

Recent Developments in Romanian Political Life*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DAHR	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania
DAPR	Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania
DCR	Democratic Convention of Romania
DNSF	Democratic National Salvation Front
DSPR	Democratic–Social Pole of Romania
DP	Democratic Party
GRP	Greater Romania Party
NLP	National Liberal Party
NSF	National Salvation Front
NUPR	National Unity Party Romanians
PSDR	Party of Social Democracy in Romania
REM	Romanian Ecologist Movement
RSDP	Romanian Social Democratic Party
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SDU	Social Democratic Union

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Before proceeding to argue substantive issues regarding or relating to the following presentation of developments that occurred after January 2001, I will make a short note on the structure of this contribution. Hence, the introductory part of the paper will consist of some comments on various interpretations of minority participation in the exercise of institutional power. The body of the paper will commence with an overview of the participation of the Hungarian minority in Romanian government (on national level). Then, I will discuss the recent developments themselves concentrating on policy-making, socio-political life and public discourse. In what concerns policy-making, I will also provide a brief description of the analytical tool employed herein. Finally, I will summarize and conclude according to the main criteria outlined in this research report. That is, DAHR's latest successes and failures will be listed, followed by a discussion of the evolution of majority–minority relations after 2001 and of the (un)democratizing effect of the recent cooperation between the Hungarian political elite and the governing (ethnic) Romanian party.

Interpreting minority participation in the exercise of political power

Though it is rewarding to write about minority issues, one must not downplay the less gratifying side of such a task either. What is to be said could be contentious first of all because researchers may well have diverging priorities depending on whether they belong to the ethnic majority, the ethnic minority or are less involved outside observers. The present research project formulated concerns that try to balance the three perspectives, thus managing to cope with this first challenge. Yet, another difficulty is whether to use sociological criteria and methods or a political scientific approach or a combination of the two when tackling the topic. Analysts of ethnoregionalist parties prefer to adopt a “pure” political science approach and concentrate on various indicators of success in terms of minority participation.¹ The present project generally, and in particular the previous contribution on Romania by Dan

¹ See Lieven De Winter “Conclusion: A comparative analysis of the electoral, office and policy success of ethnoregionalist parties.” in Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.) *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. (Routledge–ECPR Studies in European Political Science.) London–New York: Routledge, 1998. pp. 204–247.

Chiribucă and Tivadar Magyari, favors again an even-handed approach. Thus, it partly shares both focus and method with a study written by two Hungarian researchers.² Nevertheless, the latter paper takes into account a broader range of criteria in order to evaluate minority participation. Its authors do not analyze only majority–minority relations, but look at Romanian–Hungarian interstate relations, too. Moreover, they take into account the effect of the presence of the DAHR in the governing coalition on Romania’s chances in terms of her accession to NATO and European integration. Finally, they have some specific minority concerns when asking what impact did the participation in the cabinets between 1996 and 2000 have on the Hungarian community in Romania and the ethnic Hungarian party itself.³

This paper also tries to present a balanced view. Nevertheless, in terms of scientific approach it uses a modified framework. That is, its focus are the indicators of success defined by Lieven de Winter, the three central concerns of the current research and to a smaller extent the criteria deemed relevant for the Hungarian minority by Bárdi and Kántor. Moreover, I also employ Arend Lijphart’s concepts and analytical apparatus set out in his latest work on democracies⁴ in order to characterise the overall political conditions under which minority participation occurs in a country. It seems straightforward that an ethnic group representing a (small) numerical minority has better chances of capturing a certain share of power and fulfilling its own political aspirations if the political system exhibits consensual rather than majoritarian traits.

From a methodological point of view I will rely on (political) historical and statistical data regarding Romanian politics and government, on public opinion polls as well as political documents, namely the agreements of cooperation signed on a yearly basis since the 27th of December 2000 by the SDP and the DAHR. I will present a quantitative content analysis of these documents using a standard methodology developed for party manifestos⁵.

² Bárdi Nándor and Kántor Zoltán “Az RMDSZ a romániai kormányban, 1996–2000.” [The DAHR in the Romanian government, 1996–2000.] *Regio*, vol. 11 (2000) no. 4, pp. 150–186.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 158–159.

⁴ Arend Lijphart *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty–Six Countries*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

⁵ See Andrea Volkens *Manifesto Coding Instructions*. 2nd rev. ed. Discussion Paper FS III 02-201. Berlin, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), 2002. [<http://skylla.wz-berlin.de/pdf/2002/iii02-201.pdf>] The coding has been done under my supervision by János Márton, a student at the Hungarian section of the Faculty of Political and Administrative Sciences, Babeş–Bolyai University of Cluj.

The participation of the Hungarian minority in the exercise of power (1990-2003)

This section will overview the participation of the Hungarian minority in the exercise of institutional power on national level in Romania. Hence, I will concentrate on the share of legislative and executive power captured by the ethnic Hungarian party, the DAHR. Analyzing the whole period will allow us to look both back and ahead considering the latest elections as the turning point in time to which one should relate.

The DAHR in the Romanian parliament since 1990

Table 1 presents the seat shares obtained in the Chamber of Deputies⁶ by major Romanian political parties from the founding elections held on the 20th of May 1990 until the latest elections held on the 26th of November 2000. (The table also hints to the party splits and mergers that lead to the emergence of newer important parties. Hence, it is an illustration of organizational continuity and “descent”, too.⁷)

Table 1. Major Parties in the Romanian Parliament (1990–2003)

Party	1990 (%)	1992 (%)	1996 (%)	2000 (%)
National Salvation Front / Democratic National Salvation Front / Party of Social Democracy in Romania / Democratic–Social Pole of Romania ^{a)} / Social Democratic Party	70.89	35.67	27.74	47.40
National Salvation Front–Democratic Party / Democratic Party / Social Democratic Union ^{b)} / Democratic Party	–	13.11	16.16	9.48
Romanian Ecologist Movement ^{c)}	3.23	–	–	–
Democratic Convention / Democratic Convention of Romania / Democratic Convention of Romania – 2000	–	25	37.20	–
(Christian Democratic) National Peasant’s Party^{d)}	3.23			
National Liberal Party^{d)}	7.82			9.17
Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	7.82	8.23	7.62	8.26
Alliance for the Unity of Romanians / National Unity Party of Romanians / National Alliance / National Unity Party of Romanians	2.43	9.15	5.49	–
Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania ^{e)}	2.43	–	–	–
Greater Romania Party	–	4.88	5.79	25.69
Others	2.16	3.96	–	–
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

⁶ Considering the lower house of Parliament is justified above all else by the fact that the process of government formation is shaped by the seat shares obtained in this house. Furthermore, the electoral system used for electing the lower chamber of Parliament is usually defined as the country’s electoral system, and again lower house seats shares are used to compute all party system indicators.

⁷ The names of parties that still exist have been boldfaced.

- a) This electoral alliance consisted of the PSDR, the Romanian Social Democratic Party and the Humanist Party of Romania. The first two merged to form the Social Democratic Party on the 16th of June 2001.
- b) The RSDP has been the member of this alliance between the 27th of September 1995 and the 13th of May 1999. Though not listed separately because of faring rather poorly when contesting elections alone, this party did much better as a member of alliances and has been a minor coalition partner in almost all Romanian governments since the 1996 elections.
- c) Party listed because of holding one portfolio (the Ministry of Environment) in the Stolojan-cabinet (the 16th of October 1991–the 19th of November 1992). On the 26th of September 1998, the party merged with and has been absorbed by the Romanian Ecologist Federation.
- d) These parties or some of their splinter groups have been members of the Democratic Convention between 1992–2000.
- e) Party listed because of holding one portfolio (the Ministry of Instruction and Science) both in the second Roman-cabinet (the 28th of June 1990–the 26th of September 1991) and (the Ministry of Agriculture and Foodstuffs Industry) in the Stolojan-cabinet (the 16th of October 1991–the 19th of November 1992). After absorbing a series of tiny parties between 1990–1996, on the 14th of March 1998, the DAPR merged with the New Romania Party to form the Romanian National Party.
- f) Romanian Ecologist Party.
- g) Socialist Labour Party.

Sources: Stan Stoica *Mic dicționar al partidelor politice din România (1989–2000)*. [Brief Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2000.] București: Editura Meronia, 2000. pp. 21–27., 30–42., 45–72., 75–84., 93–96., 98–99., 103–108.; *idem*, *Dicționarul partidelor politice din România (1989–2001)*. [Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2001.] București: Editura Meronia, 2001. pp. 31–37., 41–61., 64–105., 111–127., 139–146., 148–152., 161–169.; Szász Attila “2001 fontos belpolitikai eseményei.” [Important events in Romanian politics – 2001.] in Bodó Barna (ed.) *Romániai magyar évkönyv, 2002*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian Community in Romania, 2002.] pp. 341., 343. and official electoral statistics compiled by the research fellows of the *Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe* project of the University of Essex. (Data available at [<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/indexElections.asp>]. – last accessed on the 18th of January 2004.)

Two immediate observations can be made on the basis of the above table. First, the current government party, the SDP—a successor party of the former Communists—has dominated the post-1989 political scene in Romania, even if it had to contend itself with being the main opposition force for a four-year term (1996–2000). Second, maintaining the support of the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian community, the DAHR managed to be a constant political actor, one that cannot be neglected.

Government formation and role of the DAHR (1996–2000)

Banking on their electoral fares, the parties formed in the thirteen-year period starting with the founding elections the cabinets listed in *Table 2*.⁸

⁸ I use the customary distinction between *Government* (with capital G)—i.e., the cabinet formed by ministers—and *government* (with lowercase g) as the encompassing array of political positions in central and local administration, which are filled by appointees of various parties. Furthermore, the table is based on the interpretation that a new cabinet assumed office if at least one of the following four conditions obtained: (i) elections have been held; (ii) a new prime minister has been appointed; (iii) the party composition of the cabinet has changed; (iv) the status of the cabinet has changed due to party splits, mergers or—massive—resignations of

Table 2. Romanian Cabinets (1990–2003)

Period	Cabinet type and status	Composition
the 28 th of June 1990 – the 15 th of October 1991	coalition government (oversized)	NSF–DAPR
the 16 th of October 1991 – the 28 th of April 1992 ^{a)}	coalition government (oversized)	NSF–NLP–REM–DAPR
the 29 th of April 1992 – the 18 th of November 1992	coalition government (oversized)	NSF–DNSF–NLP–REM–DAPR
the 19 th of November 1992 – the 17 th of August 1994	one-party government (minority)	DNSF / PSDR
the 18 th of August 1994 – the 2 nd of September 1996	coalition government (minority)	PSDR–NUPR
the 3 rd of September 1996 – the 11 th of December 1996	one-party government (minority)	PSDR
the 12 th of December 1996 – the 16 th of April 1998	coalition government (oversized)	DCR–DP–RSDP–DAHR
the 17 th of April 1998 – the 21 st of December 1999	coalition government (oversized)	DCR–DP–RSDP–DAHR
the 22 nd of December 1999 – the 7 th of September 2000	coalition government (oversized)	DCR–DP–RSDP–DAHR
the 8 th of September 2000 – the 27 th of December 2000 ^{b)}	coalition government (oversized)	DCR–DP–DAHR
the 28 th of December 2000 – the 16 th of June 2001 ^{c)}	coalition government (minority)	PSDR–RSDP–HPR
the 17 th of June 2001–the 16 th of June 2003	coalition government (minority)	SDP–HPR
the 17 th of June 2003–	one-party government (minority)	SDP

^{a)} The NSF-faction lead by President Ion Iliescu left the party during the National Convention held between the 27th and the 29th of March 1992 and established a month later the DNSF.

^{b)} The RSDP withdrew from the coalition as a result of deciding to join the DSPR for the upcoming elections.

^{c)} The minor coalition partners, the RSDP and the HPR, obtained a single portfolio each: the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperation, respectively.

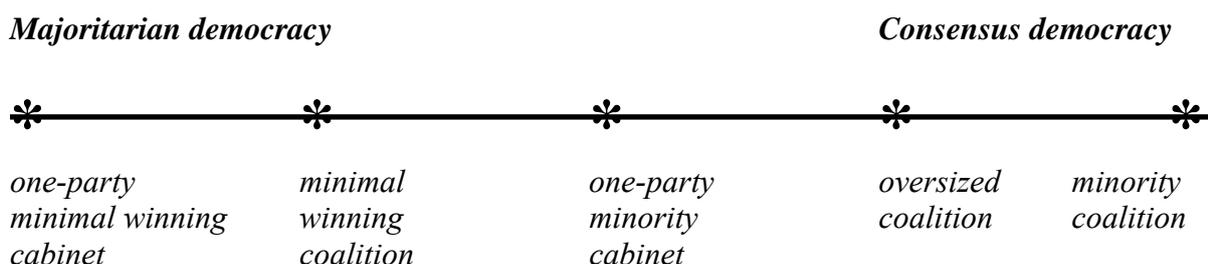
^{d)} The HPR lost its single portfolio as a result of restructuring measures that touched various ministries.

Sources: Stan Stoica *Mic dicționar al partidelor politice din România (1989–2000)*. [Brief Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2000.] București: Editura Meronia, 2000. pp. 26., 109–118.; *idem*, *Dicționarul partidelor politice din România (1989–2001)*. [Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2001.] București: Editura Meronia, 2001. pp. 36., 105., 179–189. and Szász Attila “2001 fontos belpolitikai eseményei.” [Important events in Romanian politics – 2001.] in Bodó Barna (ed.) *Romániai magyar évkönyv, 2002*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian Community in Romania, 2002.] p. 341. and information available on the Internet site of the Humanist Party of Romania [www.pur.ro] (last accessed on the 26th of May 2004).

MPs from the government party/ies. (Cf. Arend Lijphart *op. cit.* p. 132.) Hence, government reshuffles that leave the latter three elements or features of a cabinet unmodified do not qualify as changes of government. In what regards the first condition, the table lists the dates on which Parliament formally invested the new cabinet.

It can be observed that I distinguish between two types of cabinets: one-party and coalition governments. According to coalition theory, the status of a cabinet can be: minority, minimal winning or oversized.⁹ Since one-party cabinets cannot be oversized, we have five types of governments ranging from the most majoritarian to the most consensual as charted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. The Placement of Various Cabinet Types along the Majoritarian–Consensual Continuum



Source: After Arend Lijphart *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999. pp. 90–91., 103–104.

In what concerns government type, coalition cabinets have been twice as frequent as one-party governments and overall have been almost one and a half times as durable as the latter (2789 days as compared to 1886 days¹⁰). One-party governments tended to be minority cabinets (3 out of 4), while coalition governments were usually formed of more parties than strictly necessary (in 6 cases out of 8). Regarding the status of cabinets, the table shows that out of the 12 cabinets 5 were minority governments and out of the 7 majority governments 6 were oversized. (Only after the founding elections was a party able to form a one-party minimal winning cabinet.) Thus, at first glance, in terms of concentration vs distribution of power among political actors, the Romanian cabinets exhibit consensual traits. Measuring, as Lijphart does, majoritarianism as the average of the time shares spent in office by minimal winning coalitions and one-party majority cabinets, yields after computations 10.16% for Romania—a value that would be the second lowest if the country were to be added as the thirty-seventh to the database of the Dutch political scientist.¹¹ In sum, Romanian Governments are markedly consensual in terms of distribution of power. *This is the*

⁹ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 90–91., 98.

¹⁰ Data collection terminated on the 22nd of May 2003.

¹¹ See *ibid.* pp. 109–111.

background observation against which the participation of the Hungarian party in Romania's cabinets has to be assessed.

Consequently, it hardly comes as a surprise that the DAHR was co-opted in the government after the 1996 elections. Moreover, the importance of the Hungarian party as a minor coalition partner should not be underestimated. Three arguments can be offered to support these statements. First, Romania has already experienced two oversized coalition cabinets and thus the option has not been a novelty for the parties that negotiated coalition formation. Second, the seat shares of the DCR and the SDU amounted to only 53,36%.¹² This majority seemed feeble especially in light of the *ab ovo* uneasy DCR–SDU relationship, hence, adding another party to the coalition was an advisable alternative. Finally, the best choice was the DAHR because of several reasons:

- the party's voters helped the presidential candidate of the DCR, Emil Constantinescu, to win the runoff against former president Ion Iliescu;
- the DAHR could have boosted Romania's image abroad and enhance its chances of being invited to join NATO

and, last but not least,

- the party representing ethnic Hungarians appeared to be an inexpensive coalition partner since its ethnoregionalist character placed it “out of competition”, in a “detached” position.¹³

In sum, it can be said that the constant *electoral success* of the DAHR in the 1990–1996 period lead to its *office-holding success*. The ethnic Hungarian party held two portfolios from the 1996 until the 2000 elections.¹⁴

The fact that the Minister of National Minorities has been a DAHR-appointee throughout the period can be interpreted as a *policy success* as well since this policy area is probably the most salient for the party. Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to specify what actual policy successes did the DAHR attain. Chiribucă and Magyari list increased autonomy for local governments, returning of community and private property as well as enhancement of minority rights

¹² Cf. Stan Stoica *Dicționarul partidelor politice din România (1989–2001)*. [Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2001.] București: Editura Meronia, 2001. p. 166.

¹³ Cf. Bárdi Nándor and Kántor Zoltán *op. cit.* p. 161. and Dan Chiribucă and Tivadar Magyari “Impact of Minority Participation in Romanian Government.” p. 105. (The attractiveness as coalition partner of a “detached” small party, provided it does not voice exacting demands, has been stressed by Gordon Smith. See Gordon Smith “In Search of Small Parties: Problems of Definition, Classification and Significance.” in Ferdinand Müller–Rommel and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.) *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*. (SAGE Modern Politics Series Volume 27.) London: Sage Publications, 1991. p. 36.)

¹⁴ Stan Stoica *Mic dicționar al partidelor politice din România (1989–2000)*. [Brief Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2000.] București: Editura Meronia, 2000. pp. 114–118.

(especially in education) among the main policy priorities of DAHR-leaders. Yet, they admit that the internal opposition of the party—the adversaries and critics of coalition membership—voiced their discontent mainly because the restitution of community and church property has not been finalized and the most important objective regarding native language education, namely (re)establishing the/a Hungarian language university, has not been materialised either.¹⁵ Still, the most notable achievements concern the use of the Hungarian language in education and public administration.¹⁶

Minority government with legislative support offered by the DAHR (2000–2003)

One day before assuming office, on the 27th of December 2000, the PSDR signed bilateral agreements of cooperation with two other forces, the DAHR and the NLP.¹⁷ However, because of disagreements regarding the Law on the 2001 public budget, the NLP renounced the agreement on the 18th of April 2001.¹⁸ This act made the Hungarian party, only the fifth strongest party in Parliament, the major legislative partner of the PSDR. Consequently, this section analyzes to what extent did the DAHR manage to convert its latest *electoral success* into *policy success*.

I propose to measure policy success on the basis of the issue content of the protocols signed by PSDR/SDP and DAHR. It is reasonable to assume that both parties tried their best to include their top policy priorities in these documents and, in consequence, to look at which elements of these agreements have been transformed into legislative measures and later policies. I will analyze the content of these documents using a standard tool for the comparative analysis of parties' policy positions. The content analytical method used by the *Manifesto Research Group* (MRG) is designed to map these policy positions in a seven-dimensional political space made up of the following major issue areas: foreign relations; “freedom and democracy”; the political system; the national economic system as well as economic policies and attitudes; welfare and the quality of life; the fabric of society and social

¹⁵ Cf. Dan Chiribucă and Tivadar Magyari *op. cit.* pp. 110., 122.

¹⁶ Bárdi Nándor and Kántor Zoltán *op. cit.* pp. 170–171.

¹⁷ Stan Stoica *Dicționarul partidelor politice din România (1989–2001)*. [Encyclopedia of Romanian Political Parties: 1989–2001.] București: Editura Meronia, 2001. p. 289. and Tófalvi Zselyke and Járai Albert “2000 kisebbségpolitikailag fontos belpolitikai eseményei.” [Events in Domestic Politics that Are Salient for the Hungarian Minority – 2000.] in Bodó Barna (ed.) *Romániai magyar évkönyv, 2001*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian Community in Romania, 2001.] p. 353.

¹⁸ Szász Attila “2001 fontos belpolitikai eseményei.” [Important events in Romanian politics –2001.] in Bodó Barna (ed.) *Romániai magyar évkönyv, 2002*. [Yearbook of the Hungarian Community in Romania, 2002.] p. 341.

groups—the latter two combining issues linked to the value system and the structure of society.¹⁹ Party policies are studied on the bases of election programs because:

- these cover a wide range of policy areas and represent a “set of key central statements of party positions”;
- are the most authoritative policy statements issued by parties since they are usually ratified by party conventions;

and

- are published regularly before every election—thus allowing analysts to track changes in party positions.²⁰

The protocols which will come under scrutiny below share these features of party manifestos. First, they are crucial statements of party positions since these yearly agreements stipulate the policy goals for the upcoming year and hence can also be interpreted as promises made to the voters of the parties involved. Second, at least in the case of the DAHR, the two most important fora of the party—the Operative Council and the Council of Representatives, the permanent decision-making body of the Alliance—ratified these protocols. Third, these agreements have been thus far signed periodically, on a yearly basis. (However, one cannot speak of changes in policy positions but rather about yearly progress or stagnation in this case.)

Finally, the quantitative content analysis of policy documents as standardised by the MRG assumes that the (relative) frequency of occurrence of various issues mirror their salience as perceived by the parties in question. The following analysis of the PSDR–DAHR agreements accepts this assumption and investigates the weight attached by the two parties to various political issues when drafting and signing the documents.

2001 and the first protocol

As noted above, the first protocol was signed on the 27th of December 2000 and comprised a series of objectives to be attained through “concrete measures” taken in 2001. The agreement ranges the policy goals agreed upon by the two parties under five headings: economic reforms, administrative decentralisation, restitution of property, protection of national minorities and regional development. The document contains 64 “quasi-sentences” (policy statements) referring to 18 issues (See *Table 3*).

¹⁹ Andrea Volkens *op. cit.* p. 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 2.

Table 3. Results of the Content Analysis of the December 2000 Protocol

Policy issue	Number of occurrences	Relative frequency (%)
Multiculturalism: positive	12	18.75
Neutral (uncodable) statements	7	10.94
Decentralisation	6	9.38
Rights, protection and identity of national minorities ^{a)}	6	9.38
Hungarian language culture ^{a)}	5	7.81
Property-restitution: positive	4	6.25
Education in Hungarian language ^{a)}	4	6.25
Minorities abroad ^{b)}	4	6.25
European Community: positive	3	4.69
Military: positive	2	3.13
Freedom and human rights	2	3.13
Social justice	2	3.13
Military: negative	1	1.56
Technology and infrastructure	1	1.56
Economic goals	1	1.56
Private-public mix in welfare	1	1.56
Education expansion	1	1.56
Law and order	1	1.56
Social harmony	1	1.56
TOTAL	64	100

^{a)} Special *party-specific categories* created by the coder. (Since this is a case study, the requirement of specificity prevails over the requirement of preserving the unitary comparative coding frame.)

^{b)} This category refers to minorities whose “mother country” or “kin state” is another country.

The table shows that multiculturalism²¹, administrative decentralisation and issues concerning the Hungarian and other minorities as well as restitution of property are the priorities stressed by the DAHR and accepted by the PSDR as targets of political measures to be undertaken in 2001.

Legislative measures, politics and public discourse in 2001

In what follows, I will try to assess the achievements and failures, positive and negative aspects of 2001 regarding the participation of the Hungarian minority in Romanian government. The questions looked at can be grouped in two categories: legislative measures and politics and public discourse, respectively.

²¹ This category is defined as favourable mentions of cultural diversity, communalism, cultural plurality and pillarization; preservation of autonomy of religious, linguistic heritages within the country including special educational provisions. *Ibid.* p. 35.

With regard to *legislative measures*, two laws enacted in 2001 can be termed as *policy successes* of the DAHR: Law no. 10/2001 on the restitution of nationalized immovable properties and the new law of public administration.²² Nonetheless, the leader of the party himself noted various reasons for discontent during a meeting of the DAHR Mediation Council, which has been held in Covasna on the 9th of July. These “non-achievements” were the delays in implementing the mentioned laws. The various hindrances to the restitution of private—notably, church—property were of utmost concern. Another issue that remained unresolved during 2001 was the question of the publicly funded Hungarian language university.²³

The Romanian Government made an attempt to redress some of these grievances on the 21st of November. The cabinet adopted a set of regulations on the implementation of the law on public administration. These measures concerned the use of languages spoken by national minorities.²⁴ As seen above, issues like property restitution, administrative decentralisation and its aspects involving national minorities directly carry a significant weight as parts of the protocol. Hence, their legal enactment can be seen as an important step forward. Still, as Monica Robotin points out, good laws are insufficient unless they are implemented properly—a point which calls for only moderated optimism.²⁵

In what follows, I would like to point to three issues that polarised political life and debate as well as public discourse during 2001. The most salient was, no doubt, an external political event. Hungary adopted the “law of benefits” (or the “status law”) on the 19th of June.²⁶ Official Romanian political circles responded with rejection and criticism. This showed that even if Romanian–Hungarian relationships have improved, both on interethnic and interstate level, the perception of the Romanian political elite’s majority that Hungarians in Transsylvania are no loyal citizens of Romania, seemingly, still persists. Furthermore, their negative attitudes and suspicions towards Hungary have not been replaced by positive ones, just weakened slightly.²⁷ A rather eloquent proof of my claim regarding elite attitudes towards

²² Szász Attila *op. cit.* p. 339.

²³ See Szász Attila and Sepsi Barnabás “2001 kisebbségpolitikailag fontos belpolitikai eseményei.” [Events in Domestic Politics that Are Salient for the Hungarian Minority – 2001.] in Bodó Barna (ed.) *Romániai magyar évkönyv, 2002.* [Yearbook of the Hungarian Community in Romania, 2002.] pp. 357–358.

²⁴ Szász Attila *op. cit.* p. 339. and Szász Attila and Sepsi Barnabás “2001 kisebbségpolitikailag fontos belpolitikai eseményei.” [Events in Domestic Politics that Are Salient for the Hungarian Minority – 2001.] in Bodó Barna (ed.) *Romániai magyar évkönyv, 2002.* [Yearbook of the Hungarian Community in Romania, 2002.] p. 363.

²⁵ Cf. Monica Robotin “A Comparative Approach to Minority Participation in Government.” p. 204.

²⁶ See Szász Alpár Zoltán “Discourses on the Status Law.” in Bakk Miklós and Bodó Barna *Discourse on the Status Law.* p. 189.

²⁷ Bodó Barna ‘Státustól státusig.’ [From status to status.] pp.16–17. cited *ibid.* pp. 191–192.

the ethnic minority in question is an allegation made by Ioan Rus (Minister of Internal Affairs) in a document called *Social Democratic Program for Transsylvania* and the political consequences of this statement. In this paper, minister Rus argued that the Romanian state institutions are unable to exercise authority in counties where the majority of the population is made up of ethnic Hungarians. Needless to say, the allegation is strange because a top official of the governing party seems to blame for his own fault the voters of their ally. The final act of the debate initiated by this document was a motion of no-confidence submitted by all three opposition parties (the DP, the NLP and the GRP) regarding the inability of the government to rule Harghita and Covasna county.²⁸

The third noteworthy issue is the creation of economic regions for purposes of development in Romania. This is not necessarily a specific demand of the Hungarian minority—fact proved by the various divisions in Romanian public opinion when it comes to this matter. Yet, the latest events and debates suggest that the SDP and the DAHR do not see eye to eye in questions of economic and regional development. The 2001 protocol is very laconic in these respects. It contains only two (quasi-)sentences with no specific. This very short section of the agreement stresses only that localities inhabited by national minorities should receive a fair amount of financial support from the government.

All in all, public debate and political life were areas of competition where tensions between Romanians and Hungarians, as well as the government party and the DAHR surfaced. Only one “hot issue” received a partly acceptable solution: prime ministers Adrian Năstase and Viktor Orbán met in Budapest on the 22nd of December and signed an agreement regarding the implementation of the Hungarian “status law” in Romania.

2002 and the second protocol

The second agreement of cooperation between the SDP and the DAHR is a lengthy text, roughly three times as long as the previous protocol. Its 170 quasi-sentences are grouped under five headings, which are not policy domains as before. The first four target general matters regarding the relationship of the two parties, their cooperation on parliamentary and local level as well as the support lent by the DAHR to the governing party in what regards the implementation of the former’s governmental program. The last section stipulates procedures for evaluating the implementation of the agreement. The increase of the percentage of neutral statements also hints to the generality of the 2002 protocol (See *Table 4*).

²⁸ Events recorded by Szász Attila *op. cit.* p. 344.

Table 4. Results of the Content Analysis of the Protocol for 2002

Policy issue	Number of occurrences	Relative frequency (%)
Neutral (uncodable) statements	39	22.94
Decentralisation	15	8.82
Property-restitution: positive	12	7.06
Welfare state expansion	11	6.47
Education in Hungarian language ^{a)}	10	5.88
Economic goals	10	5.88
Rights, protection and identity of national minorities ^{a)}	8	4.71
Minorities abroad ^{b)}	7	4.12
Hungarian language culture ^{a)}	6	3.53
European Community: positive	6	3.53
Military: positive	6	3.53
Social justice	5	2.94
Multiculturalism: positive	4	2.35
Technology and infrastructure	4	2.35
International legal instruments and treaties	4	2.35
Rehabilitation and compensation (in order to redress the wrongdoings of the communist regime)	3	1.76
Freedom and human rights	2	1.18
Privatisation: positive	2	1.18
(Non-state) social ownership: positive	2	1.18
Governmental and administrative efficiency	2	1.18
Minorities inland ^{c)}	2	1.18
Agriculture	1	0.59
Military: negative	1	0.59
Transition to democracy	1	0.59
Law and order	1	0.59
Internationalism: positive	1	0.59
Constitutionalism: positive	1	0.59
Political corruption	1	0.59
Social harmony	1	0.59
(Economic) incentives	1	0.59
Relationships with Hungary: positive	1	0.59
TOTAL	170	100

^{a)} Special *party-specific categories* created by the coder. (Since this is a case study, the requirement of specificity prevails over the requirement of preserving the unitary comparative coding frame.)

^{b)} This category refers to minorities whose “mother country” or “kin state” is another country.

^{c)} This category refers to minorities whose “mother country” or “kin state” is Romania, i.e., Romanians minorities inhabiting the neighbouring countries.

The table shows a somewhat modified order of priorities, or—in other words—a different policy focus as compared to the agreement signed for the previous year. Administrative decentralisation became the major concern, followed by the restitution of property and welfare state expansion. The presence of each of these policy goals on the top of the list has a separate explanation. The seemingly endless regionalism debate and, particularly, the country's eagerness to join the European Union—which means legal harmonisation and inclusion of the *acquis communautaire* in national legislation—force the Government to speak of decentralisation even if they hardly mean it. In fact, most post-1989 cabinets exhibited a centralist–etatist attitude in administrative matters. Perhaps, the Năstase-cabinet surpasses all its predecessors in this respect. Hence, conjunctural reasons and Transylvanian–Hungarian regionalist pressures may have put this issue on the top of the list. The fact that property restitution continues to be important seems to signal numerous hindrances and that the process is arduous and progresses extremely slowly. (One must not forget that this issue has been—in various forms and contexts—on the agenda for at least seven years already.) Finally, welfare state expansion seems to be a genuine concern of the social democratic government. Nevertheless, analysts and voters alike cannot but hope that the Romanian national economy which has just been showing the first signs of recovery can generate sufficient tax revenues to finance such ambitions.

In sum, the issues that can be viewed as special Hungarian demands carry a weight of 28.24% in the new document, while only 20.59% of the policy claims tackle ethno-cultural diversity. (Administrative decentralisation, would raise this percentage with 8.82 points.) Two explanations could account for this situation. The bargaining power of the DAHR vs the government party weakened considerably, or the leaders of the Hungarian party saw that the SDP encounters serious difficulties in fulfilling their demands and asked even less hoping that promises will be kept. If so, at the end of the year the party could have reported the most significant success ever. Ethnic Hungarian critics of the protocols often accused DAHR leaders for omitting to negotiate deadlines with the government party. One must admit, such a thing is hardly feasible in (Romanian) politics. Yet, the party—as stipulated in paragraph 6 of the document—promised to refrain from submitting motions levelled at the cabinet. This creates an imbalance in the DAHR–SDP relationship and a serious disadvantage to the

Hungarian party. Cast in party theoretical terms: if the DAHR has ever had some *blackmail* or *veto potential*²⁹ over the government party it has voluntarily given it away.

Legislative measures and politics in 2002

If one wanted to measure *policy successes* attained by the DAHR in 2002 in legislative terms, the most notable result could be the enactment of the anti-discrimination law. Another positive aspect is the implementation of previously adopted legislation on the usage of multilingual signs indicating the names of settlements.³⁰ Considering the small, punctual results that have been obtained and the long list of “non-achievements” (hindrances to use one’s native language in public institutions, especially before the law; the stalling of the property restitution process and various educational matters starting from the special textbooks for pupils belonging to national minorities in order to facilitate them the learning of the Romanian language, through learning Romanian history and geography in one’s mother tongue up to the (re)establishment of the/a publicly funded Hungarian language university) there is even less reason for optimism than at the end of 2001. The fact that Csángós³¹, their education and “right” to the Hungarian language are still a hot and debated issue on the agenda

Having said that the balance of the last year is not positive for the Hungarian minority, let us turn at the end of our discussion to analysing how Romanian–Hungarian relationships have evolved since the latest elections and to assessing various legislative–political changes that occurred in the last two years.

Hungarian–Romanian relations after 2000

It is interesting to examine how Hungarian–Romanian relations interethnic and interstate relations have evolved since the November 2000 elections. Social scientific conventional wisdom in Romania holds that the participation of the DAHR in the cabinets that have been formed during the 1996–2000 term improved the relationships of the two ethnic groups and I see no reason for challenging this conviction. However, the cooperation between the

²⁹ Cf. Giovanni Sartori “A Typology of Party Systems.” in Peter Mair (ed.) *The West European Party System*. (Oxford Readings in Government and Politics.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. p. 321.

³⁰ There are exceptions, however. The most notable or notorious case of disregarding the law is Gheorghe Funar’s refusal to implement it.

³¹ Some Romanian historians and linguists still argues the Romanian ancestry of this archaic ethnic Hungarian group that lives outside Transsylvania.

Hungarian and the “social democratised” Communist successor party has been severely criticised within both ethnic communities. Moreover, the Hungarian “law of benefits” elicited instinctive reactions and lengthy polemics in Romania. Under these circumstances, one can expect a deterioration of both interethnic and interstate relationships.

In terms of the public’s perception on the evolution of interethnic relations, survey data confirms this expectation. Ethnic Romanian respondents considered end of July 2001, just after the law has been adopted and received harsh criticism from Romanian authorities, that Romanian–Hungarian interethnic relationships have worsened as compared to the previous period (1996–2000).³² End of November, a month after the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) made public its interesting opinion in which it stated that both parties—the proponents and the critics of the law—are to a certain extent right and called for intergovernmental negotiations, *Metro Media Transilvania* (MMT) reached the same conclusion. Furthermore, MMT found that the relationships between the two states have also deteriorated.³³ Nonetheless, the Orbán–Năstase meeting at the end of 2001, the victory of the Hungarian Socialist Party at the 2002 Hungarian elections, the nomination of a Hungarian prime minister who was born in Transsylvania and speaks Romanian as well as the fact that both heads of government celebrated Romania’s national holiday in Budapest might easily improve intergovernmental and interstate relations.³⁴

The (un)democratising effect of recent developments

Unfortunately, as compared to what can be said about the DAHR’s participation in former cabinets, one cannot speak of the democratising effect of the SDP–DAHR collaboration. First, of all, as I said earlier, the DAHR is currently supporting a centralist–etatist–paternalist party, a political force that can hardly be called a friend of liberal democracy and open society. A number of illiberal and undemocratic laws or acts containing such provisions that have been adopted recently by the SDP with the assistance of the DAHR can be given as examples in support of this admittedly strong claim:³⁵

³² Bodó Barna “Felelősség és törvény.” [Responsibility and law.] in Bakk Miklós and Bodó Barna *op. cit.* p. 54.

³³ See *Barometrul relațiilor interetnice. Noiembrie 2001.* pp. 18., 33. or *Barometer of Interethnic Relations. November 2001.* pp. 32., 60.

³⁴ It should be noted that both prime ministers have been strongly criticized for the celebration, even if the attacks leveled against them have had a totally different contents.

³⁵ I am grateful to Bodó Barna for helping me to compile this short list.

- The law of classified information interpreted the notion rather broadly—a “totalitarian reflex”—and contained ambiguous provisions. This might have put journalists in a delicate position and limited the freedom of the press.
- The “law on replies” is clearly an infringement upon the freedom of the press since it is envisaged to protect government officials and authorities against various revelations of investigative journalists, who are practically exposed to libel suits as a result of the law.
- The law on the organisation and functioning of archives seriously limits the accessibility of research materials, including sensitive data that are of interest to ethnic Hungarian scientists.
- The legislative package regarding corruption saw the solution in the establishment of institutions instead of trying to put a halt to negative social phenomena and take measures against culprits(, including SDP politicians).
- Registration provisions in the initially adopted variant of the law on political parties created extremely high entry barriers into the political market.

However, in some of the above cases, like the law on classified information and the law on parties, the Government withdrew certain stipulations and corrected the errors. In other cases, legislation entered into force as adopted.

Another set of undemocratic aspects concern the DAHR itself. Several dysfunctions, or as some critics say no functioning at all, started to characterise recently the internal public sphere of the party. Moreover, the frequent negotiations with the government party shifted the balance of internal power from the Council of Representatives (the top decision-making body of the party) towards the Operative Council (the body grouping the main DAHR-leaders). Hence, strong oligarchical tendencies and functioning became defining features of the Hungarian party in Romania.

Summary

The conclusions of a paper dealing with a “laggard” country as part of a book that compares post-communist states can hardly be optimistic. One would have probably expected significant improvements as compared to 2000. However, the last three years have neither

been a success story in Romania in terms of democratisation, nor in terms of minority rights. A line of argument holds that democratisation should come first and the question of minority rights should be addressed later. The last three years of Romanian politics seem to suggest the following lesson:

- democracy cannot progress without the management of ethno-cultural diversity and guarantees for minority rights, nor can minorities achieve their political goals under “imperfectly” democratic auspices;
- both democracy and minority rights should be of equal concern to political forces within the nominal group and the main ethnic minority alike.