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**Sean Jefferson Crawford  
Honors Senior Project  
PSC 480  
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## Hungarians in Transylvania: A Struggle for Equality

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, analysts throughout the West immediately started theorizing about the myriad conflicts that could arise in the resulting power vacuum. Not the least among these potential conflicts was a seventy-year-old dispute between the Republics of Hungary and Romania over the region known as Transylvania. In the political upheaval following the 1989 revolutions, many feared that nationalist sentiment would win over in one or both of the Central European states and that they would once again go to war. This dispute had not disappeared even during the forty-five-year period of Soviet domination, and the war in the former Yugoslavia stood as a lesson on what could happen to such disputes in the absence of stabilizing, repressive force.

From the very end of the period of Soviet domination in Central Europe, though, Hungary and Romania were reaching out for integration into Western alliances. Many began to claim that this wish for integration would spare the region a "shooting war" and perhaps bring about a peaceful resolution to the dispute. It is my intention to evaluate this claim by setting forth an account of the origins of the dispute and exploring the policies pursued by both Hungarian and Romanian governments regarding the Transylvanian question.

# I. HISTORY OF THE DISPUTE: ANTIQUITY TO THE END OF WORLD WAR II

*Treat newcomers well, and hold them in honour, for they bring fresh knowledge and arms into the country: they are an ornament and support of the throne, for a country where only one language and one custom prevail, is weak and fragile.*

-King Stephen of Hungary, c.1030 C. E.<sup>1</sup>

From the earliest references to it in ancient works, Transylvania is known to have changed hands quite frequently until being consolidated under the rule of the Kingdom of Hungary. Accounts differ as to when this consolidation took place, but generally place the beginning of Hungarian rule at or around the beginning of the eleventh century C.E.<sup>2</sup> Before this time Transylvania was ruled by a variety of tribes in the Carpathian Basin, including Scythians, Goths, and Mongols based in Bulgaria. According to Romanian historians, early Romanian culture (derived from Dacians and Romans) was already well-established by the time of Hungarian domination.<sup>3</sup> According to these accounts, a people who could be called Romanians lived in and around Transylvania from the eighth or ninth century onward, though they never held power over the region.<sup>4</sup> The official Romanian position is that Transylvania is the heart and the birthplace of Romanian culture. While the Romanian people never ruled Transylvania until 1920, they hold that Romanian culture grew there under the domination of other nomadic tribes and foreign empires.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. W. Seton-Watson, A History of The Roumanians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 19; and The Danubian Research Centre and The Transylvanian World Federation, Documented Facts and Figures on Transylvania (Astor, FL: The Danubian Press, 1977), p. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Pascu, A History of Transylvania (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth look at the "official" Romanian position on the history of Transylvania, see S. Mehedenti, What Is Transylvania? trans. Dora Kennedy (Miami

Most Hungarian accounts differ in that they deny Daco-Roman continuity in Transylvania. The Hungarian histories either omit any reference to the presence of Romanians in Transylvania until after the onset of Magyar (Hungarian) rule, or they openly deny that Romanians or their ancestors inhabited the area continuously from the period of Roman rule until the present. The latter hold that the Daco-Romans who would later become Romanians left Transylvania with the Romans and were replaced mostly by Slavs.<sup>6</sup> One fact that does not appear to be in dispute is the Hungarian nobility's effort to attract foreign settlers to Transylvania. The Hungarian settlers, known as Szeklers or Szekely Hungarians, who moved into Transylvania after the conquest were not numerous enough to secure the borders of the region from other tribes. So in an effort to consolidate their hold on the territory, the Hungarians allowed foreigners (mostly Germans and Romanians) to farm and tend their herds in Transylvania.

Communities of Hungarians, Germans and Romanians coexisted in Transylvania for hundreds of years without significant conflict. If there was any program of "Magyarization" pursued by the Hungarian kings, as alleged by some historians, then it was terribly ineffective. Issues of nationality seem to have been subdued somewhat by issues of class and economics, as Hungarian and Romanian peasants worked together against their respective nobles, who also unified, in uprisings during the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> While the common Romanian people were not allowed to govern themselves, virtually none of the common people (Hungarians included) were allowed to govern themselves.

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Beach: Romanian Historical Studies, 1986). This work and Pascu's A History of Transylvania are examples of the official Romanian view of Transylvanian history during the Communist era. To some extent, this position still prevails in Romania today.

<sup>6</sup> Gyorgy Gyorffy, Peter Hanak, Laszlo Makkai, and Andras Mocsy, "Who Were The People Living in The Carpathian Basin Before The Hungarian Conquest?" trans. Thomas Szendrey, in Transylvania and The Theory of Daco-Roman-Rumanian Continuity ed. Louis L. Lote (Rochester: Committee of Transylvania, 1980), p. 42-54.

<sup>7</sup> Seton-Watson, A History of The Roumanians, p. 101.

Power was in the hands of the nobility, which was both Hungarian and Romanian by ethnicity.

Though Transylvania later came under the rule of the Turks and then the Habsburgs, the region eventually came to be ruled by the Hungarians again in 1867 when Austria and Hungary entered into the dual monarchy system. Transylvania reunited with Hungary proper and the new Hungarian parliamentary government reassured its German and Romanian inhabitants with a clause in its constitution prohibiting special privileges pertaining to "race, creed, and language."<sup>8</sup> Education and religious worship in German and Romanian remained available until Hungary's loss of Transylvania at the end of World War I.

During the war, Hungary fought on the side of the Central Powers. Romania proclaimed neutrality at first, then entered the war on the side of the Central Powers in 1914. In 1916, as a result of a then-secret pact with the Allied Powers, Romania switched sides in the war and invaded Transylvania. The secret pact guaranteed Romanian possession of Transylvania upon the end of the war. The Romanian invasion of the territory was soon repulsed and Romania was defeated by Germany; but when the Allied Powers were victorious, Transylvania was awarded to Romania in the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. The Trianon decision was bitterly fought by Hungarian diplomats, but to no avail. Hungary found some support in the American camp, which had not been a party to the secret agreement with Romania. President Wilson argued on behalf of the Hungarians for a short time, but gave in to the French and British; the United States had no vested interest in Hungary, so Wilson was willing to let the European plan to divide and weaken Germany's allies prevail.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Danubian Research Centre, Documented Facts and Figures, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Zsuzsa L. Nagy, "Peacemaking After World War I: The Western Democracies and The Hungarian Question," in The Hungarians: A Divided Nation, ed. Stephen Borsody (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), p. 35.

Immediately following the signing of the treaty, the Romanian government set out on a campaign of discrimination against its national minorities. In 1921, a sweeping land reform in Transylvania expropriated the land of many minority property-holders, reassigning it to ethnic Romanians.<sup>10</sup> Lands owned by minority churches were also expropriated and handed over to the Romanian Orthodox Church. At various times during the interwar period, the use of minority languages was discouraged or outlawed, then legalized, then outlawed again.<sup>11</sup> This sort of on-again-off-again political and social repression of Romania's minorities continued for the whole of the interwar period, demoralizing Transylvania's Hungarians and Germans. With the loss of much of their property, their historic churches, and the freedom to celebrate their culture, Romania's minorities were desperate for change when the second World War broke out.

In 1940, the German Reich ordered Romania (which had sworn allegiance to the Reich in 1939) to return northern Transylvania to Hungary, which was also a German ally.<sup>12</sup> In the following years, thousands of ethnic Hungarians still left inside Romania were murdered, beaten, raped or drafted into forced labor camps.<sup>13</sup> This situation continued until both Romania and Hungary attempted to switch sides in the war and join the Allies in 1943. Due to agreements among the Allies, both Central European states would have to address such attempts to the Soviets; but the Soviets were not willing to deal. Hungary's failed attempt to jump ship prompted a German occupation of the country, and Romania was not able to enter the war on the Allies' side until it surrendered to the invading Soviet army and marched beside it through Transylvania and Hungary in 1944.

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<sup>10</sup> Elemer Illyes, National Minorities in Romania: Change in Transylvania (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1982), p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 91-93.

<sup>12</sup> Danubian Research Centre, Documented Facts and Figures, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



The retaking of Transylvania in 1944 marks a historic low point in ethnic relations in the region. Now-victorious Romanian forces committed horrible atrocities on their way through Transylvania, and stories such as the following abound. In 1976, Jeno Orosz gave the following sworn testimony:

In 1944 I was living in Kendilona, Transylvania, where I was born and raised as the son of a Hungarian peasant. In October of that year, I do not remember the exact date but it was in the second part of October, Rumanian soldiers came into our village, led by some Rumanian civilians. First they herded us Hungarians together in front of our church, then they dragged out from the church our preacher, his wife and their two small children. They were naked and bleeding. First they tied our preacher to a tree in front of the church. Then they raped his wife right in front of him and the children. We had to stand there and watch, about fifty of us. Some of the Hungarians in the crowd started cursing, while others prayed aloud. The Rumanian soldiers fired into us, and yelled to be quiet and watch, because the same thing will happen to every damned Hungarian in the country. Every time one of us uttered a sound, one of the soldiers fired a shot into the crowd. Many of us were hit. Five died right there. I got a bullet in my leg, and had to sit down on the ground. But I could see everything. While some of them were still torturing the preacher's wife, who kept on screaming so terrible that I could feel it in my bones, some Rumanian civilians drew knives, and kept throwing them into the naked body of the preacher who was tied to the tree, until they cut him to pieces. Things like that happened everywhere, not just in our village...<sup>14</sup>

At the conclusion of the war, Hungary once again attempted to garner support among the Allies for a reversal of the Trianon borders. The Hungarians were in a very poor bargaining position, though. Their resistance against Russian and Romanian forces retaking Transylvania, though forced by German occupation forces, made their regrets over siding with the Germans sound insincere; and the government's wartime cooperation with the Nazi extermination of the Jews made their cries of mercy for Transylvanian minorities ring hollow. There was little sympathy for Hungary in the wake of World War II, and Romania's ethnic minorities had a long, difficult trial to look forward to.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

## II. TRANSYLVANIA FROM 1944-1989: FORCED ROMANIANIZATION

*Political-educational activity must develop a revolutionary spirit, a sense of responsibility for the cause of socialism and communism in our homeland, make the working people cherish the noble feelings of patriotism, of love for the Party and the people, be resolved to do their best to defend and further the revolutionary gains of our homeland. Furthermore, political-educational activity shall have to fight most resolutely backward, retrograde attitudes, any shows of nationalism, chauvinism, anti-Semitism, which are mentalities of the old bourgeois-landlord system, of the society based on exploitation and oppression.*

-Nicolae Ceausescu, 1985<sup>15</sup>

Romania's national minorities only suffered more severely under the heavy-handed Communist dictatorship which came to power after the war. The sort of double-speak practiced by President Nicolae Ceausescu was typical of Communist leaders. The blindness to nationality inherent in Marxism-Leninism was exalted, while the ideals of patriotism and homeland were rallied around.

The Romanian government set out on a deliberate policy of Romanianization in Transylvania. Two distinct methods were employed in order to dilute the minority presence in Transylvania. The first was to immediately alter the demographics of the region through population transfers. The second was to weaken the minorities' links to their cultural heritage.

Extensive population transfers were performed, especially in the first few (pre-Communist) years after the war, in order to weaken minority communities. Hungarians were harassed in a number of ways in order to encourage them to move out of Transylvania and into more uniformly Romanian areas of the country. In 1944, estimated thousands of Hungarians were herded out of Transylvania on foot by combined Soviet

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<sup>15</sup> Nicolae Ceausescu, Romania On The Way of Building Up The Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Politica, 1988), vol. 28, p. 354-355.

and Romanian forces.<sup>16</sup> Stragglers were shot or kicked to death, and when the survivors reached Old Romania (as Romania of its pre-Trianon borders is known) they were transported by rail to prison camps in the Soviet Union or the Danube Delta where they worked for decades. Upon their release they were "encouraged" to live in Old Romania by the authorities. "Encouragement" meant anything from being forbidden to use their native language while remaining in Transylvania to arrest, torture, and extended imprisonment.<sup>17</sup> While living in Bucharest or other areas of Old Romania, Hungarians were not subjected to such official discrimination and were largely left to their own devices. Meanwhile, minorities in Transylvania claimed that they were discriminated against in the workplace and that only Romanians received "the better jobs."<sup>18</sup>

As Hungarians were being coerced into leaving Transylvania, Romanians were being moved into Transylvania. While simply moving Romanians into Transylvania hardly indicates a policy of Romanianization, certain bizarre transfers suggest that the government was in fact using the importation of ethnic Romanians into Transylvania for just such a purpose. One of these strange practices was reported by Ference Kunszabo, a journalist and professor in Hungary during the Communist era. According to Kunszabo, pregnant Romanians were brought into Transylvania where they stayed until their children were born.<sup>19</sup> To make room in the hospitals for these Romanian women, pregnant Hungarians were moved into Old Romania temporarily. Romanian births were recorded as such and Hungarian births in Old Romania were also recorded as Romanian,

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<sup>16</sup> Danubian Research Centre, Documented Facts and Figures, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Ference Kunszabo, "Modern Genocide and Its Remedy," in Witnesses To Cultural Genocide, The American Transylvanian Federation and The Committee for Human Rights in Rumania (New York: The American Transylvanian Federation and The Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1979), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Danubian Research Centre, Documented Facts and Figures, p. 55; and Illyes, National Minorities, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Kunszabo, "Modern Genocide," p. 22.

since only births within Transylvania could be recorded as belonging to minority groups. The resulting numbers on birth rates were used to justify further closings of minority-language schools.

The most surprising part of such nearly comic campaigns to change the reported composition of the population is that they were not even dramatically reflected in total population numbers. According to the government's own official numbers, the Hungarian population as a percentage of the total population of Transylvania declined by less than one percent between 1930 and 1966.<sup>20</sup> In absolute terms, the Hungarian population is shown to have grown during the same period.<sup>21</sup> The question must arise: If the numbers were going to be falsified anyway, then why not falsify them to greater effect? The answer ties in with the discussion of the second method of Romanianization, and so it shall wait.

The weakening of the minorities' links with their cultural heritage was the second component of the Romanianization program. In addition to the attempt to disperse ethnic Hungarians, the Romanians sought to force their assimilation. Their attack on Hungarian cultural heritage focused primarily upon the minority-language school system, closing minority educational facilities at all levels and harassing the faculty.

The lengths to which the Romanian government went to justify this attack on the school system were somewhat outlandish. In addition to the shuffling about of pregnant women designed to skew official birth rate figures, Romanian officials responsible for recording the names of newborns and registering school-age children would often refuse to record Hungarian names for the children. The names were either spelled the Romanian way or if parents submitted a name which could not be Romanianized, the official might choose simply to record a different, *Romanian*, name for the child.<sup>22</sup>

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20 Illyes, National Minorities, p. 56.

21 Ibid.

22 Kunszabo, "Modern Genocide," p. 20-21.

Then, when it became time to enroll children for classes, their ethnicity was determined by the spelling of their name and the Hungarian population was underrepresented in these figures. Never mind that the official population census (which usually determined ethnicity by asking the subject what they wished to be recorded as) showed much higher numbers for Hungarian children. Minority school apportionments were made by the spelling of the names, and so the names were falsely recorded in order to affect these apportionments.

Numerous education reform laws were passed during the Communist era which had serious impact on the minority education system. Most notable were the 1948 and 1973 laws. The 1948 law was not as much an act of Romanianization as it was a move to Communism. The legislation disbanded schools operated by religious or foreign organizations, which had been the source of minority education in the interwar period.<sup>23</sup> Mitigating the loss of their traditional school system was Stalin's directive to the Romanians to respect the rights of the Transylvanian minorities. This order from the Soviet leader resulted in the state's provision of funding for minority-language schooling, though the schools were required to use textbooks offering only the "official" Romanian nationalist take on history. These texts discounted or even totally denied all non-Romanian influences on Transylvania and included such ludicrous claims as the one made by Nicolae Ceausescu that an independent Romanian state had existed uninterrupted within the post-Trianon borders since the first century B. C. E.<sup>24</sup> The decidedly nationalist bent of Romanian education during the Communist era was obvious to all.

The effect of later laws, including the 1973 education law, was to reduce even the availability of the state-provided minority-language education. The number of students

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<sup>23</sup> Illyes, National Minorities, p. 169.

<sup>24</sup> Mihai Fatu and Mircea Musat ed., Horthyist-Fascist Terror in Northwestern Romania, September 1940-October 1944 (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986), p. IX.

required for the maintenance of minority schools was repeatedly raised, even as such efforts as described above were made to lower the number of students counted as minorities.

Hungarian universities in Transylvania were targeted heavily in the 1960's. Due to their efforts to slow the reductions in minority-language education, well-known faculty members were harassed, arrested on false charges and tortured. Many of these individuals committed suicide in order to escape state persecution or to protest the Romanianization program. Perhaps the most dramatic of these incidents was the case in 1959 connected with the reorganization of the Hungarian Bolyai University in Cluj. As a result of the University's merger with and subordination to a Romanian university, seven members of the faculty committed suicide.<sup>25</sup> By 1962, the university which was once a well-known Hungarian-language institution had dropped almost all of its instruction in that language.<sup>26</sup> Of the few classes that were still taught in Hungarian, about 80% of them were courses on Romanian political ideology.<sup>27</sup> By the 1970's, Hungarian-language courses in the hard sciences were almost totally unavailable at basic levels, and upper-division courses were all in Romanian.

All of this came about in spite of the Romanian Constitution and certain government declarations which supposedly safeguarded the minorities' right to education in their mother tongue. It also happened despite the teachings of Marxism-Leninism and the words (rather, one of every two words) of Party Chairman Nicolae Ceausescu. Alternately preaching against "imperialist" racial discrimination in the rest of the world,

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Sozan, "Ethnocide in Romania," in Transylvania and The Theory of Daco-Roman-Rumanian Continuity, Louis Lote ed. (Rochester: Committee of Transylvania, 1980), p.100-101.

<sup>26</sup> Gyorgy Lazar, "Memorandum," in Witnesses To Cultural Genocide, The American Transylvanian Federation and The Committee for Human Rights in Rumania (New York: The American Transylvanian Federation and The Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1979), p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

and speaking on the evil deeds of the "invaders" and "outsiders" in Transylvania, Ceausescu managed to be even more harmful to Hungarians in Romania than he was to his own ethnic Romanian brethren. It was largely Ceausescu's voice heard on the radio at night, waxing poetic over the beauty and superiority of the Romanian language. His 1977 speech at a Bucharest gathering was typical of these nationalist wanderings:

I repeat and say proudly what magnificent people we have in our villages and throughout the whole country! People with a healthy judgment who believe firmly in the policy of the party and resolutely, simply, and without circumlocution, say in the language of their ancestors what they want to... in that language in which our poets sang so often and so beautifully, and which our entire nation speaks today... We can really say, comrades, along with the poet: 'Our native tongue rings clear, this is our dearest treasure, enchanting music of pleasure, it nowhere has a peer.'<sup>28</sup>

And what was heard in response from Budapest? Little, if anything, is the answer. No one event in the campaign of ethnocide was large enough in scale to overcome the blanket of silence thrown over Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union. At no specific point could the Hungarian government say, "Now *this* is enough," and bring complaints to the international community. In the Summer of 1977, Hungary's leader Janos Kadar did meet with Ceausescu to discuss the issue. No progress was made and the visit is thought to have actually worsened the situation. In the months leading up to the meeting, Romanian officials arrested several ethnic Hungarian intellectuals on false charges. These individuals were tortured, their families threatened, or both, in order to coerce them into signing confessions stating that they were working toward the overthrow of the Romanian government. Those who refused to sign were imprisoned or tortured and driven to suicide.<sup>29</sup> Ceausescu brought these confessions to his meeting with Kadar as "proof" that the Transylvanian Hungarians were enemies of the state, and used other such "evidence" to ease pressure from within the Soviet bloc. Each of these

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<sup>28</sup> Kunszabo, "Modern Genocide," p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 12-15.

nations must have known how the confessions were obtained, for their own secret police agencies were no strangers to such measures; but Hungary's hands were tied during the Communist era. Indeed, it is thought by many that the driving force behind the conspicuous shortage of Hungarian-language publications in Romania was the relatively larger measure of freedom and economic well-being enjoyed by citizens in Hungary.

From outside the bloc, however, voices of protest were heard. The most vocal critics of Romanian ethnic policy were Hungarian expatriates operating in the United States and Great Britain. Scholars and writers in these countries lobbied governments and criticized the Romanian take on history and human rights. This effort secured little pressure from the West on the specific issue, but added to the constant stream of criticism of the Soviet bloc. In 1985, this manifested itself in the passage of U. S. House Resolution 147, which condemned the Romanian government for its mistreatment of Hungarians and called upon the President to discuss the issue with the Romanians. No progress resulted.

At the end of the Communist era in Romania, one must return to the question posed earlier. If numbers were falsified anyway, if people were jailed and tortured, if Ceausescu was so ready to hold up the Transylvanian minorities as Romania's enemy, then why can you still hear Hungarian folk songs in the valleys of southeastern Transylvania? Why did minority education not disappear altogether? And why did nearly one-and-three-quarter-million ethnic Hungarians still appear in the national census at the time of Ceausescu's execution? A Szekler might want to tell you that it is because of the persistent spirit of his people. He might want to tell you that it is because the Romanian people are no match for his great warrior heritage. In fact, it is more likely because of the Romanian government's fear of substantial rebukes from other nations and the dim likelihood of the Romanian population actually participating in the wholesale extermination of the Hungarian and German minorities. Without the threat of international response, Ceausescu would not have spent his entire reign preaching about



the importance of non-interference and national sovereignty. By no means did the Eastern Bloc require a spotless human rights record of any member; but mass-scale genocide, pursued at anything other than a gradual pace would have been unacceptable from a minor power such as Romania. It would have pitted bloc members against each other and weakened the alliance. For this reason, there is still a Hungarian minority in Romania today.

### III. IN THE WAKE OF REVOLUTION: 1989-PRESENT

*Who can doubt the pain caused to this people, this country, by the peace treaty of Trianon that followed the First World War? No one can doubt it, just as we cannot doubt the delight it may have given to other peoples and national groups who had set this as an objective for themselves while dreaming of a nation-state in the Nineteenth Century. But if we can once sit down honestly and say that we know it gave you delight and still does today, understand the pain that it caused us and which it still causes us.*

-Jozsef Antall, 1992<sup>30</sup>

From the very beginning of the breakdown in 1989, Hungary was at the front of the East European nations striving for unification with the West. Hungary was the first to remove its barbed-wire fence separating it from the West and to allow the unrestricted movement of East Germans across the border into Austria. After the first post-Communist government came to power in 1990, this trend continued. At the 1990 meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee in Russia, newly-elected Prime Minister Jozsef Antall stamped his passport to European integration when he proposed to the Committee the total dissolution of the Pact.<sup>31</sup>

Antall's attitude has been typical of Hungarian governments since 1990. Upon his death in December of 1993, his governing party elected Peter Boross to the Prime Minister's chair. Boross remained true to the Westernization policy until his party was bumped from power in the 1994 national elections. The succeeding government of the Hungarian Socialist Party surprised many by continuing with Western integration at full speed. Hungary's primary goal of foreign policy has been entrance to NATO and the EU as a full member. Secondary is its campaign to secure the rights of its minorities abroad.

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<sup>30</sup> As quoted in: Jonathan Sunley, "Hungary: The Triumph of Compromise," European Security Study No. 19 (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, 1993), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

Meanwhile, in Bucharest, the Romanians have also been working hard at gaining acceptance in the West. Though behind Hungary in the queue leading to full integration, Romania has made significant progress. Smooth-talking President Ion Iliescu has proved to be a master of public relations in America, where he gained praise from both the media and politicians across the spectrum for his commitment to Western integration.

All of this sounds like good news for the Transylvanian Hungarians; indeed, it is good news for all of those living in Eastern Europe today. In their quest for EU membership, both Hungary and Romania have been ordered to clean up their human rights records. With the passage of the dictatorial Communist system and the application of more international pressure, the theory is that the minorities will do fine in the future. The question that must be asked though, in order to determine whether the struggle has passed, is this: Has Romania's love affair with nationalism ended with the report of an executioner's rifle? If so, and if Ceausescu was the last Romanian leader to use xenophobia as a political tool, then the road ahead for Romania's national minorities should be free of obstacles.

The trouble is that the answer to both conditions is a well-documented *no*. On March 19 and 20, 1990 (the day preceding, and the day of, Romania's first post-Communist elections), the Romanian nationalist group Vatra Romaneasca (Romanian Hearth) instigated attacks on ethnic Hungarians in the Transylvanian city of Tirgu Mures. Despite government warnings against "any kind of extremist, nationalist or chauvinistic actions, irrespective of who they come from," about 2000 Romanians armed with farm implements and clubs attacked a gathering of ethnic Hungarians, resulting in seven deaths and hundreds of wounded.<sup>32</sup> The provisional government brokered talks between Romanian Hearth and Hungarian organizations which led to a cessation of the violence;

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew Bilski, Pamela Clark, Mary Nemeth, and E. Kaye Fulton, "A Bitter Blood Feud," *MacLean's*, 2 April, 1990, p. 28.

but as of today no charges have been filed against those who participated in the attack. Indeed, according to the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, "the local courts--whose judges include members of the overtly anti-Semitic and anti-Hungarian organization Vatra Romaneasca--sentenced a total of 47 *victims*: ethnic Hungarians and Gypsies *who had acted in self-defense*."<sup>33</sup>

In 1992, the mayor of Cluj gave an anti-Hungarian rant in which he promised to outlaw bilingual signs, eliminate Hungarian-language schooling completely, and throw an ethnic Hungarian political party out of town.<sup>34</sup> All of these promises, illegal to honor in Romania, were made in the presence of President Iliescu. Iliescu's reply to Gheorghe Funar's speech was to place blame on the Hungarian government for exacerbating ethnic strife. Later in the year, Funar would become a candidate for president himself, alternately praising and criticizing Ceausescu's regime. Among his criticisms of the old leader was Funar's belief that Ceausescu had actually been overly generous to the Hungarian minority, who had been given too many rights.<sup>35</sup> Funar's ultra-nationalist Party of Romanian National Unity went on to increase its seats in parliament from 11 to 41, increasing its share of the vote to 7.71%.<sup>36</sup> Funar himself received just under 11% of the votes in the presidential election.

Another ultra-nationalist party, the Greater Romania Party, won 3.89% of the votes nationally. The GRP's leadership, former Ceausescu cronies, won many votes from reactionaries who view Ceausescu's reign as Romania's "Golden Age." The Socialist Labor Party (SLP), also a reactionary group, won eighteen seats with renowned

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<sup>33</sup> Letter to The Honorable Zsuzsanna Szelenyi of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, from The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation. New York, September 24, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Gallagher, "Electoral Breakthroughs for Romanian Nationalists," *RFE/RL Research Report* (13 November, 1992), p. 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

nationalist intellectuals campaigning for it. Indeed, the only party in the 1992 election which won parliamentary seats without expressing at least some form of moderate nationalism was the Hungarian Democratic Federation of Romania, which won only 20% of *Transylvanian* seats.<sup>37</sup>

On March 24, 1993, two measures were approved by the Romanian parliament. The first, which was immediately announced to the public, was the decision to finally form a Council of National Minorities, as promised by the provisional government in 1990. The second, which was kept secret for two days, was the decision to appoint ethnic Romanian prefects to two predominantly Hungarian (84.6% and 75.2% of the population) districts in Transylvania. Ethnic Hungarians were infuriated to find that one of these new prefects was a proud member of *Vatra Romaneasca*, the nationalist "cultural organization" responsible for the 1990 bloodbath in *Tirgu Mures*.<sup>38</sup>

These incidents are all strong arguments in favor of the assertion that Romanian nationalism did not die with Nicolae Ceausescu and that politicians are still very willing to use it for their own ends. Recently though, some new developments have changed the outlook.

Negotiations over a bilateral friendship treaty have broken down repeatedly over the past six years. Romania wants provisions reaffirming current borders, while Hungary wants provisions safeguarding minority rights. Each state's answer to the other is that the desired measure has already been provided for in the Helsinki Accords or other treaties in the past, which is true. Nevertheless, each government refuses to reaffirm the required measure while it demands that the other do so. On March 15, 1996, Romanian Foreign

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 18-20.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Shafir, "Minorities Council Raises Questions," *RFE/RL Research Report* (11 June, 1993), p. 37.

Minister Teodor Melescanu announced that his government wished to sign a friendship treaty before Romania's national elections in May of the same year.<sup>39</sup>

It is thought that the ruling Romanian Party of Social Democracy (PDSR) hopes to downplay nationalism in the upcoming election. Gallup surveys conducted shortly thereafter indicate that Romanian voters are beginning to lose some of their enthusiasm about nationalism and are demanding faster market and governance reforms than the PDSR's coalition government with Romanian ultra-nationalists has provided.<sup>40</sup> So while recent history shows that treaty talks will most likely break down, Romanian political change might see talks through this time.

Regardless of whether the ruling government can see talks through, the treaty has a good chance of materializing. With elections coming in May, the ruling coalition is facing political difficulties dwarfed only by the difficulties of its coalition partners, the ultra-nationalists. The popularity of the centrist Democratic Convention (CDR) has been on the rise and outpaced that of the PDSR.<sup>41</sup> A coalition of moderate parties headed by the CDR might very well go ahead with treaty talks in order to speed entry into the EU, and such a policy would play very well with voters who are both disillusioned with nationalism (whether Romanian or Hungarian) and who demand faster economic progress. Integration into the EU for former Communist countries is expected to accelerate after the conclusion of the year-long 1996 EU Inter-Governmental Conference. Hopefully Romanian voters will want a government more inclined to genuine human rights reforms to be in office when the Conference ends so that the country will be in a better position to apply for full membership.

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<sup>39</sup> "Romania Wants Hungary Treaty Before Election," *CET Online*, (18 March, 1996), <<http://www.eunet.cz/>>.

<sup>40</sup> "Romanians Favour Opposition Party and Reforms," *CET Online* (1 April, 1996), <<http://www.eunet.cz/>>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Pressure has also come from outside of Europe. In April of 1996, Congressman Tom Lantos informed Iliescu's government that approval of permanent Most-Favored-Nation trade status with the United States depended upon the elimination of ultra-nationalist parties from the ruling coalition.<sup>42</sup> The Romanian government is said to take this predicament seriously, but the PDSR is unlikely to cut off ties with the GRP, PRNU or SLP since the maintenance of a parliamentary majority currently depends upon the controversial coalition. Lantos, a California Democrat of Hungarian descent, is thought to be capable of preventing Romania's permanent MFN status from being approved. MFN status, which Romania currently has on a yearly basis, is highly valued by Romanian politicians of all stripes for both economic and symbolic reasons. Now that its permanence has been associated with human rights reform, Romanian voters have even more reason to steer away from nationalism. With continued pressure from Europe and the United States, the Hungarian minority in Romania should see a continuation of the move away from nationalism.

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<sup>42</sup> "US Congressman Links Romanian MFN To 'Extremists'," *CET Online* (10 April, 1996), <<http://www.eunet.cz/>>.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

*Being a democrat means, primarily, not to be afraid; not to be afraid of those who have differing opinions, speak different languages, or belong to other races; not to be afraid of revolutions, conspiracies, the unknown malicious intent of enemies, hostile propaganda, being demeaned, or any of those imaginary dangers that become truly dangerous because we are afraid of them.*

-Istvan Bibo, 1946<sup>43</sup>

If they are to receive fair treatment, then Romania's Hungarian minority must ultimately become part of the country's political mainstream. Adherence to their own nationalist party within Romania will only continue to stimulate the nationalist urge in that country. Then again, one must not blame the victim and claim that the cause of anti-Hungarian sentiment is the Hungarians' own quest for equal rights. To do so would be circular and nonsensical.

Ethnic Hungarian voters must make the more powerful mainstream parties come to them. As they will learn, the only way to do this is to convince them that members of the minority will vote for them instead of the party which they formed in the name of ethnic difference. As long as their party of choice is a minority nationalist party, they will be resented; and any power that they do secure for themselves will be won in the name of difference and ethnicity. Adherence to difference in politics will only extend the duration of their struggle. Adherence to difference will never lay to rest the demons of Transylvania's past.

What ethnic Hungarians need in Romania today is the same as what ethnic Romanians, Germans, Ruthenians, Gypsies, and Jews *all* need in Romania; that is a more stable and extensive democracy. Many Hungarians claim that they should have

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<sup>43</sup> Istvan Bibo, "The Distress of the East European Small States," in Democracy, Revolution, Self-determination: Selected Writings, Karoly Nagy ed., Andras Boros-Kazai trans. (Budapest: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1991), p. 42.



Hungarian prefects in districts in which they constitute a majority. They *should* demand that the prefect of each and every district in all of Romania be elected by that district's inhabitants. If the Hungarians wish to elect a Hungarian to that post, then so be it; but *appointment* to any post on the basis of ethnicity is an affirmation of the very system which has persecuted them for so long. It is anti-democratic, divisive, and can be taken away at any time.

In a letter to "the New Democratic Organizations in Central and Eastern Europe" on Christmas Day, 1989, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF, later to become the governing party in Hungary after the 1990 elections) wrote the following.

One of the cardinal prerequisites of democracy is tolerance of those whose political view, religion or language differs - in the case of the various minorities. The practical realization of that principle is recognition of these groups' organization and autonomy in order to facilitate their free development. It is our hope that in the future social integration in the new democracies will go side-by-side with respect for regional, national and ethnic distinctions, and that representative democracy will be based upon local self-government.<sup>44</sup>

The problem with the HDF's proclamation lies in the call for local self-government and autonomy. In the name of ethnic difference alone, Antall and company essentially asked for separate government. What is to become of the Romanian minority in a primarily Hungarian district in Transylvania? Are their wishes to be ignored because Hungarians are in the majority? If so, then what obligation does the country as a whole have to that very same minority district? Separation due to ethnic difference only sets the minority up for more unequal treatment and justifies the entire process whereby they are harmed. A stronger, more extensive democracy makes the Hungarian valuable to Romanians and the Romanian valuable to Hungarians since each can potentially vote for the other. In a society where each group excludes the other from local governance, everyone loses out.

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<sup>44</sup> Geza Jeszenszky, "Nations and Minorities in Europe," *The Hungarian Observer* (May 1994 Special issue), p. 4.

Only those people within one's own ethnic group are valuable, and the minority will stand to lose in the sphere of national government.

While ethnic Hungarians should enter the political process as Romanians, there is no reason for them to give up their culture and language. It must be remembered that these are not the descendants of a people who left their homeland voluntarily to venture out and become part of a new nation. Transylvania *is* their homeland, and they are Romanians only because of a political settlement made without their approval or input. A discussion of whether or not immigrants should give up their native language when they find themselves a minority in a new nation is neither within the scope of this paper nor is it in any way relevant to the question of Transylvania.

When Romania won Transylvania in a secret deal with the Allied Powers, it won its people too. It won a multinational culture one-millennium old. The attempt to forcefully assimilate the minorities was unjust, harmful, unnecessary, and unrealistic. Overcoming that attempt will take the *combined* effort of *all* the Romanian people. Separation is not the answer.

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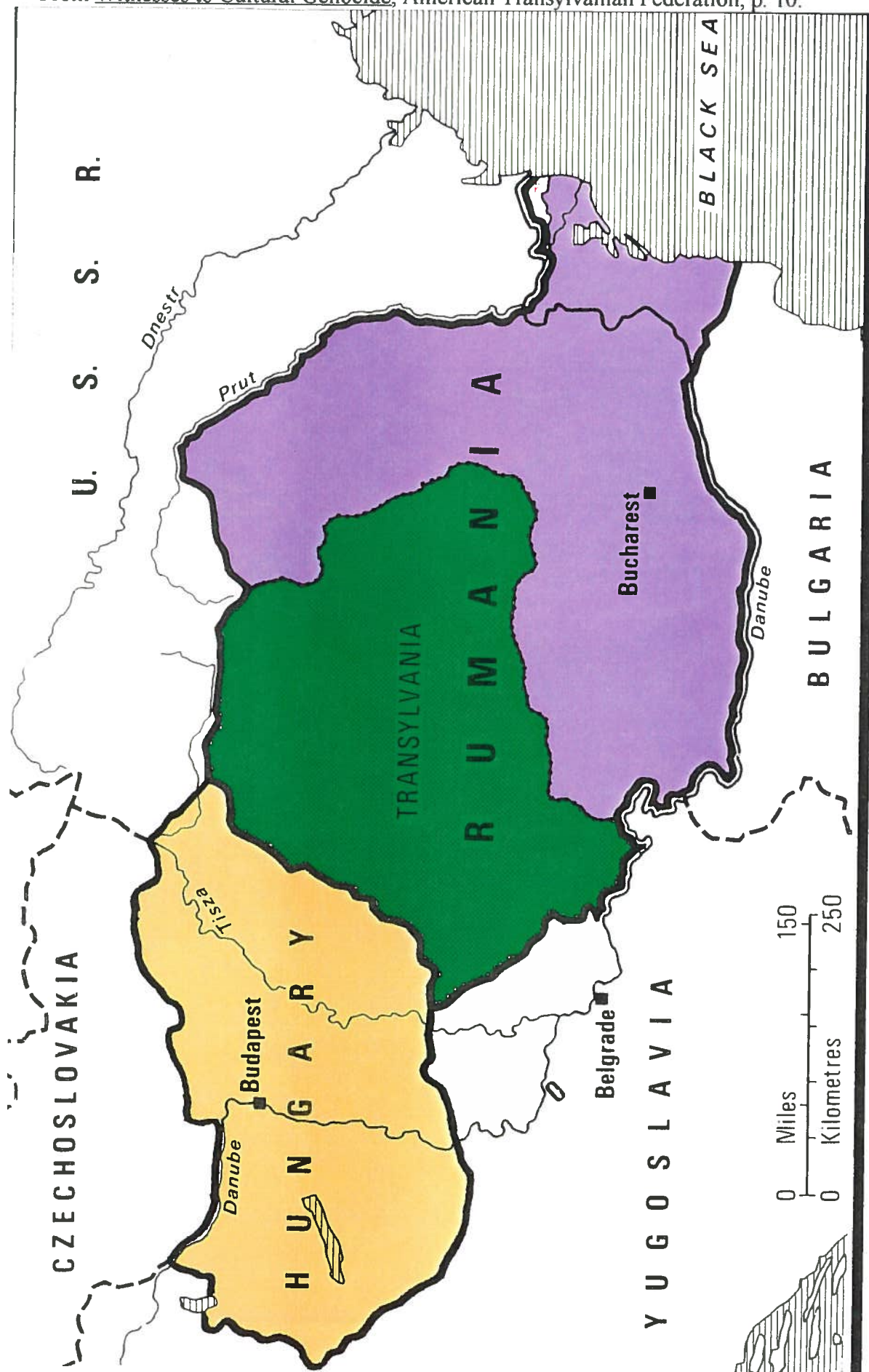
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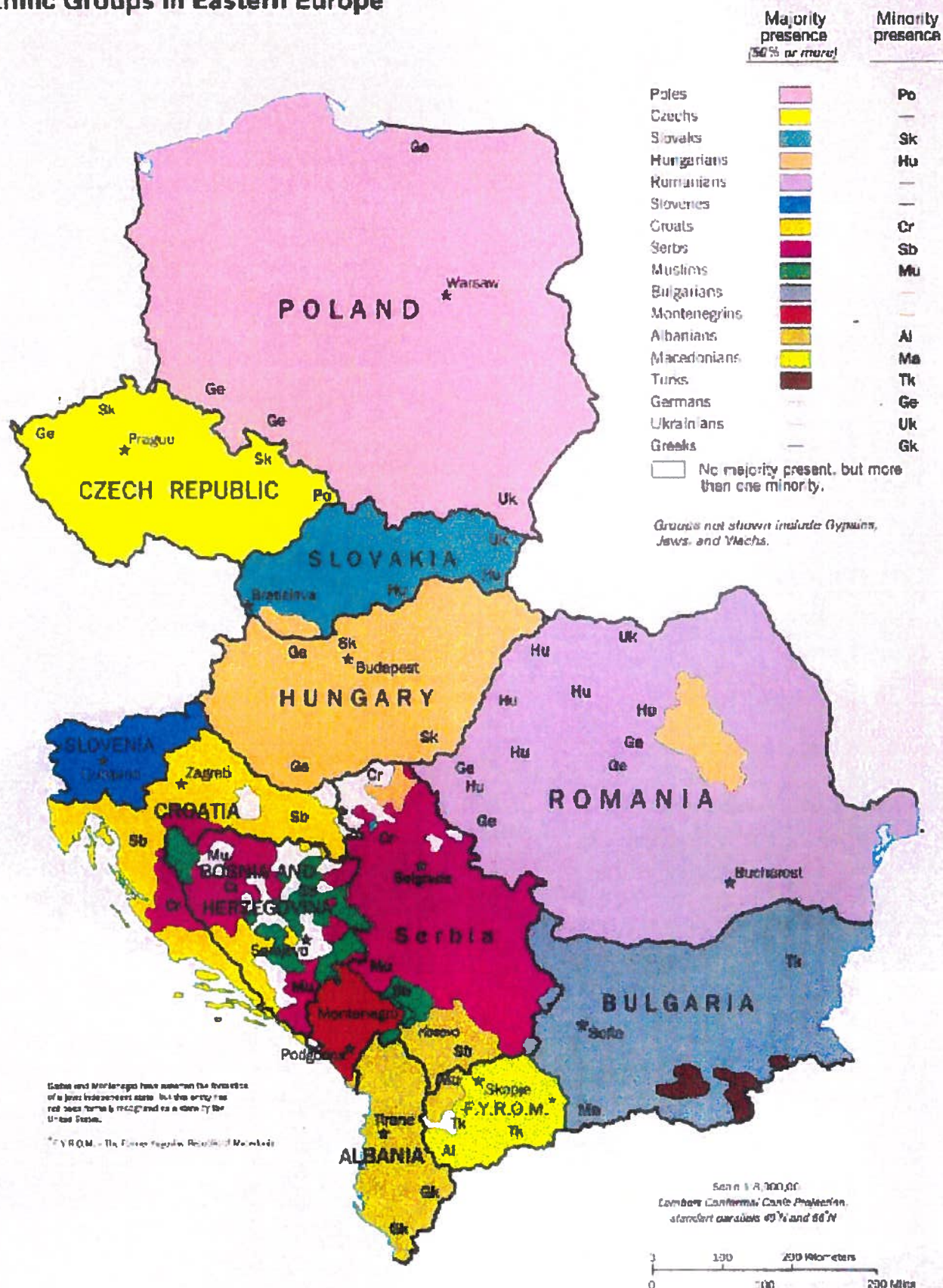
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# Ethnic Groups in Eastern Europe



Bosnia and Herzegovina have achieved the status of a joint independent state, but this entity has not been formally recognized as a state by the United States.

\*FYROM - The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia