylvania, when Szeklers, a Hungarian population defending the Eastern borders of the Hungarian kingdom, benefited of full autonomy[4]. The decision of the county-council, dominated by ethnic Hungarian elected officials, was criticized by local ethnic Romanian elites because of its symbolic ethnic connotation and the advertising panel was quickly removed by the Romanian State Road Company. Subsequently, the road company refused to deliver the compulsory technical documentation for the advertising panels demanded by Covasna county-council and blocked any other attempt to set up similar advertising panels. The official motivation of the state road company was largely symbolic, meaning that the advertising panel was set against the principles of the Romanian unitary state.

The Use of Hungarian Language in Public Schools and Universities

Hungarian community's willingness to benefit of separate schools after decades of forced ethnic cohabitation during communist rule is not easy to accept by ethnic Romanian community in Transylvania. On the one hand, new schools have to be built, especially where old public buildings have been returned to one community or another according to the property restitution act. This is often the case of old buildings in Transylvanian towns that have been returned to Hungarian churches. They are generally situated at the center of historical towns like Timișoara, Cluj, Arad, Brașov, Oradea. Moving Romanian schools to city periphery would mean to accept the symbolic primacy of Hungarian education. This is so sensitive because ethnic Romanian elites in Transylvania struggled for centuries to promote Romanian culture

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[1] Catherine KETTLEY, "Ethnicity, Language and Transition Politics in Romania…cit.", p. 259.

[2] D. CHIRIBUCĂ, T. MAGYARI, "The Impact of Minority Participation in Romanian Government", in Monica ROBOTIN, Levente SALAT (eds.), *A New Balance: Democracy and Minorities in Post-Communist Europe*, Open Society Institute, Budapest, 2003, p. 84.

[3] István HORVÁTH, "Evaluarea politicilor lingvistice din România", cit.

[4] G. KRISTÓ, *Histoire de la Hongrie médiévale*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2000; Paul LENDVAI, *The Hungarians*…cit.

and to equal other national cultures in the region, especially Austrian and Hungarian ones[1]. On the other hand, ethnically separating the mixed schools is often seen by ethnic Romanians as granting too much autonomy for the Hungarian education in the overall framework of the unitary and national Romanian state, as well as an inadequate measure to support "multiculturalism". Thus, one could notice frequent protests from Romanian teachers and pupils when it comes to start using separate school buildings in various towns in the region. Yet the willingness to keep linguistic mixed universities often triggers the protests of Hungarian ethnic students and teachers, as it occurred at the bilingual state university "Babeș-Bolyai" in Cluj.

This modern Transylvanian university was founded in Cluj by the Hungarian state, following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and the formal political unification of Hungary with Transylvania. The end of the First World War led to the dismantling of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the unification of Transylvania with Romania. One of the top priorities for the new authorities was to take over control of the university. When the university with Romanian language of instruction was established in 1919, the Hungarian university was symbolically and officially transferred to Szeged, in the Republic of Hungary, but all the patrimonial goods of the former remained in Cluj, at the disposal of the new Romanian University. After the Second World War, as a testimony of friendship and cooperation between workers' parties from communist Romania and communist Hungary, a state university with Hungarian language of instruction was established for a brief period of time under the name of the illustrious Hungarian mathematician "Janos Bolyai". In the aftermath of the Hungarian anti-communist revolution in 1956, the Romanian communist regime decided to merge the Hungarian university with the Romanian university "Victor Babeș" in a mixed university called "Babeș-Bolyai" University (BBU). Since that institutional merger, the Hungarian speaking students and teachers benefit only of specific chairs inside mixed faculties, and not of fully autonomous departments and faculties.

The possibility of self-organization for Hungarian speaking faculties or even the creation of a separate university is a constant debate inside and outside "Babeș-Bolyai" University. Despite political negotiations between DAHR and the Romanian political party in government, the ruling body of the university, dominated by ethnic Romanian professors, rejected the autonomous organization of two faculties that encompass the current Hungarian chairs. The main argument of BBU ruling body is, except the threat to the scientific competitiveness, the preservation of "multiculturalism", which is said to be better promoted by the current organization of chairs and faculties. The institutional pitfall thus triggered the response of Hungarian teachers and students from BBU, who protested on the streets of the city. Moreover, in response to the official argument of BBU regarding its "multicultural" identity, two young Hungarian professors demanded that bilingual plates be installed inside BBU buildings that really express the willingness of Romanian teachers and students to share the public space with their Hungarian fellows. After being dismissed by the university's governing body, the Hungarian teachers were symbolically awarded a prize by a Hungarian foundation for their particular contribution in keeping the identity of Hungarians in Romania.

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[1] Keith HITCHINS, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania*…cit.

CONCLUSION

Ethnically mixed areas are generally subject of ethnic conflict. Despite the progress made in the last two decades and the success in avoiding open conflict and bloodshed, ethnic struggle between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania lately became symbolic and non-material. It now uses mechanisms of differentiation and power in order to spatially mark the dominance of ethnic groups by items as flags, road signs, street names, churches and statues. Yet there are new symbolic issues, like territorial design and linguistic nationalism that overpass this spatial framework and affect the overall ethnic climate. Although the symbolic weight of ethnic issues in Transylvania is overlooked by scholars and the general public, it could actually be the key in comprehending and (partially) solving the conflict. Moreover, the ongoing symbolic struggle has important consequences for the democratization process in Romania in terms of the consolidation of an autonomous and neutral public space. As it is a space of freedom, equality and dialogue, the public space is an essential feature of democratization, because it enables ethnic communities and citizens to find the common grounds for political institutions and practices. In this respect, the Balkans are marked by a slower democratic transition, as it is complicated by cultural, religious and linguistic pluralism that affects state-building and nationhood.

Despite the reconciliation process between Hungary and Romania following their equal accession into NATO and the European Union, political relations are still marked by recurrent crises that relate rather on symbolic issues than on practical matter. The controversial Hungarian Status Law designed to give a series of rights in the kin country to Hungarian minority abroad raised the question regarding the symbolic relationship between language, citizenship and privileged ties between ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania and the Hungarian state. Although ethnic relations in Transylvania have made an important progress since 1989, a step forward would be to agree on an overall power-sharing arrangement that guarantees significant minority rights, but also undeniable minority integration and loyalty. Until today, Hungarian minority had to defend its rights in every specific area by negotiating with various Romanian parties on power, yet it has no guarantee that already granted minorities' rights will not be restricted for the future.

The Europeanization of Eastern Europe seems to signify for many optimistic scholars the end of ethnic conflict. Salat and Enache even raised the question if one could compare the Romanian-Hungarian relations to the historical French-German Reconciliation[1]. We think that this optimist perspective largely overlooks the power of ethnic symbolism in the region and the current mechanisms of "ethnicisation" of the public sphere that are generally kept in a long-term *status-quo*, only for breaking out from time to time and returning to a precarious standstill. Taking them into account might help us to better estimate ethnic struggle and democratization in this complicated region of Transylvania.

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[1] Levente SALAT, Smaranda ENACHE (eds.), *Romanian-Hungarian Relations and the French-German Reconciliation*, Ethocultural Diversity Ressource Center Press, Cluj, 2004.