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# **Hungarian Neighbouring policy towards Romania from 1989**

## **I. Introduction**

I chose this topic because of I am interested in the existing relations between Hungary and Romania from several point of view, e. g. regarding the question of neighbourship, the situation of minorities, the possibilities for mutual cooperation.

In this essay I would like to introduce Hungary's neighbouring policy towards Romania since 1989. 1989 is a kind of watershed regarding the relations of the two countries. We can speak about "real" neighbouring policy just after the transition. I would like to present its main objectives, hindrances which have occurred in the last 20 years.

Furthermore, this essay tries to summarize the necessity of neighbouring policy during the Euro-Atlantic integration process. The case of Hungarian minorities will also be picked up, as dealing with neighbouring policy we cannot pass over the question of their situation.

I try to underline those events which have determinant and main role in the process of composition of neighbouring policy. Of course, this essay cannot specify each of them.

### **I. 1. Definitions**

Regarding this topic the first problem which occurs is the definition of such terms as nation policy, neighbourhood policy, minority policy, etc. Subsequently, I would like to give a definition for these key terms, because later on it is essential to use them correctly.

When we use the term of *neighbouring policy* we talk about the relations of the country concerned towards its neighbours. It is generally part of the foreign policy because of the

geography each country has to deal with this problem. We can speak about good neighbouring policy in that case when the parties can handle the common issues successfully. It does not mean that there are no problematic questions at all, rather that there is a common interest to solve these issues.

In case of Hungary the issue of neighbouring policy is inseparable from minority policy and regional cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Both of them have to rely on humanity and stability. *Minority policy* is the instrument of the government to deal with the issue of different minorities within the borders of Hungary as well as to handle the questions related to the Hungarian minorities beyond the borders.

*Regional policy* became more important after the change of regime in 1989-90, because on the one hand till that it was totally unimaginable and on the other hand there was no possibility for the East Central European countries to form a regional coalition with the dropout of the Soviet Union. After the transition regional cooperation has got more sense and it could intensify the neighbouring policy. As we will see the EU membership offers great possibilities regarding regional policy.

The term of '*nation policy*' is a particular expression in this region. It refers to one part of the minority policy, because nation policy deals with the national interests of Hungarians inside and outside Hungary.<sup>2</sup> In this sense there is a debate between state interest and national interest. State interest implies the interests of the Hungarian citizens within the borders of Hungary while national interest includes additionally the interests of Hungarian minorities beyond the borders. Nation policy generally links the question of identity and the conditions essential for maintaining that identity so it does not mean the question of national belonging to borders and territories.

Nation policy can only be realized by an effective neighbouring policy<sup>3</sup>. This principle should not be forgotten. Since nation policy is a constitutional responsibility of Hungary, moreover, for the Hungarian public the issue of Hungarian minority is a crucial point, the question of nation policy is not negligible when we analyze neighbouring policy. Consequently I cannot separate the question of minorities from the neighbouring policy, but I deal with each of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Németh (2002), pp. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Kántor (2004), pp. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Kiss J. (2007), pp. 5.

## **II. Late Kádár era (The end of the eighties)**

### **II. 1. Antecedents**

Since the communist policy neglected the issue of nationalism it did not deal with the problem of national minorities. The ignoring did not solve the problem at all, but it prolonged it. It resulted in that Nicolae Ceausescu the Romanian party leader dared to make the situation of Hungarians living in Romania worse and worse. After that he came into power in 1965 he dissolved the Hungarian Autonomic Territory. In 1972 he announced the national homogenization program. Its aim was the total elimination of minorities in Romania and the establishment of the Romanian nation-state.

It must be admitted that the relationship between Hungary and Romania became tenser partly because of these steps. Since the bilateral negotiations were unsuccessful the aim of Hungarian foreign policy was to “achieve the international denunciation of the Romanian policy in international forums directly”<sup>4</sup>. The main argument was the issue of human rights which was reasonable as the Hungarian government was the main promoter of the Helsinki process within the Eastern bloc. Although it corresponded to the expectations of Western countries in that time, nothing happened concerning the situation of Hungarians in Romania.

In March 1987 at the Vienna follow-up meeting of the conference on European Security and Cooperation Hungary forthrightly expressed its desire for the denunciation of Romania by supporting the Canadian proposal which targeted the extension of the rights of minorities in Europe.

### **II. 2. ‘Systematization’ and its consequences**

In the beginning of 1988 Ceausescu announced the so-called ‘systematization’ program. Formally its aim was the enlargement of bearing surface, but it was obvious that its goal was the final elimination of Hungarian minorities by destroying thousands of villages. These operations resulted in a huge number of Romanian emigrants which motivated both the

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<sup>4</sup> Békés (2002), pp. 30.

Hungarian government and the Hungarian public to do something.<sup>5</sup> The most enormous public protestation was held at the Heroes Square in Budapest.

In consequence of the Soviet pressure and initiative, a meeting of secretary generals of the two countries was held in Arad on 28 August 1988. Ceausescu did not want to make any compromise so the meeting was unsuccessful, which aggravated the problems. In July 1989 in parallel with the session of the Political Consultative Body of the Warsaw Pact in Bucharest the Hungarian politicians (chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party Rezső Nyers, Prime Minister Miklós Németh and foreign minister Gyula Horn) had an ‘unofficial meeting’ with Ceausescu. That time Hungarians leaders had a much more powerful negotiating position and in this occasion they were those who imposed the conditions of the possible agreement:

“the Romanian Side should cease its discrimination against the Hungarian minority as well as the propaganda and the military threats against Hungary, it should abort the fulfillment of the systematization project in the regions inhabited by Hungarians, it should allow Hungarian cultural products into the country, and it should stop the humiliating harassment of masses of Hungarian tourists at the Hungarian-Romanian border. In addition, Gyula Horn indicated that if necessary, Hungary would propose international supervision of the situation of the national minorities and the systematization plan.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the participants agreed on further negotiations, the events of the transition in Romania did not let them to materialize. Right after the ‘1989 episode’ the germs of cooperation were evolved: the border control was normalized, new border crossing points were established, and the armies had common actions, although these were diametrically opposed to the official relations.<sup>7</sup>

### **III. New direction of Hungarian Foreign Policy (1990-1996)**

After the peaceful change of regime the Antall-government (1990-1993) replaced the sovereignty of the country, furthermore, it declared the principles of the Hungarian Foreign Policy. Since then the targets were not changed a lot, but different governments gave different interpretations for them. The main principles or the so-called triad are as follows: political,

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<sup>5</sup> In March 1989 Hungary ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – she was the first in the Eastern bloc.

<sup>6</sup> Békés (2002), pp. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Salat (2004), pp. 548.

economic and military integration into the West; the policy of good neighbourly and regional cooperation; and the protection of Hungarian minority rights.

### **III.1. All beginnings are difficult**

At the very start the establishment of Hungarian-Romanian good relationship had several obstacles. For the Antall-government the precondition of the establishment of good neighbourly relations was the proper treatment of Hungarian minorities within the countries concerned, including Romania. Moreover, after the end of the Cold War, the nationalism was revived in this region, which aggravated the already existing problems regarding the situation of minorities and caused in several tensions. Finally, it must be admitted that the Euro-Atlantic integration was considered as the most important priority for the East Central European countries, which meant that other problems like neighbouring policy, minority rights, etc. had only second-rank importance. Consequently, the development of the neighbouring policy was mainly the answer for an external need from the point of view of our neighbours including Romania.

### **III. 2. International pressure**

For Western countries the preservation of stability was regarded as the most important goal in East Central Europe. During the Yugoslav wars Hungary did several efforts in order to prove its capability for maintaining peaceful and effective relations with her neighbours.

In 1993 in the European Council Meeting in Copenhagen the French Prime Minister Balladur initiated the preparation of a pact “directed towards assuring the application of the principles agreed by the European countries with regard to respect of borders and rights of minorities”<sup>8</sup>. It was accepted as the “European Union in favour of a Pact on Stability in Europe”. Its aim was to dispose the countries to regularize their neighbourly relationships in the form of bilateral agreements, which contains guarantees on the invariability of borders and minority rights. The pact was inaugurated in 1994 and was accepted in 1995. It was a huge development but the Declaration was not legally binding. It was an enormous defect. Although it contains the list of good-neighbourliness and cooperation agreements and arrangements, there is no sanction for the violation of the prescription.

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<sup>8</sup> *European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993, Presidency Conclusions*, 8. Pact on Stability in Europe, p. 16. Vide at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/72921.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/72921.pdf).

The so-called Copenhagen criteria<sup>9</sup> also defined the eligibility of a country for the EU accession. It is important, because they emphasize the protection of minority rights as well.

Hungary and Romania perceived the need of the settlement of their relations in an agreement, but the negotiations were moving on quite slowly. The situation was worse and worse because the Romanian government partly consisted of nationalists who did not want to make any compromise.

### **III. 3. Turnaround in neighbouring policy**

In 1994 after the parliamentary elections in Hungary a Socialist-Liberal government (1994-98) was formed. Gyula Horn became the Prime Minister. It was a turnaround of Hungarian neighbouring policy, because the government declared that minority policy is just one element of its neighbouring policy. However, it was quite difficult to reach a real breakthrough. The merit of the Horn government is that it managed to reach an agreement with Romania. Although it was partly due to the international situation, the government revived the process of negotiations and reached successful results regarding the relations of the two countries.

On 5 August 1995 Romanian President Ion Iliescu delivered a speech in which he proposed the solution of problems between Hungary and Romania for historical reconciliation, patterned on the Franco-German model.<sup>10</sup> This proposal failed again, on the one hand because of Romanians did not want to accept the so-called Recommendation 1201 (1993) of Council of Europe on minority rights.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand several articles of the Constitution of Romania were also hindrances for the compromise, as declared the unity of the Romanian nation without any respect of the minority communities.

But the necessity of an agreement was urgent for both countries since the NATO Foreign Ministers' Summit would be held in December 1996 to name the states invited to the organization. Both countries believed that in case of having solved the problems they would be able to join to it. Nevertheless it was unimaginable to reach this target, because the nationalist parties in Romania and the upcoming elections seemed insurmountable obstacles.

### **III. 4. Signature of the Basic Treaty**

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<sup>9</sup> Vide the Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria), retrieved on 14.12.2009 from [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Gyurcsik (1998), pp. 543.

<sup>11</sup> Vide RECOMMENDATION 1201 (1993) of Council of Europe. Retrieved on 13.12.2009 from <http://www.forost.ungarisches-institut.de/pdf/19930201-1.pdf>

For that very reason on 13-14 August 1996 the announcement of an agreement was a real 'surprise'. The Basic Treaty between Hungary and Romania on Good Neighbourly Relations and Friendly Cooperation<sup>12</sup> was signed on 16 September 1996. It contains mutual recognition of borders; furthermore, Hungary renounced all territorial claims to Transylvania. In the same time Romania reiterated its respects for the rights of its minorities.

The parties agreed on mutual support of their Euro-Atlantic integration process. Two countries decided to develop their economic and trade cooperation and relations<sup>13</sup>. Other forms of cooperation are also objectives of the treaty, e.g. in the field of S&T; on regional level; in the field of Danubian shipping; culture, science and education; preservation of cultural heritage; health care; mass media. In Article 14 they insist the elimination of xenophobia and the establishment of tolerance and understanding between citizens. In addition, as a real breakthrough, the Recommendation 1201 became accepted by Romania as a legal obligation. The Treaty contains the rights of minorities, besides, the way of implementation of these rights.

Although collective rights of minorities are rejected, the Treaty is a milestone of the Hungarian Romanian relations.

Even though an intergovernmental expert commission was charged with the monitoring of the implementation of the Treaty, the control mechanism of the agreement was pretty weak. The composition of the commission was often controversial; consequently its function was not satisfying. After that the situation of minorities has improved less than it was expected, but otherwise the relations between the two countries began to develop.

#### **IV. Launching of deeper cooperation (1996-2004)**

In November 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Romania. Subsequently, a Democratic Convention was formed as the majority of the legislature and it contained the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR), which is the party of

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<sup>11</sup> Vide <http://gyula.mae.ro/index.php?lang=en&id=50107> (EN)

<sup>13</sup> In Article 8 the parties admitted that they would „pay particular attention to the cooperation in the coordinated, international standard-conform development of their national and interconnected infrastructures, including their energy systems, transport and telecommunication networks.” This aim got importance after the EU-accession.

Hungarian minorities. In the next few years the neighbouring relations developed a lot, because the presence of DAHR in the government was a real pressure on the executive branch.

#### **IV. 1. A more emphasized nation policy: Status Law**

In 1998 Hungarian presidential elections were held and it resulted in the establishment of a conservative government (1998-2002). Viktor Orbán became the Hungarian Prime Minister. Regarding neighbouring policy it meant that the executive branch put more emphasize on the nation policy patterned the Antall-government. The international circumstances were quite positive: Hungary was on its way to the accession of NATO and EU, by Basic Treaty Romania was not only neutralized<sup>14</sup>, but there were good relations between the Heads of Governments of the two countries.

The Orbán-government decided to institutionalize the Hungarian-Hungarian relationships, besides, they wanted to grant more support to the Hungarians living beyond the borders. In consequence they prepared the so-called Status law. Its aim was to give support on the field of education, science or culture. Additionally it provides the recourse of health care insurance, as well as financial support for the families if their child(ren) go(es) to a Hungarian educational institution.<sup>15</sup>

The Law on Hungarians Living in Neighbouring Countries was prepared and accepted without any efficient consultation or any agreement with the neighbouring countries, including Romania. Since the law has extra-territorial applicability the avoidance of consultation complicated the relations of Hungary with its neighbours.

Anyway, the law was accepted with a 92.4 % majority, which is not common in the Hungarian legislation<sup>16</sup>.

#### **IV. 2. Special agreement with Romania**

After a long process of negotiations in December 2001 the Agreement on Understanding was signed by the two Prime Ministers (Orbán and Nastase). It contains 3 main parts: firstly, the Parties insisted the enhancement of mutual support during the Euro-Atlantic Integration; the

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<sup>14</sup> Dunay (2008), pp. 203.

<sup>15</sup> Szilágyi (2001)

<sup>16</sup> No.LXII Act of 2001

second part deals with the question of the law concerned; and thirdly, they agreed on further development of Hungarian Romanian relations. The Parties accepted the proposals of Venice Commission<sup>17</sup> word by word. This is how they withheld the possibility of any kind of illegal regulation. Over and above, they decided that preferences on employment would be available for every Romanian citizen, not only for Hungarian minorities<sup>18</sup>.

The Parties discussed the opportunities of trade, investment and minority problems as well, nevertheless, they agreed on the necessity of general, bilateral top-level meetings. Since then the Hungarian Romanian relationships changed for better and better, although there are still some crucial points. This agreement improved Romanian Hungarian relations ostensibly, which is necessary in order to reach stability in East Central Europe.

#### **IV. 3. Redefinition of neighbouring policy in order to meet EU criteria**

From 2002 Hungary had a socialist-liberal government. It meant that the focus was much more on the neighbouring policy than on the nation policy<sup>19</sup>. There was a big challenge for the government to form its policy to meet the EU requirements. This was the same in case of neighbouring and minority policy. The oncoming EU accession provided extra benefits for the neighbouring states, which meant more possibilities for the cooperation.

Nevertheless, in 2003 the government announced the necessity of the modification of the Status Law. It caused violent protests from the side of the ex-governmental parties. Even so the government submitted and passed the amendment of the law, and made an agreement with Romania according to the modifications. The aim was to urge Hungarian minorities to stay on their homeland where they were going to be supported to preserve their culture, national identity.<sup>20</sup>

### **V. Relations within the European Union**

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<sup>17</sup> During the preparation of the law, Romania and Slovakia declared that the country of citizenship has the main responsibility for its citizen. After the examination the Venice Commission stated that the kin-state had to do its best for the national minorities and précised what and how it can accomplish it in a legal sense. The Commission emphasized on cultural preferences towards the minorities but in effect all kinds of preferences were acceptable with the condition of legitimacy. Vide Németh (2002), pp. 12.

<sup>18</sup>Vide <http://www.jogiforum.hu/hirek/3109>

<sup>19</sup> As for Hungarian minorities are concerned the politics changed towards them: social-economic-cultural relationships got more support while the unity of Hungarian nation got less popularity from the side of government.

<sup>20</sup> Vide <http://www.jogiforum.hu/hirek/9270>

The European Union has several opportunities for the development and improvement of cooperation between Hungary and its neighbouring countries, including Romania. Several joint programmes aimed to enhance regional cross-border cooperation. The fact that Hungary joined the Union in 2004 and Romania just 3 years later was a bit problematic, because some envisaged the new iron curtain. Fortunately it did not realize even though Hungary's membership in Schengen zone complicates sometimes the crossing of the border.

### **V. 1. Question of minorities**

The hope that the EU will solve the question of minority rights was unsubstantiated since within the framework of European institutions there is no single uniform system regarding their situation. Countries who want to join the European Union have to meet the above mentioned Copenhagen Criteria<sup>21</sup>. The following requirements are listed among political conditions: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Many accused the socialist-liberal government because during accession negotiations Romania was not forced to guarantee wider rights for minorities based on the criteria.

In 2003 the government and Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy addressed the necessity of the improvement of minority rights within the Community. Furthermore, during the elaboration of the Constitutional Treaty there was a possibility to enforce the protection of minority rights including collective rights<sup>22</sup>.

After the enlargement of the Union another forum became an instrument for the law enforcement of minority rights. In the European Parliament the national deputies can fight for them. The Parliament has another surplus regarding the possibility of a closer cooperation between the members of the parliament from different nations.

So far the European Union should be the community of communities, but the neighbouring countries of Hungary do not want to accept it. Anyway, the EU accession gave opportunity for a kind of re-unification of the Hungarian nation. In 2007 the nation policy was reformed

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<sup>21</sup>For further details vide [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately after the French and Danish referendum which rejected the Constitutional Treaty, it was rejected. During the elaboration of the quasi successor of the Constitutional Treaty the minority rights were dropped out from the text, so the Treaty of Lisbon does not include them. Additionally, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union did not become part of the Treaty, consequently it is not legally binding.

by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its main objective was to meet the EU requirement and within the Union to enforce closer cooperation with neighbouring countries and organizations of these countries in order to enforce the regional development policy.<sup>23</sup>

## **V. 2. Recognition and realization common interests**

The recognition of the necessity and the perspectives of neighbouring cooperation facilitated the further deepening of relations as having common objectives, common interests. Since 2005 there are annual meetings of the ministers of foreign affairs of Romania and Hungary.

Additionally, Hungary and Romania jointly asked EU support for several projects, for instance for the construction of a motorway which was to connect Budapest and Bucharest through Transylvania. This project was realized successfully. Since 2007 Romania and Hungary have harmonized their National Development Strategies. It is necessary for the exploitation of EU resources.

On the other hand there are many lower level initiations which are supported by the government. The history of the Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co-operation Programme is also a success story. Since 1996 the project had several stages which were sewed up. Its aim on the one hand is to improve the key conditions of joint, sustainable development of the cooperation area, on the other hand is to strengthen social and economic cohesion of the border area.<sup>24</sup> Hence, there are other common issues like environmental protection, energy supply, gas pipeline links<sup>25</sup> and transport networks<sup>26</sup> which moves on the cooperation.

The role of non-government organizations are improving and NGOs are getting greater importance in the formation and realization of neighbouring policy. Multinational companies, research institutes, the Churches can add surplus to the intensification of Hungarian Romanian relations.

Within the Union regarding the enlargement strategy Hungary and Romania have common interests in Balkan policy. Recently the Serbian minister of foreign affairs has participated in the high-level meetings. The main objective of the last meeting held in July 2009 was the

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<sup>23</sup> This kind of nation policy had a huge problem which is the determined and expressed actions for the situation of minorities. Regarding Romania it did not cause major problems, but Slovakia exploited this approached and violated the rights of Hungarian minorities several times.

<sup>24</sup> [http://huro-cbc.eu/en/objectives\\_and\\_priorities](http://huro-cbc.eu/en/objectives_and_priorities)

<sup>25</sup> E.g. the Nabucco project is essential for each party.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. the construction is planned of Vienna-Budapest-Bucharest express rail line.

support of the EU accession of Serbia.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore they decided to elaborate the European Danube Strategy which will approximate the countries concerned.

Although the Romanian parties have lost their radical nationalist views and propaganda in the last decade, the opposition of the national and Europeanist forces still exist, which can block sometimes the efforts of neighbouring policy.

## **VI. Summary**

We can summarize that Hungarian Romanian relations have improved significantly in the past decade. Especially since 1996 Romanian government did huge efforts to get closer to the Euro-Atlantic integration, which resulted in improvement of its neighbouring relations. Although different approaches of Hungarian government changed the priorities of neighbouring policy, they never rejected the necessity and the importance of neighbouring policy.

Regarding the minority rights, nowadays the situation of Hungarian minorities is much better than it was 20 years ago, even though there are still several incomplete problems. The EU accession has provided wider opportunities for further cooperation which have to be exploited successively in the near future.

This positive process shows us that Hungary is able to cooperate with its neighbours if they are ready for mutual actions. As it is mentioned before each change of government resulted in the change of emphasize between neighbouring policy and nation policy, in case of Romania the outcomes of the whole process are definitely positive. It means that Hungary could – more or less – exceed the so-called Trianon syndrome and is able to cooperate with its neighbours – partly in order to improve the situation of Hungarian minorities in countries concerned. So the image of a chauvinist and revisionist Hungary is absolutely groundless, even if our northern neighbour wants to present us like that and what western countries see is the regular quarrel between Hungary and Slovakia.

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<sup>27</sup> Vide [http://kitekinto.hu/karpat-medence/2009/07/20/magyar-roman-szerb\\_kulugyminiszteri\\_talalkozo](http://kitekinto.hu/karpat-medence/2009/07/20/magyar-roman-szerb_kulugyminiszteri_talalkozo)

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