

RESURGENT ROMANIAN NATIONALISM

In the Wake of the Interethnic Clashes in Tirgu Mures March 1990

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ABSTRACT

How ingrained is nationalism in Romanian institutions, history and political culture? Through the interethnic clashes in Tirgu Mures, March 1990, in this thesis I will try to illuminate the roots of Romanian nationalism, how it resurfaced, and the elements which played a part for its fast resurrection. To make the reader aware of the background of the ethnic conflict in the region, I will first explain the historical and ethnographic foundation of ethnic tension in Romania, and how the last twenty years of communism paved the way for the resurgence of nationalism in the 1990's. In part two and three I will first explain in detail the chronological events of the street clashes, before presenting each element of organization and how nationalist parties and intelligence officers were involved in pulling the strings during the clashes and how they benefited from it. The response of the government and the following political polemics after the clashes will be given weight, and in the fourth and last part this will be continued by looking at the outcome of the interethnic clashes. Then I will briefly examine the political elections in the decade after the clashes, as well as ethnic relations and progress in Romanian-Hungarian relations during the fifteen years after the incident. This will show the peak of nationalism in the beginning of the 1990's and its on-going decline during the last five years. The sources used throughout the document mainly rely upon reports from Helsinki Watch and Radio Free Europe's staff of writers, especially the political scientist Michael Shafir who has touched upon the topic several times in the last decade. Although I have found few monographers especially dedicated to Tirgu Mures, I have consulted several books on theoretical, historical and political developments in Romania during this period. Of those worth mentioning, and who have given me invaluable inspiration, are authors such as Katherine Verdery and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi. The facts expressed in this paper attempt to give a balanced and objective view of the ethnic tension and their impact on Romanian-Hungarian relations. However, as I have been prone to use mainly foreign sources the views might be biased toward the west. At the same time, I have tried to do my best to weigh the information in a balanced matter between the Hungarian and Romanian view of the happenings. As the topic is still touchy, some might disagree with the findings. All the opinions expressed here belong fully to the author.

One argument might be that nationalism is the form of political discourse preferred by those who want to retain maximum power for the socialist state upon which they had become such adept parasites, and which openness to foreign capital would compromise. In other words, nationalists and ex-Communists share a defense not so much of the nation as of the state, which they wish to shield from foreign predation.

- Katherine Verdery, 1996: 14

ABBREVIATIONS: *

AUR	Alianța pentru Unitatea României / Alliance for Romanian Unity	
CDR	Convenția Democrată Română / Romanian Democratic Convention	
CNS	Consiliul Național al Secuilor / Szekely National Council	(SzNC)
CPUN	Consiliul Provizoriu al Unității Naționale / Provisional Council of National Unity	
FDSN	Frontul Democrației Salvării Naționale / National Democratic Salvation Front	
FSN	Frontul Salvării Naționale / National Salvation Front	(NSF)
PCR	Partidul Comunist Român / Romanian Communist Party	(RCP)
PD	Partidul Democrat / Democratic Party	(DP)
PDSR	Partidul Democrației Sociale din România / Romanian Social Democratic Party	
PRM	Partidul România Mare / Greater Romania Party	
PUNR	Partidul Unității Naționale din România / Party of Romanian National Unity	
SRI	Serviciul Român de Informații / Romania's Information Service	
UDMR	Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România / Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	(DAHR)

*Throughout the document all abbreviations are given in the Romanian form, although some studies and sources sometimes use the English abbreviation of it (put in parentheses on the right) if existing, however this is not the standard norm. To not create confusion I consequently stick with the Romanian abbreviation. Since there is no consensus on the English translations of these names, they might vary throughout the text.

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INTRODUCTION

In March 1990 interethnic clashes between Romanians and Hungarians left behind eight dead and several hundred injured. The political psychologist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, one of Romania's well-known contemporary scholars on ethnic relations in Transylvania, pointed out that: "this minor clash doesn't indeed seem noteworthy compared to the other Balkan contemporary disputes," it nevertheless carries importance "beyond the Transylvanian context" since it was the first ethnic clash in East Europe since the fall of communism in 1989 (Mungiu-Pippidi 2000: 2). Daniel Vighi, a professor and fiction writer in Romania, noted that "no one can deny today that the unhappy events in the Balkans sprang from an extreme development of that March 1990 in Romania" (Vighi 2004: 431). The entire incident began March 19, 1990, when some Romanians in Tîrgu Mures¹ demonstrated outside the Hungarian Democratic Union (UDMR) building. This event left several Hungarians injured after that the Romanians put a siege on it. The next day, Hungarians as well as sympathetic Romanians gathered on the main square of the city to voice their concern for what happened that previous day. The group of approximately 15,000 Hungarians gathered on the square were attacked by a group of comparable size of Romanians, many whom had been bussed in to the city from surrounding villages during the day. Violence erupted between the two ethnic inhabitants of Tîrgu Mures, and did not cease until the morning of 21 March.

The interethnic clashes in Tîrgu Mures created wounds that would take a long time to heal. The slow response or rather lack of, by the local police and army has been questioned and contested. The reaction and statements by the government during and shortly after the incident have opened the way to speculations on its nature. The government did not repress the nationalist organizations for fuelling the violence, but rather consoled them while at the same time attempting to appease the Hungarian minority. The government largely blamed Hungary

¹ The name *Tîrgu Mures* is normally used in most international documents regarding the town, but other writing of Tîrgu could be found, such as *Targu*, *Târgu* and *Tîrgu Mureş*. Some people do write the city name *Tîrgu-Mures*. The

itself, claiming that circles in Hungary had created the situation so that the unity between the Hungarians and Romanians created during the revolution of December 1989 would be disrupted. Subsequently, this was to create a situation where Hungarian claims for a more autonomous Transylvania under the influence of Hungary would take place. Elements that came to the surface in response to the clashes carry many historical references, which need to be examined. The situation resembles an aspect of nationalism similar to that of the Second World War when Transylvania was divided between Hungary and Romania. Forty years of national communism left Romania with the mental scar of indoctrination, historical untruths and misinformation. The “power gap” left behind by the communists after the December revolution was slowly going to be filled up by a growing Romanian nationalism in an organized form, while the Hungarians were demanding more equal rights than they had been granted before. This culminated in the clashes in Tirgu Mures and created violence on a scale that modern Romania had never experienced before or after. I will try to show how nationalist parties were behind and organized the events of Tirgu Mures, and how former, current and becoming intelligence service agents involvement in it, gives it a more dubious character. At the same time, the interim government managed to create a political base that insured their victory in Romania’s first democratic election in May 1990. There are clear indicators that the build up, consequences and fall-out of March 1990 shaped the political environment in the years to follow. As ethnic relations soured, the dismantled *Securitate* was re-assembled March-April 1990 under the name Romania’s Intelligence Service (SRI).

Regarding historiography on the incident, there have been no books dedicated especially to this topic. However, a few Hungarian books have been written on the subject, some of them highly biased personal accounts, while the Romanians have often distorted to a protectionist attitude when commenting on the topic. Also international observers have sometimes failed to report on the event unbiased, just as there is a problem of both Romanian and Hungarian

Hungarian name for the city is *Marosvásárhely*, while in German it is called *Naumarkt an der Mieresch*. I have chosen to

scholars from outside Transylvania writing about it, as they do not fully understand what really was going on in Transylvania itself.

1.0 Background: History, Communism and Ethnic Relations

Historiography during the reign of Ceausescu together with the ethnic tension that surfaced in the case of Tirgu Mures has given roots to a resurgence of “ethno-chauvinism, native populism and fascisms akin to the programs and policies of the Iron Guard². A student of Romanian history can discover many similarities between the 1930’s” and the situation in 1990 (Gilberg 1990: 412). During communism, nationalism had been used to create adherence to the country, and subsequently a threat to communism became bound to a threat to the nation in nationalistic terms. This reached a peak during the years of Ceausescu, and as an external threat Romania sought Hungary as the main enemy to distort the focus from Ceausescu’s failing policies. When communism fell, nationalism with its strong roots in history surfaced to fill in the “power vacuum” left behind. One should never underestimate the power of history, especially in the Balkans where it most often is used to justify presence in one area or claiming another.

1.1 Historical Outline of Transylvania

Both the Hungarians and the Romanians view Transylvania as their “cradle of civilization.” For both nations, Transylvania substitutes the hearth of their historical existence. While the Romanians claim their historical presence from before the establishment of the Roman province of Dacia (106-271)³, the Hungarians claim that they came to an abandoned Transylvania, and

use the most common name *Tirgu Mures*, while the other names might occur in quotations.

² The Iron Guard was a nationalist anti-Semite organization operating on Romanian lands during the Second World War. One of their aims was the suppression of Hungarians living in southern Transylvania. Hungary had been granted northern Transylvania, including Tirgu Mures, after the Second Vienna Award in 1940.

³ The official version of the Daco-Roman continuity theory states that when the emperor Trajan occupied Dacia and made it a part of the Roman Empire, the Dachs became assimilated and integrated with the Romans. When the Romans had to evacuate Dacia in the wake of the barbarian invasions, the now so-called Daco-Romans had become such a homogenous group that they constitute today’s Romanian’s ancestors. In other words, the melting pot of the Dacian and Latin cultures resulted in the birth of the Romanian culture and language.

subsequently the area was included under the crown of Saint Stephen (r. 957-1038)⁴. When the Ottoman Empire expanded itself as far as to the city walls of Vienna (1529), Transylvania became an Ottoman vassal state from 1541 and a stronghold of anti-Habsburg Hungarian political traditions (Magocsi 2002: 46). While Transylvania was either a vassal state or a part of the Habsburg Empire, a Hungarian prince and administration always controlled it. Yet from 1691 and until 1867 it was ruled directly under Vienna. After *Ausgleich* (compromise) in 1867, when the Habsburg Empire was reformed into Austria-Hungary, a dual monarchy, Transylvania became directly under Hungarian control and again incorporated into Hungary.

Only for a short period would Mihai of Wallachia (the Brave, r. 1593-1601) expand his rule to also include Transylvania and Moldova (Magocsi 2002: 64). Mihai's rule over the three provinces (1599-1600) has been seen by Romanian historiographers as the first united Romanian state. Under the Habsburgs, the Romanians did not constitute any recognised *nation* in Transylvania. A *nation* was a description of a respected ethnic group, which could participate in the Transylvanian *Diet*. However, "nations, properly *nationes*, represented the nobility against the other classes and should in no sense be regarded as nation in the modern usage; in the Transylvanian case they were the Magyars, the Saxons and the Szeklers" (Schöpflin and Poulton 1990: 8). Romanians were predominantly farmers, while the Hungarians constituted the majority in the cities. Since Romanian serfs did not own their own land, they were not a nation, they were simply acknowledged. Actually, the true classification was 'tolerated'. In essence, the Romanian population in Transylvania were not acknowledged any rights.

The collapse of the Habsburg dynasty and the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary after World War I, led to the creation of "rump-Hungary". At the Trianon peace conference in 1920 Transylvania was granted to Romania. The northern part of Transylvania was "given back" to

⁴The Hungarian historiography states that the Hungarians arrived in the Transylvania in the 11th Century, and found a Transylvania that was mostly uninhabited except by a small group of Slavs. They imported Germans and Szeklers to settle down and build a civilization. Hungarian historiographers emphasize that the (Daco-) Romanians had retreated completely up in the Carpathian Mountains after the fall of Dacia, and did not return to Transylvania until the 13th Century. Thus, the Hungarians were first and put claims to it.

Hungary at the Second Vienna Award 1940. The psychological impact the Romanians felt by giving up parts of Transylvania without a fight would haunt the government until its restoration at the final days of the war. Hungary found itself again in the losing camp of the war, and Transylvania was re-united with Romania in 1944. Since the First World War Hungary has suffered from the “Trianon-trauma” and not until recently did it acknowledge the fact that certain part of St. Stephen land will never again be reunited with Hungary.

1.2 Historical Demography

Ethnic Hungarians live predominantly in Transylvania. Historically, Hungarians and Romanians have cohabited with each other for centuries, except remote areas in the Carpathian Mountains often described as “Szekely Land”. However, since Transylvania became a part of Romania in 1918 there has been an increase in ethnic Romanians. This has not only been at the expense of ethnic Hungarians, but rather by the assimilation of other smaller ethnic groups (Mogocsi 2002: 150). If one compares the census of 1910 with one conducted in 1992 we see a sharp increase of Romanians. In 1910, before Transylvania was incorporated into the rest of Romania, 53,8 percent was of Romanian descent, 31,6 percent Hungarian, while 14,6 percent constituted others, mainly Germans. However, in 1992 the conditions had changed to 73,6 percent Romanians, 20,7 percent Hungarians, and only 5,7 percent others (Svanberg & Sörhman 1996: 72). Although some Hungarians have emigrated in real numbers the Romanians have increased on the expense of the Hungarian percentage.⁵ The national census for all of Romania the same year were 89,9 percent Romanians, 8,9 percent Hungarians, 0,4 percent German and 1,6 percent others⁶ (European Forum 1999).⁷

⁵ At least until the fall of communism, since recent consensus data on Romania’s population and minorities indicates that 200,000 Hungarians have emigrated between 1992 and 2002. In 2002 the Hungarians constituted an unprecedented low of 6,6 percent of Romania’s total population (Database: Ethno-demographic Structure of Romania at <http://www.edrc.ro>).

⁶ Others constitute Ukrainian, Serb, Croat, Russian, Turk and Roma. However, some estimates the Roma population to be between 1,6 million and as many as 2,5 million, of a total population of Romania’s 22,5 million people. Therefore, Roma constitute a minimum of 6-10 percent of Romania’s total population.

The sharp decline of Germans is due to emigration and Ceausescu's "sale" of Germans to Germany during the 1970's and 80's. Historically, there has been little emigration of Hungarians to Hungary. However, due to the poor and brutal conditions of Romania in the 1980's some Hungarians chose to illegally flee the country (Brubaker 1996: 156-159), and even more moved to Hungary's more lucrative labour market after the Revolution; only a few chose to do so after both World Wars.

Hungarians, as well as Romanians, have a strong tendency to preserve their ethnic identity. In cases of mixed ancestry, there are stronger tendencies to declare oneself as Hungarian. "When heterogeneity appears in the generation of grandparents, the declared identity has a greater importance that favours the identify shift of the Hungarians. In case of ethnically homogenous Hungarian grandparents the proportion of those who declare themselves Romanian was only 2%, even when one of the parents was Romanian" (Csepeli & Szekelyi 1999).

The demographic change in Transylvania is due to urbanisation, the influx of other Romanians from other parts of Romania (notable by Moldova) to Transylvania, and emigration of Germans and assimilation of other ethnic groups. In real terms, this has left the Hungarians in some areas of Transylvania with the feeling of becoming colonised by the increase of Romanians, and together with other factors, this has produced a psychologically unpleasant feeling among the Hungarians.

1.3 Communist Historiography and Indoctrination

The Daco-Roman continuity theory provides Romania with the "historical precedence" in the area and justifies their claims to Transylvania. Hungarian historiography, on the other hand, is also articulating a diagonal claim to Transylvania. Thus, Transylvania is a unique case since "both Romanians and Hungarians consider the region a 'cradle' essential to their whole image of

⁷ For newer numbers (from 2002) on ethno-demographic structure in all of Romania, Mures County and Tirgu

national identity and the historiography of both countries was dedicated in modern and contemporary times primarily to the task of proving the legitimacy of claims to Transylvania or the other way around” (Mungiu-Pippidi 2000: 5). Mythical history writing helps nations remember their history, though flawed, in a national-romantic way. However, it becomes a problem when it is used in exploiting superior terms, just as one can perceive degrees of positive and negative nationalism.

The Communists in Romania after World War II went further than forging an “organized solidarity”, but also used the origins of Romanians to keep them loyal to the regime. Ceausescu was probably the one who exploited the Daco-Roman theory to the fullest, imprinting it in every Romanians’ head. This has led Romanian historians and researchers to use every possible means to prove their Romanian ancestry and their Dacian-Roman origin⁸. This exploded to an academic and politicised war between Hungary and Romania on research concerning who was “first” in Transylvania. Ceausescu’s “arguments also paved the way for identifying the Romanian Communist Party [PCR] not just with the proletariat but with the entire Nation” (Verdery 1991: 118). Dragos Petrescu, in *Historical Myths, legitimating discourses, and identity politics in Ceausescu’s Romania*, has identified four different pillars which Romanian writing and teaching of national history were based on after the PCR’s program was imposed in 1974: (1) the ancient roots of the Romanians; (2) continuity; (3) unity; and (4) independence⁹ (Petrescu 2004). This came at the same time the PCR announced their attempt to create a “new socialist man”, which included the reshaping of national identity (e.g. see Verdery 1991; Helsinki Watch 1989). This was furthered in the 1980’s with the destruction of rural areas, which had an impact on all aspects of Romanian life but was felt hard by the Hungarian minority. However, for the Hungarians “not even communist indoctrination can match the effectiveness of national

Mures see Appendix II.

⁸ One has to keep in mind that under Communist regimes scholars were often restricted to ancient and pre-war history, and as Katherine Verdery points out that especially in Romania this included also support for work in “defence of the Nation” (1991: 102).

⁹ The Daco-Roman continuity theory evolves around several of these aspects.

socialization in a matter seen essential” (Mungiu-Pippidi 2000: 11), such as cross-border Hungarian Radio, circulation of Hungarian books and Hungarian national unity.

Romanian nationalism during four decades of communism was a state affair. This can be shown through the ethno-demographic changes in Romania previously shown, especially in Transylvania. A system of forced or encouraged “Romanianization”¹⁰ in regions historically inhabited by Hungarians took place. One of the ways of doing this was to place state officials of Romanian ethnicity such as policemen, railroad employees, in the postal service, or in the local administration to work in predominantly Hungarian villages, thus increasing the Romanian presence and dominance. Ethnic Romanians were also encouraged to move and settle down in such areas. Romanian orthodox churches would be built in villages scarcely populated by Romanians, often built in dominant size and architecture overshadowing the Hungarian more modest and smaller church. In schools the pupils were taught, or indoctrinated, with their Daco-Roman origin. Ceausescu put into force the four pillars in history writing and created a period of “Dacomania” in Romania up to 1990, which would last much later. “Consequently, one of the major lessons of national history as taught until December 1989, was that the Romanian unitary nation-state has been continuously contested and threatened, and that it was the patriotic duty of all responsible people to defend it at all cost” (Petrescu 2004). Since the communists had created the picture that they were the protectors of Romanian unity and independence, a rise of nationalist parties naturally replaced the gap created by the revolution. “More precisely, socialism produced a characteristic organisation of the self – one characterised by an internalised opposition to external “aliens,” seen as “them”; it also produced specific conditions from which

¹⁰ This is one of the typical views of the (forced) urbanization which took place especially in the seventies and eighties when peasants were forcefully moved into concrete apartments buildings in the outskirts of every Romanian city. However, urbanization is a naturally phenomena in all industrialist countries, although in Romania the shape of it was more of a forced one. The term *Romanianization* means that Romanians were moved into Hungarian cities to make them more Romanian, although this might be true, another aspect of it is important to mention. Historically the Hungarians lived in the cities, and Romanians lived in villages. Thus, when urbanization took place, it was mostly Romanian peasants who were forced into the cities and new settlements. This happened all across Romania, but the impact on i.e. Tirgu Mures has been described as *Romanianization* because the ethnic map changed radically. However, it can be argued that it might would happened naturally, and not as a policy to undermine the Hungarian majority.

scape-goating emerged as an effective political tactic, one that uses stereotypes of other nationalities as means to explain social problems” (Verdery 1997: 97). Social problems are one thing Romania has enough of, and subsequently ethnic Romanians felt insecure about their nations future from 1990 and onwards.

Still today, Romanian scholars are influenced by their communist past. Therefore, many have been unable to escape the reminiscence of communist indoctrination and are unable to comment objectively or balanced on interethnic tension and the Tîrgu Mures incident. Publications, writings and other comments about ethnic diversity and Transylvanian Hungarians shows a picture of continued use of ideas, language and fear of the “other” that Ceausescu so vehemently indoctrinated the Romanian population with for two decades.

1.4 Roots of Romanian Nationalism

Romanian nationalism in the beginning of 1990’s can be described as “integral nationalism”. That is nationalism of a more extreme sort, which happens when a nation feels threatened by neighbours or have had a blow to their self-esteem and other factors. This kind of nationalism grows under extreme conditions, such as during or after a revolution. Integral nationalism is also a tool, which can create extreme conditions. It is a system where the individual belongs fully to the nation, and only to the nation. “Exponents of integral nationalism are prepared unscrupulously to assert the interest of their own nation at the expense of others” (Alter 1994: 26). The definition fits the Romanian political environment post-1989, since integral nationalism grows in extreme political environments when sentiments were generally preceded by a crisis of national self-confidence, extraordinary events from the outside, or a “real or self-perceived threats to the continued existence of the nation” (Alter 1994: 32). Romanians after the Revolution felt intimidated by the Hungarians; they had initiated the Revolution, and afterwards they increased their cries for equal rights. Many Hungarians were left with the immediate feeling that nationalism had disappeared along with communism, while the Romanians still believed

what Ceausescu had told them; that the “Hungarian question” had been solved. As historically, Transylvania had been a part of “Greater-Hungary”, more demands for Hungarian rights sparked off a fear of possible federalism, or even secession plans of Transylvania from the rest of the country¹¹. In this respect many Romanians were scared of Hungarian revisionism. As both nations put diagonal claims to Transylvania many believed that there would always exist distrust between Romanians and Hungarians. The ghost of federalism will always hunt Romanians (Sugar 1995: 500), and this was one of the initial fears that erupted after 1989 when ethnic Hungarians demanded more cultural and educational autonomy. Under President Iliescu, ethnic minorities such as Hungarians (and Gypsies) “were described by government-connected media as disloyal, potentially treacherous and inferior to the Romanians” (Tismaneanu 1999: 435).

The self-image the Transylvanian Romanians come up with is shaped under the pressure of the constant threat they feel coming from “the other”. The collective defence mechanism set off by this permanent fear and defiance favours the shaping of an original self-image that feverishly tends to make up compensating myths, security meant to provide symbolic protection to threatened identity and injured national pride. (Mitu 2001: 4)

At the same time, communism has produced more tightly knit ethnic groups, which enforced the separation between Romanian and Hungarians. As the “shortage economy” created bribery, it also produced “the use of ethnicity as basis for personistic connections” (Verdery 1996: 86). Thus, while the strongest group, in most areas the Romanians, created a shortage for Hungarians (and in some cases vice versa), the Hungarians would despise the Romanians even more. In this sense, the economic failure of communism was anti-integrationist, and together with Ceausescu’s more obvious attempts of trying to destruct Hungarian identity, it rather strengthened it and created more separation between the two groups. Subsequently it laid the roots for Romanian nationalism.

¹¹ Although a lot of sentiments are attached to Transylvania, Hungary would not want the territory if it were offered to them for free. A border change between the countries is as unrealistic as them going to war with each other. But this does not undermine the historical and psychological sentiments this region means to both nations.

1.5 The Hungarians of Romania

Since the Trianon treaty in 1920 many Hungarians have dreamt of reuniting Transylvania with Hungary proper. As it has been showed, this has increased the Romanian fear and nationalism in response to a perceived Hungarian separatism. For the Hungarians in Romania, the Vienna dictate, which granted northern Transylvania to Hungary in 1940, was a blessing; for the Romanians, an unforgiving curse upon the Romanian nation, which would last for four years. For the first time in over two decades the Hungarians felt like first-class citizens again. Still today, many old Hungarians remember Horthy's regime of northern Transylvania as a "golden age" (Mungiu-Pippidi 1999). Equally, the Romanians felt they were degraded as citizens under Hungarian rule. In southern Transylvania, Hungarians were equally mistreated and to some extent persecuted, as Romanians felt they were in the north.

After World War II, Transylvania was restored under Romanian rule, although the central region of Transylvania, an Hungarian dense area, including the counties Covasna, Harghita and Mures, experienced some kind of autonomy¹². This was gradually stripped in the 1960's, and during the 1970's Ceausescu's policy of state nationalism and discrimination against the Hungarians deteriorated the Hungarians status even more. The situation for the Hungarian minority was to reach a peak during the 1980's. However, it is well to remember that during the last decade of communism economic hardship, state (secret) police control and isolationists foreign policy affected everyone in Romania, Hungarians as well as Romanians. Some of the measures were not always directly aimed at the Hungarian minority, but in many instances they suffered the most. As Romania became "Romanianized" Hungarians were not allowed to give Hungarian names to their children that could not be translated into Romanian, nor to attend school in Hungarian; Romanian language became the absolute norm in all institutions, and to speak Hungarian in public was impossible without fear of police intimidation; books and

newspapers were increasingly limited (in extreme cases only Romanian nationalist propaganda was translated into Hungarian); Hungarian radio ceased to exist; and Hungarians suffered more work discrimination than other ethnic groups (Helsinki Watch 1989).

These injustices laid the roots for international minority rights pressure on Romania well into the 1990's. This has repeatedly been boosted by Hungarian demands for equal rights and Hungarian nationalism, both from Transylvanian Hungarians, Hungary and the Hungarian diaspora. In this respect, the hardship Romania went through in the 1980's, including the discrimination of the Hungarian minority stipulated above, laid the groundwork for Hungarian nationalism in the region, which again fuelled the increasing interethnic tension and helped the resurfacing of Romanian nationalism in the 1990s.

2.0 The Interethnic Clashes in Tirgu Mures

Tirgu Mures is lying in the heart of Transylvania, and the city served as the capital of the Hungarian autonomous region between 1952 and 1968. Tirgu Mures has historically been predominantly Hungarian, but during the forced urbanisation during communism the city saw an influx of Romanians. Today the city is approximately fifty-fifty Romanian and Hungarian. The Hungarian autonomous region included the counties Mures, Harghita and Covasna, and still today these three counties are dubbed "Szekely Land" after the historically Hungarian sub-group who inhabits the area. The Szeklers is a Hungarian tribe of a slightly different ancestry, and lives in an enclave in the Carpathian Mountains surrounded by Romanians. However, most inhabitants of this area view themselves first as Hungarian and only secondly as Szekely (Mungiu-Pippidi 1999). Only a small group of people praises their Szekely ancestry as a separate unit, although the name is still in use, such as for the Szekler National Council (CNS) that works in close association with UDMR. Actually, the Szeklers had been better off referring to themselves as Hungarians to receive a stronger minority status; the more united and bigger

¹² See Appendix I for county map and the map of the historical Szekely region.

minority, the greater voice and influence. Therefore, the Hungarian Szeklers constitutes a problem in the Romanians' eyes. Not only because the area they live in is the most homogenous Hungarian area in Romania, but also because for a century they have refused Romanian assimilation.

“The ‘Szekely’ identity survived only as a ‘local’ identity. With one exception, the rest of the ‘Szkelys’ we discussed with considered ‘it is the Romanian nationalists who say that Szekelys are anything else than Hungarians.’ Due to their homogenous presence in their areas, Szekely are in fact less interested in cohabitation [with the Romanians] than other Hungarians. [...] Cohabitation in the Szekely area is viewed differently in the rest of Transylvania, especially in towns, since at the country side there are almost no Romanians except one policeman per village” (Mungiu-Pippidi 1999).

This strong self-consciousness among the Hungarians in the area is threatening to most Romanians. This was one of the elements that sparked off the ethnic tension in 1990. What is more irritating for the Romanians, especially in ‘Szekely land’ and in Tirgu Mures, is that Hungarians are more united than the Romanians are. One “can still trace [...] fundamental Romanian inferiority and feeling of rejection and [a] fundamental superiority and pride as Hungarians as the basis of nationalistic feelings of today” (Mungiu-Pippidi 1999). Thus, in this region Romanians have ‘low self-esteem’ compared to Hungarians, since in “the predominantly Hungarian-inhabited area Szekler counties [...] Romanians felt that they were in a minority and that their culture was neglected” (Schopflin 1993: 28). The Szekler capital Tirgu Mures was to become the stage for the events that would stir Romanian-Hungarian relations for a decade to come.

2.1 Prior to the Events

When communism collapsed, some feared that Romania would disintegrate. Some claim that it was a real threat, others a manipulated one. One of the initial factors that started the revolution in 1989 was when the Hungarians demanded more equal rights, such as respect of cultural and

language autonomy. The police in response tried to evict a Hungarian Protestant pastor, Laszlo Tökès, from his parish house in Timisoara (a city in the western region Banat, on the border to Serbia). A demonstration for his release sparked a nation-wide reaction. In a few days communism had collapsed, and an interim government consisting of dissidents, former communist and scholars were put up under the name National Salvation Front (FSN). The fraction of former high-ranking communists in its leadership is of dubious character, and the revolution has often been named a coup d'état or a "stolen revolution"¹³. Nonetheless, entering the year 1990 Hungarian-Romanian ethnic relations seemed harmonious. Hungary had been the first country to send help-packages of food and clothes into Romania, almost immediately after the revolution. The interim government (FSN) dismantled the secret police *Securitate*, which main aim was to control, intervene and arrest any Hungarian 'counter-revolutionary' attempts. Ethnic Hungarians were as well automatically promised more cultural rights in Transylvania, however any fundamental changes were held off until after the coming May elections.

For the Hungarians developments went too slow, and they continued to demand and press for more rights, and asked for "the immediate development of an educational system guaranteeing minority-language instruction at every level; the re-establishment of the independent Hungarian University in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvar); the introduction of mandatory bilingualism in Transylvania, with administrative and judicial proceedings being conducted in the Romanian and Hungarian languages and the creation of a Ministry of Nationalities" (Deletante 1991: 29). On February 8, this reached a peak when approximately 5,000 Romanians attended an anti-Hungarian demonstration in the local sports hall in Tirgu Mures to voice their opposition to the Hungarian's demands that the Bolyai High School and other University branches in the city to resume teaching in Hungarian instead of Romanian. The Hungarians retaliated, February 10,

¹³ Several scholars agree on this statement, but for elaborate discussion on this topic see: Hall, Richard Andrew, 1999. "The Uses of Absurdity: The Staged War Theory and the Romanian Revolution of December 1989." *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp 501-542.

with a silent protest to demand equal rights with Romanians in Tirgu Mures, Sfintu Georghe (in Covasna) and several other towns.

On the Hungarian national day, March 15, an influx of Hungarian tourists from Hungary proper accompanied the Transylvanian Hungarians in their celebration. March 15 escalated the ethnic tension already present in Transylvania. Although, several of the arrangements were done in Romanian as well as Hungarian language, Hungarian flags, speeches and songs dominated the day. This was the first free celebration in over 40 years for Transylvanian Hungarians. In a historical context, March 15 is the anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian revolution¹⁴. On March 16, *Vatra*¹⁵ supporters in Tirgu Mures were angered by two bilingual signs placed in the city centre that read “Justice for Minorities” and “Schools in Hungarian.” The supporters subsequently “began molesting Hungarians in the street” (Socor 1990: 38). It seems like the anger that developed on March 16 was the first big event of a build up to the clashes. A pharmacy in the city had put up a bilingual sign in response to a newly passed law that stated that medicine could be labelled in both languages. Some Romanians attacked the female pharmacist working there and threatened to kill her. The police did not intervene. Soon the crowd of 200 Romanians outside the pharmacy escalated into a crowd of 2000 people who demonstrated against the Hungarians. From video footage and interviews¹⁶ it seems like March 16 marked one of the first violent mass protests by Romanians against the Hungarians. On March 17 a Hungarian drunk driver ran his Trabant into a group of Romanians, raising suspicion of a violent Hungarian counter attack. However, these two days resulted only in a small number of injuries (Socor 1990: 38).

¹⁴ This was a revolution, which the Hungarians lost, while Romanians sided with the Austrians to crush the attempt of Hungarian independence. The Romanians mainly did this to gain more rights from Vienna, but when the revolution or “War of Independence” as the Hungarians have dubbed it ended in 1849, the Romanians gained nothing. When the dual monarchy was established in 1867 and Transylvania fell under the rule from Budapest it was clear that the Hungarians had lost the war but won the peace. The opposite was the case for the Romanians.

¹⁵ The organizations nature and program will be fully explained and explored later.

¹⁶ From an unpublished documentary “After Ten Years: A Documentary Film on the Events in Tirgu Mures, March 1990,” produced by the Civitas Foundation in Cluj, funded by Soros Open Network. Bori Kovacs simultaneously translated this part for me.

On March 18-19, students' rallies against Hungarian demands were held in Bucharest, Iasi, Craiova, Suceava, and Constanta (all outside Transylvania) and Cluj. The demonstrations had small participation, but gained good media coverage.

2.2 Day 1

In the morning March 19 a crowd of Romanians had gathered outside the City Hall. The County Council was supposed to hold a meeting on the topic of the rising tension between Hungarians and Romanians. At 10 o'clock some of the Romanians from the crowd entered the City Hall, and at least one secretary was hit by the mob. The crowd had gathered to demand the resignation of Kiraly Karoly, Vice Chairman of the Provisional Council of National Unity (CPUN) and Elod Kincses, a Hungarian Vice President of the County Council. The meeting was subsequently cancelled, and the crowd moved to the headquarters of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) (Helsinki Watch 1990: 3).

The UDMR's building came immediately under attack. Two of the 65-70 members inside the building, Istvan Kiraly and Andras Suto requested protection against the crowd. Kiraly Karoly, who at that time was in Bucharest, said in an interview¹⁷ that:

“When I found out that Suto and the others were at the headquarters [of the UDMR], I met with Iliescu, and Petre Roman, the minister of the interior, the minister of defense, with Cambrea, the head of the police, with general Cojocaru and they all told me to calm down, that there was no problem. On the contrary, on the contrary, they called the minister of the interior and he told me around 6 o'clock that the tanks were out and that Suto and the others were not there anymore. I didn't believe it and so I called Suto's wife, Eva. And she told me that Andras wasn't there, that she didn't know where he was. And then she says, and I have it here, on tape. And the minister of the interior tells me, Mr. Vice-president, these are all hooligans. They are lying.”

¹⁷ The interview takes place in the unpublished documentary previously mentioned. Bori Kovacs' translation, I'm in gratitude.

Even if the police station was only 300 meters away from the building, neither the police nor the army responded to calls for help. The crowd was armed with sticks, bottles and farm tools as they began to force themselves into the building. “The police and army did not respond to the UDMR’s calls for protection until several hours after the attack began. Many ethnic Hungarians trapped inside were seriously injured” (HRW 1990). Most of the Hungarians inside had hid in the attic, and the Romanians threatened to put the building on fire. At this point the police were seen outside, acting as mere observers of the events. The crowd was reinforced with more people, and at least one busload of peasants arrived from the nearby villages of Hodac and Ibanesti arrived. Helsinki Watch reported that they were unable to confirm the involvement of *Vatra* in the organization of the busses and trucks that day, but a “representative of the *Vatra Romaneasca*, stated that the armed peasants were in Tirgu Mures to attend a musical festival and responded to requests for help from Romanians” (Helsinki Watch 1990: 3-4). Around 8 p.m. approximately 30 soldiers finally arrived and promised the Hungarians safe exit¹⁸, and a truck was put at the back entrance to take them away. Colonel Judea¹⁹ told those in the attic that the building would be cleared and he personally guaranteed their safety. At 9 p.m., Suto and about 15 other members of UDMR left the attic and were attacked by Romanians still in the building. Col. Judea and all of the other army officers were nowhere to be seen. As the Hungarians came out the building, they had to walk through the crowd for about 10-15 meters to reach the truck. They were sporadically beaten and humiliated on the way, and further injuries occurred as it took the truck 10 minutes to leave the area. The remaining people in the attic escaped later at 10 p.m. when the crowd had dispersed (Helsinki Watch 1990: 4).

¹⁸ One of those interviewed in the documentary says that they were first told to come down to negotiate, and not until this seemed impossible did they choose to escape. Nevertheless, all sources indicate that they were promised a safe exit by the military.

¹⁹ A retired army officer and president of the Front of National Salvation in the County Council, often portrayed in military uniform during City Hall meetings in the spring of 1990. He is still involved in politics on local level in Tirgu Mures today.

Seven Hungarians were hospitalised after the attack, among them was Andras Suto who was treated in a hospital in Boston many months afterwards. He was blinded in one eye (Deletante 1991: 32).

2.3 Day 2

The next morning around 15,000 Hungarians and sympathetic Romanians and Gypsies gathered at the main square outside the City Hall to demonstrate against the incident the previous day. Not much later 3,000 Romanians gathered at the opposite side of the square, some of them carrying signs of *Vatra*. At this moment the first calls to President Iliescu and Minister of Defence Stanculescu in Bucharest was made (Helsinki Watch 1990: 4). Speeches from the City Hall, both in Romanian and Hungarian, were made to the crowd on the square, and promises that President Iliescu would come to solve the problems were made. One of the Hungarian speakers told the crowd²⁰:

“I am begging you, dear brothers. We have to behave calmly, we must not break apart, get demoralized. What today is really about is to learn to live together, to be together. This way we can maintain the cleanliness of our revolution. In the afternoon we are expecting Király Károly and president Iliescu.”

After several promises that Iliescu would come from Bucharest, he oddly enough didn't show up. General Scriciu, a reserve officer and member of the County Council, admitted that he personally talked to Iliescu and told him that it was unnecessary for him to come. A videotaped speech from the City Hall balcony confers that Scriciu said that Iliescu would come in two-three days to huge outcry from the crowd in the square.

At 2 p.m. the situation became more infuriated with tension when rumours spread that busses of Romanian peasants were approaching the city to join the Romanians on the square, and “there was near mass hysteria among the Hungarian crowd” (Helsinki Watch 1990: 4). By

2:30 p.m., General Scrieciu told the crowds that the city was sealed off such that no reinforcement from outside the city would be possible, and some 50 policemen placed themselves between the two crowds. The roadblock proved itself to be insufficient and corrupted, since busloads continued to pour in long after the roads should have been closed. The people arriving were mainly Romanian peasants armed with farm tools and such, but it is possible that a few trucks with ethnic Hungarians also arrived. Hungarian villagers around Tirgu Mures responded that the Romanians attacked them when they saw the trucks approaching the city. One of them said that by then they understood that something was going on, and another stated that they called and warned their Hungarian kinsmen in Tirgu Mures about the approaching trucks²¹.

The influx of Romanian peasants increased the Romanian crowd to equal that of the 15,000 Hungarian. “Both Hungarian and Romanian leaders inside the Town Hall repeatedly called the army asking that all necessary steps be taken to prevent violence. At about 3 p.m., the army promised that troops would be sent. The government in Bucharest also claims that it gave an order at about 3 p.m. to the army in Tirgu Mures to go to the scene. The army in Tirgu Mures, however, claims it did not receive such an order” (Helsinki Watch 1990: 5). Between 5 and 5:30 p.m. violence erupted as “ethnic Romanians surged forward and attacked the Hungarians, breaking the single line of 50 police that the authorities had sent to divide the two groups” (HRW 1990). A film shows General Scrieciu on the phone saying that no military intervention is needed, while he added, “we don’t want to frighten anybody.”²² The Hungarians responded by retreating away from the crowd. In most of the previous demonstrations, including this one, the Hungarians leaders had warned against any confrontations asking the Hungarians not to respond to violence, and most of all not to act violent, provocative or even hit back when

²⁰ Taken from the unpublished documentary on the Tirgu Mures incident. Since the film was not finished, the names of the people appearing in it were not given. Bori Kovacs translation.

²¹ Interviews from the unpublished documentary on the Tirgu Mures incident. Simultaneously translated by Bori Kovacs.

²² *Ibid.*

beaten. Initially the Romanians who had gathered at the square first were also unarmed, but their reinforcement from surrounding villages brought with them farming tools and other weapons. Some signs of organisation were observed as weapons were handed out to busloads of people upon their arrival. However, it is clear that the Hungarians arrived unarmed, and did not anticipate any violence and fighting. They only armed themselves in self-defence when the first attack came. As Dr. Zoltan Kolozsvary, later a Vice President of the County Council, observed the events from the City Hall told Helsinki Watch:

We have heard some cries that those from Hodac have arrived and they are coming. It was awful, what I have seen. They were destroyed in that moment – because the Hungarians had no weapons at all. They were empty-handed, that is for sure. I have seen from the window [of the City Hall] the terror of the people as they tried to obtain something, sticks from here, from the building. They destroyed some of the fences here and destroyed benches just to obtain something to use as a weapon. It was awful. It was truly awful (cited in Helsinki Watch 1990: 5).

However, as the Romanians were seen beating up Hungarians at the square, and fighting continued, this was supported by chants in Hungarian from the City Hall who screamed through the microphone, “Hit them,” “Don’t Run” and other similar phrases²³.

At around 7 p.m., five or six tanks entered the city centre. Attempts to split the crowds by then were impossible, and the interethnic clashes moved and continued in nearby streets. Street fighting and mob violence would continue through the evening and night, and it was not before the morning that the widespread violence had ended.

2.4. Days After: Counting the Dead and Injured

Most of the fighting ended by the morning March 21, but isolated incidents continued on the city’s outskirts until March 23 (Socor 1990: 36). The fighting in the square and streets of Tirgu Mures left eight dead and hundreds injured (Mungiu-Pippidi 2000: 2). The numbers of the actual

²³ *Ibid.*

death toll have varied immensely. Everything from five (Andreescu 2003: 30) and as many as thirty has been noted (Griffiths 1993: 23). This might be due to how death occurred, if it was instantly or later by injuries. The figure of some thirty people is far too high and is possibly an estimate of deaths connected to ethnic violence all over Romania, and then especially towards the Roma population. Therefore, I find Mungiu-Pippidi's estimate far more trustworthy, a number that agrees with normal accepted figures. Also Vladimir Socor in Radio Free Europe's report *Forces of Old Resurfaces in Romania: The Ethnic Clashes in Tirgu-Mures* refers to estimates by foreign correspondents in Tirgu Mures claimed that local police and medical sources put the final casualty figure at 8 dead and 300 injured. "One of the dead men is said to be Romanian; the others are reported or presumed to be Hungarians" (Socor 1990: 36). The one Romanian death seems to be a self inflicted accident. One of the trucks that first broke the police line and drove into the Hungarian crowd²⁴ hit the Orthodox Church's stairs, one Romanian fell off the truck and presumably later died of the injuries (Helsinki Watch 1990: 5).

The Romanian authorities did not manage to give an exact number on deaths and injuries, and came out with several sets of different figures that conflict in details but one: "the suggestion that ethnic Romanians sustained far more than the Hungarians did" (Socor 1990: 36-37). The media was also unable to report on this objectively, "taking sides based on ethnic considerations and failing to discuss the implications of the events for the country's future political development (Socor 1990: 37).

The events of the clashes tell the shocking truth that Romanian nationalism had resurfaced, and that on those faithful days it had taken a violent form. "At the end of December 1989 not one well-intended Romanian or Hungarian would have imagined that the "dark days" of March 1990 would come" (Gal 2004: 153). The attack on 19 and 20 March, which left 8 dead

²⁴ Helsinki Watch reported this somehow inaccurately. Tapes from the clashes shown in the documentary shows the truck come from behind the Hungarian crowd while they were throwing stones at the Romanians. The truck then went of the street and into the Church stairs. It is clear that the fighting had already been going on for a while from the footage, however, it is impossible to say exactly when this happened, except that from the light it had to be still late afternoon or early evening.

and several hundred injured, were not anticipated, but should not be underestimated. The truth behind it is blurry, but the facts tell a shocking tale.

3.0 Forces Behind the Violent Clashes

The clashes in Tirgu Mures contain certain elements that point to the fact that there were circles in Romania, and not in Hungary, that provoked the violence to take place. Although several Romanians participated on the Hungarian side of the protest, and many Romanians in the crowd who attacked first did not anticipate or want the violence, it is clear that certain elements in the clash were primary fuelled by Romanian nationalists. The only main criticism, although weak, towards the Hungarian minority could be said to be their careless provocation in asking for too many rights at one time, the extended celebration on March 15, their stubborn demonstrations for bilingualism and the influx of Hungarian tourists, which intimidated Romanians who had lived in a country so long closed to foreigners. That said, the growth of Romanian nationalist groups that had begun to get a strong foothold by the time the ethnic clashes in Tirgu Mures took place, has undoubtedly links to the violence that erupted there. Also the mixed messages and refusal of General Scrieciu to call in the Army and ask Iliescu to come immediately, together with the fact that Kiraly Karloy was constantly misinformed²⁵ in Bucharest of what was happening, indicates that some people in the FSN might have escalated, or even been behind, the incident. The involvement of “former” *Securitate* members, the handing out of weapons to arriving peasants and the transport of people from villages outside of Tirgu Mures to the event gives strong evidence that there were some kind of organization behind the tension that escalated.

²⁵ This is at least Kiraly Karaly’s own interpretation of the incident. The fact given that many Hungarians blamed him for his impassivity and absence (although he visited Tirgu Mures a few times those days, he spent most of the time in Bucharest) might underpin this argument.

3.1 Elements of Organization

The unanticipated violence that happened in Tîrgu Mures March 20 can be described as a psychological response produced by mass mentality that is easily aroused in crowds and by community feelings. As several participants in the violence noted that afterwards they came to the realization how ridiculous and unnecessary the whole thing had been, but during the clashes such logic was overshadowed by irrational feelings²⁶. However, it is “clear [...] that the violence was stage-managed, the question of by whom inevitable arose (Deletante 1991: 32). Many details will remain unclear, but several aspects are evident. The main form of organization can be seen in the arrival of buses and trucks with aroused Romanian peasants and the presence of nationalist groups. “The attack on Hungarians in Tîrgu-Mures were apparently spearheaded by a group of up to 1000 peasants, mostly from the outlying mountain villages of Hodac and Ibanesti, who had been mobilized by known *Vatra* followers, including their local mayors and other local notables” (Socor 1990: 39). In Ibanesti, the mayor had promised a sum of 3000 lei (then the equivalent sum of the average monthly wage of a manual worker) to go to Tîrgu Mures to defend Romanians there against Hungarian attacks on Romanians (Deletante 1991: 32). In a different village, the local priest had ran into a meeting with the mayor and other community members screaming to them: “You sit here and do nothing while Romanians are killed in Tîrgu Mures?”²⁷ On both 19 and 20 March, the peasants were transported in trucks and busses in and out of Tîrgu Mures given alcohol on the way. “They used identical axes and standardized clubs, which were picked up from a storage site reportedly located near the main scene of action” (Socor 1990: 39). Such weapons were stored in factories as an arsenal for Ceausescu’s civilian defence unit, the so-called patriotic guards, and were supervised by *Securitate*. “It is likely that such

²⁶ From the unpublished documentary on the interethnic clashes.

²⁷ The name of the priest was Boila, however, the village name was not identified. Taken from the unpublished documentary on the Tîrgu Mures incident. Bori Kovacs translation.

primitive arsenals were supplied to the villagers of Hodac and Ibanesti on the orders of *Securitate* members who were sympathizers of *Vatra Romaneasca*” (Deletante 1991: 32).²⁸

3.2 *Vatra and the Rise of Nationalism in the Wake of Tirgu Mures*

Three main nationalist organizations who got increased support after the Tirgu Mures incident were the cultural organization *Vatra* who already had a stronghold in Tirgu Mures long before the clashes, the political organization PUNR who was established in Tirgu Mures days before the clash and the national political party PRM who was established later, but grew out of a nationalistic weekly established with support by leading members of the FSN the summer of 1990. The main actor in Tirgu Mures, *Vatra Romanesca* had strong ties to the political groups such as PUNR and PRM, but they also had a membership mass consisting mainly of former *Securitate* members, local politicians and bureaucrats of the communist apparatus and new politicians and intellectuals with ties to the FSN. Several of the members in either group had dual membership in another one.

Most sources date the organization of *Vatra* back to January 1990 (Socor 1990: 38), but its first mass meeting was held February 1 in Alexandru Papiu Ilaria Secondary School in Tirgu Mures, and a week later another meeting was held in a bigger sports hall that attracted an even larger audience (Deletante 1991: 30). The organization was established mainly by holdovers from the Ceausescu regime’s local *nomenklatura* in Mures County and had spread to several other Transylvanian counties during February-March 1990 (Socor 1990: 38). Since many of its members had held power before 1990 they had in some areas good access and control over official local media. *Securitate* agents had been integrated into local governments “especially in predominantly Hungarian and mixed-population areas” even if in many regions these old holdovers “from the former regime lost most of their position, they seemed to be still

²⁸ When Col. Judea, who was at the City Hall March 20, was asked about the arrival and handouts of weapons he responded that they came around lunch time, so he went for lunch, so he didn’t notice that they came. Taken from the unpublished documentary on the Tirgu Mures incident.

entrenched in Mures and other counties with mixed population” (Socor 1990: 38). The language of appeal that *Vatra* and other nationalist groups used is similar to the language of propaganda used during the years of Ceausescu’s rule. Romanian nationalism is based on this external fear fostered during communism, and it was this fear who prompted the creation of *Vatra*, “as indeed its president, Radu Ceonlea has pointed out. Mistrust of Hungarian motives, fear of Hungarian revanchism, concern about an erosion of Romanian dominance in Transylvania, general unease about the future of the economy; all these factors have contributed to the climate of interethnic tension” (Deletant 1991: 29). It was easy for nationalists to create this fear in the Romanian mind when the Hungarians demanded more cultural, educational and linguistically rights. *Vatra* played on the typical aspects of Romanian nationalism that build up under this fear, and especially in the belief that Transylvania is the “Hearth” (the meaning of the word *Vatra*) or the cradle of the Romanian civilization.

Next to *Vatra*, was the emergence of the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR), which was established 15 March 1990 in Tirgu Mures, at the beginning of the violent conflict. Also PUNR’s members consisted of regional supporters of the former Ceausescu’s regime, *Securitate* members and a dual membership in the cultural organization *Vatra* was predominant. The question of PUNR’s involvement is beyond doubt (RFE/RL 2000), as evidence has pointed out that they played a role as agitators on the square that faithful day. PUNR later recruited Mihala Cafariu as the party leader, a resident of Tirgu Mures and a “hero” of the March 1990 interethnic clashes (Shafir 1997). During the street fighting in Tirgu Mures he was badly injured, something that only infuriated him even more to fight against Hungarians and other minorities in politics.

Although *Vatra* was to receive a strong support by ethnic Romanians, it was limited as a cultural organization. PUNR was by the end of the decade not to achieve the same political support as the would-to-be Greater Romanian Party (PRM). PUNR would remain a local political movement, while PRM had parliamentary ambitions. PRM’s existence can be traced

back to a weekly newspaper established in the summer, 1990. The weekly *România Mare* had a strong nationalistic and racist character to their journalism²⁹. The two most prominent figures in both the weekly and later in the party were editor in chief Cornelius Vadim Tudor (party president from the establishment until today³⁰) and its director Eugen Barbu. The two writers are “renowned for their conspicuous contribution to hagiography under former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu [and] for their links with the former secret police (Shafir 1991: 25). Both of them were skilful journalists and therefore managed to achieve many supporters, and by their success they were encouraged to establish its political wing, PRM, in May 1991. “The party’s emergence owes much to the support of the National Salvation Front and, in particular, Prime Minister Petre Roman”³¹ (Shafir 1991: 25). PRM and Tudor would achieve blooming support throughout the beginnings of the 1990’s³², however they had little impact on what happened in Tirgu Mures March 1990 they rather gained from it.

Even if the nationalist were supported by elements from the former regime, it is important to keep in mind that “Not all nationalists are former communists, nor all ex-communist nationalists” (Verdery 1996: 92). Nevertheless, the participation and involvement of

²⁹ In one year its editor, Tudor, was sued for libel close to a hundred times for his statements. One example is from his weekly, reprinted in the opposition paper *Revista 22*, 4-10 February, 1993, p. 12: “Romanian, Hungarians fascism is attacking us openly. . . . *In twenty-four hours we must ban by law all anti-Romanian groupings: the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania and Soros Foundation, as well as their stooges, the Civic Alliance Party, Group for Social Dialogue, Literary Romania, Democratic Convention! Romanians, don’t be afraid of the wild beast of Hungarian revisionism; we have put its nose out of a joint few times already, and now we’ll crush it decisively and without pity! They want autonomy? Expel tem!*” (cited in Verdery 1996: 100, emphasis in original).

³⁰ However, he stepped down early in 2005 so that the party would have better chances to join European Popular Party. It proved to be to little help and in June 2005 strong indicators shows that he might presume power again. Nevertheless, he still controls PRM behind the curtains.

³¹ A letter dated March 2 from Tudor and Barbu addressed to Petre Roman, asking for permission to start a nationalist magazine, it was reprinted in full in the opposition paper *22*, 17-23 December, 1992: “We would not have emerged from our self-imposed silence had we not been more and more revolted by the scandalously antinational character of certain publications. . . . These publications have become a sort of agent of denunciation, maintaining a climate of tension and terror over the people of good faith of this country. This isn’t good. We cannot remain passive before the attempt of these hypocrites, ulcerated with political ambitions for aggrandizement and enrichment, to destabilize the country – and worse – and to enslave it to foreign powers. . . . We see that the most perilous politics (draped in the garb of democracy, naturally!) comes from the [opposition] publications . . . manipulated openly and diabolically by the same old pig-sty at Radio Free Europe. All these people were traitors before and still are today” (cited in Verdery 1996: 112-113).

³² PRM would replace PUNR as the strongest nationalist party, and by the 2000 election PUNR had withdrawn to local politics, while PRM achieved a astonishing 20 percent in the elections, by 2004 PRM was down to around 13 percent again. Although, ethnic tension is on the decline, there is still strong electoral support for PRM. One of the

these and other elements in nationalist parties, and in the interethnic clashes have not been exaggerated. "In sum, *Vatra* emerged from the Tirgu-Mures incidents substantially strengthened" (Socor 1990: 41).

3.3 Political Polemics: the Response of the Interim Government

In the spring of 1990, the interim government FSN were to come with statements and proclamations that would contradict each other. One day it would encourage positive progress towards minority rights and democracy, and another blaming them for the problems transition. Over all, many of the statements baffled international observers. Especially during and the days after the clashes, the polemics the government would use would change from day to day, from person to person and so on. Although certain aspect of the clashes in Tirgu Mures were accurate, these were among the few, most of them resorted to focus on the damage inflicted on Romanians while putting the blame on Hungary. Romanian politics had not only taken the form of nationalism, but on the official level it had sunken to the same means as Ceausescu in the use of political language: Blame any problems on outside forces to secure your power as long as possible.

On January 5, the National Salvation Front (FSN) "Solemnly" declared that it would "guarantee individual and collective rights and freedom for minorities" (quoted in RFE/RL 2000). The interim government would stand by this statement, thus granting minorities rights step by step. However, an outsider might easily criticize that this was too little, but one have to keep in mind that minority rights were absent during Ceausescu's years and changes can hardly come over night. But by the time of the interethnic clashes in Tirgu Mures, the response of the provisional government can be best described as political polemics. Both Interim President Ion Illiescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman "issued several astonishing insensitive statements that failed to condemn the violence unequivocally – "regrettable events" was the operative

reason is that the other parties, such as the Social Democrats, have been more serious the last years, and left much

euphemism” (Socor 1990: 40). It seemed that the FSN, approaching the May elections, would not alienate the nationalistic forces growing in Romanian circles. In other words, they would stay friends with *Vatra* members and not lose votes to the political party PUNR. Therefore, it chose to play the “nationalistic card” without completely alienating themselves to the Hungarian minority, a “two sided policy began crystallize” (Deletante 1991: 33). In an interview to John Kifner in *New York Times* (NYT) March 22, Prime Minister Roman diplomatically stated that the violence was “lead by the local mayors, the attack by the Romanian villager who came to Targu Mures was the result of *a manipulation of public opinion by extremist elements*” (Kifner 1990: A17, Roman’s exact words in italics). In the article he continues: “A revival of the Iron Guard, a Fascist and anti-Semite movement, that came into power shortly before World War II could also have played a role, Mr. Roman and other Governmental officials said.” But Roman came also with accusation towards Hungary itself as he claimed that 9000 Hungarians had crossed the border to participate on the March 15 celebrations, and that the Hungarians committed “*unpleasant acts that inflamed Romanian national feelings*” (Kifner 1990: A17). Petre Roman managed to play the card of “reconciliation toward the Hungarians in Transylvania and of hostility toward the Hungarian government (Deletante 1991: 33), or as the NYT sub-headline read: “Bucharest Blames Hungary.”

In the evening of March 19, however, President Iliescu condemned the devastation of the UDMR building and the individual injuries. He also “expressed regret that local authorities, who should have kept order, had not managed to provide security to the UDMR headquarters and had failed to control extremist elements” (Helsinki Watch 1990: 6). On March 20, Romania’s Executive Bureau of the Provisional Council of National Unity (CPUN) issued a quite different statement than Iliescu the night before, “emphasising the *privileges* sought by the Hungarians and the behaviour of the Hungarians which had *offended the national feeling of the Romanian people* (Helsinki Watch 1990: 6, official statement in italics). It continued saying that the violence only

of their nationalist sentiments behind.

served Hungary's best which would give Transylvanian Hungarians more reasons to seek reunification with Hungary proper. On March 21, the Romanian government accused Budapest of fermenting anti-Romanian irredentist activities in what it called "action taken by officials from the Republic of Hungary" who had further helped to "undermine the necessary steps" that the Romanian government had done in order to "restore calm and public order in all the localities in the region (quoted in Shafir 1990: 44). It further accused Hungarian interim president Matyas Szuros of stirring up the problem of claiming that Transylvania was "ancestral Hungarian land" (Kifner 1990: A17). The Romanian government further accused Szuros that he had aroused Hungarians in Romania "to intensify their activity and to organize themselves in accordance with the idea that Transylvania is an ancient Hungarian land" (quoted in Shafir 1990: 44). Szuros' speech which the Romanian government referred to was from March 18, where he had come to criticize Romanian historiography and national indoctrination under Ceausescu, claiming that if Romanian could claim that Transylvania was their ancestral land, the Hungarians could do so too. However, he quickly added that he by no means claimed Transylvania back (Shafir 1990: 45).

On March 22, the CPUN set down a commission to be sent to Tirgu Mures to investigate the incident. The commission was headed by eight high-ranking military and civilian leaders from the old regime's law enforcement agencies, and consisted by only one ethnic Hungarian. A local investigation commission was also set up consisting of 3 Romanians and 3 Hungarians, representatives from both *Vatra*, UDMR and the local administration included. The commission's findings were never made public, but Helsinki Watch obtained a copy of the report, but "unfortunately, the report did not address the critical question raised by the violence: What role did the army and the police play in initiating the violence, and why did they fail to respond immediately to calls for help" (HRW 1990).

On March 23, a communiqué published in Bucharest said that the government "dissociated itself" from how the mass media had portrayed Tirgu Mures "regarding tendencies

of separation [and] nationalism” (quoted in Shafir 1990: 45). However, this communiqué restricted the “withdrawal” of accusations only to the counties Harghita and Covasna, and did not include the Mures county where Tirgu Mures is situated. Apparently, the statement was a response to Petre Roman’s telephone conversations to leaders in those two counties, and only said that no citizens from Hungary had been involved in any violence there (Shafir 1990: 45). On the same day, a message from Petre Roman to European prime ministers, the UN Secretary General and various international bodies, stating that 10,000 Hungarian citizens had participated in the violence around the country and that certain circles in Hungary was behind the interethnic clashes in Tirgu Mures (Shafir 1990: 46), seriously underpinning what he said to Bucharest the same day.

“The [FSN’S] reaction was an ominous sign that the Ceausescu policy of forced Romanianization had survived the ‘revolution.’ In [the] subsequent months, the number of ethnic Hungarians refugees fleeing Transylvania reached unprecedented levels” (Country Studies 1990). Michael Shafir from Radio Free Europe wrote that the reaction of the Romanian government was nothing but a “reminiscent of the Ceausescu regime’s position on the nationality issue in Romania” (Shafir 1990: 43). The main explanation FSN had given was that there had been “provocative behaviour of local Hungarians, [and that] tourists from Hungary proper and the government in Budapest” had been involved in the clashes (Gilberg 1990). No better assessments of why the clashes took place were given.

3.4 Romania’s Secret Police and its Traditional Aim

On 30 December 1989 the *Securitate* was officially “disbanded”, but its employees across the country still went to work, either at the local police station or at the regional headquarters, as nothing had happened. The *Securitate* members arrested after the December revolution had soon been released again, all but a few. As already seen, “former” agents were represented in nationalist groups such as *Vatra* and PUNR in the wake of the Tirgu Mures incident, implying

that the secret service was still operational on a certain level in the penetration or cohabitation of these nationalistic movements. Their involvement can be exemplified through the hand out of weapons during the clashes that only the former *Securitate* had access to. On March 2, the head of the Hungarian secret service declared: “Our information proves that almost without exception, the members of the Securitate are still in place” (Sturdza 1990: 34). Ion Conja, deputy of *Vatra* later admitted their involvement in an interview (RFE/RL 2000). Katherine Verdery labels PUNR and PRM as “unruly coalitions,” and that these groups were led primarily by local “officials of the [old] Communist Party, one or another fraction of the old/new Secret Police, members of the local police, and the henchmen of all these” (Verdery 1996: 197). Therefore, the involvement of secret agents in the Tirgu Mures incident seems perceptible. However, Verdery points out that her personal belief (which she cannot prove) is that “much of the violence of Romania’s first three or four postsocialist years [do not come] from central directives but from self-organizing groups of ex-Securitate who had lost out in power scuffle and hoped to improve their place by preserving a climate of political instability” (Verdery 1996: 217).

The *Securitate* had been given a three-month period to be completely dismantled, and officials were still supposed to be paid by the government during this period. The fact that the interethnic clashes took place ten days before the dismantling would have been completed, throws another light on the intention of the clashes. People employed by *Securitate* would not receive their money by March 30, and there was a growing concern for the government to what to do with them. What could one do with an organisation that was that huge? How could one just take it away, after not even knowing the true number of people employed in the sector? “The public opinion was vehemently hostile to setting up a similar institution again [...] Based on the argument that such events [as in Tirgu Mures] are a threat, the Romanian Intelligence Service was set up immediately afterward” (Andreescu 2003:85-86), bypassing legal measures and public opinion. This has lead people to speculate that the Tirgu Mures incident was as well planned and staged by the government. It has so far been impossible to verify the direct

involvement of politicians with certainty³³, although their passivity is well documented. Further suspicion is added to this by the fact that Iliescu several times promised to come to Tirgu Mures on March 20th to talk to the crowds, but never even tried to leave Bucharest while the violence started to crystallize. One of the most complex conspiracy theories states that the Tirgu Mures incident was planned to create a situation of political havoc in Romania, and to split the Hungarians and Romanians in two hostile factions. Some even note that Tirgu Mures was really intended to start a civil war where hatred towards the Hungarians would diminish the minority for good. Although the latter might be exaggerated, it brings into the light several facts about the situation in Romania at that time. The only other city that is split in fifty-fifty between Hungarians and Romanians in Romania is the north-western city Satu Mare (Szatmarnemeti). This theory states that this city was initially intended for the interethnic violence to take place, but since Satu Mare is located too close to the Hungarian border, fears that it could escalate into war between the two countries cancelled the plan. For this reason Tirgu Mures was picked instead. According to this theory, together with several facts, the former *Securitate* had a major role in planning and staging the violence. As a whole, this theory seems a little bit too speculative to be completely true. However, the fact that the clashes, the scheduled final dismantling of *Securitate* by the end of March and the re-establishment of a new secret police in the weeks after the Tirgu Mures incident happened in so tight time span is too coincidental to be ignored.

Soon after the Tirgu Mures interethnic clashes, the interim government published on March 25 a decree on a new intelligence service. The Tirgu Mures incident had obviously benefited the government by giving them an excuse to set up a new secret service. An official explained that “the dismantling of the *Securitate* had seriously compromised Romania’s security, and timely intelligence would have permitted the authorities to react more quickly to the violence

³³ This is clear from the fact that no politician, including Iliescu, has not yet been indicted for being involved in planning the violence in Tirgu Mures. Former President Ion Iliescu is currently waiting to appear in court on charges (he was indicted June 2005) for calling the miners from Jiu Valley to crush a opposition protest in June 1990, which killed 21 people and injured several more.

in Tirgu-Mures” (quoted in Sturdza 1990: 34). On April 24 Romania’s Intelligence Service (SRI) was set up.

Upon its establishment in March 1990, the Romanian Intelligence Service took over the department of the former Securitate that had used to monitor the activities of Hungarians in Romania, labelled as “irredentism”. National minorities and the Hungarians in particular used to be regarded as a threat to Ceausescu’s policy of assimilation. Most members of the former Securitate were trained from the perspective of national-communism whose main guarantors they were. After 1990, many of them have become SRI members. The department on irredentism continued its activities. At a certain point, the department was renamed “defence of the Constitution”, but hard facts demonstrate that the SRI attitude has not changed (Andreescu 1999: 7)

It is obvious that the “ethnic conflict in Tirgu Mures apparently gave the government the excuse it had sought to announce on March 25 that Romania needed a new, strong intelligence network to protect the country” (Sturdza 1990: 28). The establishment meant that the *Securitate* could again operate legally under a new name, with the only difference that they were put under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence rather than during communism, Ministry of Interior. It is difficult to estimate how many former *Securitate* members were included in the new SRI. The SRI chief Virgil Magureanu³⁴ pointed out in November 1990 that “one-quarter – or a little bit more – of the former intelligence apparatus of the Securitate has been taken over by the newly established body” (quoted in Helsinki Watch 1991: 8). These were well-trained, specialised and component officers, or as Verdery call them the “liberal” faction of *Securitate*. It is difficult to know what the one’s not included in the SRI were up to, “but forming nationalist parties and building pyramids are one reasonable possibility” (Verdery 1996: 198).

However, today it is believed that the former SRI chief Virgil Magureanu masterminded the Tirgu Mures riots (Shafir 1999; Andreescu 2003: 57). Magureanu was also one of those who initially helped establishing nationalist organizations in Tirgu Mures in the beginning of 1990.

³⁴ Magureanu was Intelligence Chief from 1990 to 1996, by the 2000 election he had moved into politics as the chairman of the Romanian National Party, another nationalist group. He is currently professor in Sociology at the University of Bucharest.

Mircea Chelaru, who headed the Romanian army during the clashes, “where he did nothing to defuse (or prevent) the conflict”, for this reason he later “participated in the establishment of the Romanian Intelligence Service, was appointed head of the Counterespionage Division, and had prerogatives in the surveillance of irredentist activities” (Andrescu 2003: 20). He was also well known for his anti-Hungarian statements in the Parliament, and for other nationalistic tendencies.

It is evidently that the mix of Romanian nationalist and former secret agents made it possible to manipulate the crowds and police in Tirgu Mures. This might also be the answer to why the Romanian peasants brought in from villages were so easily let through the roadblock. However, it gives little answer to why the military did not respond to calls both from the president and the local government to intervene earlier. Since several of those participating and organizing the violence presumably came from the communist *nomenklatura* and *Securitate*, in consideration with the instability the country was in March 1990, one can only speculate in their motives. Undoubtedly, the Tirgu Mures incident created a strong separation between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians, the resurgence of Romanian nationalism, and an unstable relationship between the two respective countries. If the reason for the involvement of former secret agents and supporters of Ceausescu was to underpin the chances of a new democratic Romania, they failed, but they certainly damaged relations that had an impact on how democracy could have been in the beginning of the 1990's. As interethnic co-operation dwindled in Romania, so did chances for stable governing of the country as Romanian nationalist parties won more support and the Hungarians predominantly voted ethnic and not ideological.

4.0 After the Clashes: 15 Years of Thwarted Politics

Not long after the clashes, the Hungarian Prime Minister Jozsef Antall³⁵ said that he was also Prime Minister for those Hungarians living outside Hungary's borders. By granting them

Hungarian identification cards,³⁶ Hungary infuriated its neighbours. As Istvan Horvath, an Hungarian professor in the Transylvanian city Cluj, notes that the impact of this “meant unconditional support for the political aspirations of the Hungarian minority in Romania, [...] this support [also] led primarily to gradually increasing confrontation and its perverse impact was the institutionalization of Romanian nationalism” (Horvath 2004: 203). Tension between the two states would continue, and a slow progress of reconciliation would take place. The Hungarians in Romania slowly gained more rights, but it was too slow and too little. Subsequently, the impact of Tirgu Mures, and the resurfaced Romanian nationalism, created political polemics and a situation, which have confused many about where the Romanian government really is headed. The trials that preceded the clashes in Tirgu Mures did not serve the justice as it was hoped for; the interethnic dialogue that looked so bright in the end of December 1989 had been buried; and the immediate political developments didn’t make it brighter.

4.1 Justice Served? Trials to Appease in Tirgu Mures

Soon after the Tirgu Mures incident, trials to find those responsible for the violence and deaths began. They can only be described as a farce. The Helsinki Watch reported in their 1990 May newsletter, that 31 persons were already under investigation. Out of these, two were Romanian, five Hungarians and 24 Gypsies (Helsinki Watch 1990: 7). Considering that the majority of deaths during the clashes were Hungarians, and that few of Tirgu Mures’ Roma inhabitants participated in the clashes, and those who did sided with the Hungarians, the investigation of the perpetrators of the violence clearly failed. Consequently, “Gypsies had been made into scapegoats and held responsible for the clashes” (HRW 1990). Between the 14 and 18 Gypsies were tried and convicted for offenses such as possession of weapons and disturbance of the peace (Helsinki Watch 1991: 17). In the end, none Romanians were convicted, while a couple of

³⁵ He was Prime Minister from May 1990 to December 1993.

³⁶ Hungary did not consult neighboring states on this issue. A Hungarian referendum in 2004 resulted in a negative vote for granting all Hungarians outside Hungary Hungarian citizenship.

Hungarians received prison sentences (pardoned by President Emil Constantinescu in 1997). The Roma on trial was forced by the police to sign their confession, or did not know what they were signing (Helsinki Watch 1990: 7). Military helicopters were continuously circling around the courthouse. This further intimidated the defence. No appeal was granted after the verdicts were given, and it's clear that the trials were politically charged. The fact that mainly Gypsies were blamed shows the nature of the Romanian legal system at the time. The fact that few Hungarians (and no Romanians) were convicted indicates that the trials were an attempt to console the Romanians while appeasing the Hungarians (instead of making it a mass trial) seem plausible.

Once more the Romanian government's policy of finding an outer threat as a solution to the national problems had surfaced and was a proof that communist indoctrination and policies prevailed as Hungary got the blame for *provocating* the violence and the Gypsies (as an outer threat since they are the least respected minority in Romania) were blamed *for* the violence.

4.2 Democracy at Birth: Elections and Politics in Romania

When FSN declared that it would hold free elections in the spring 1990³⁷, some saw it unrealistic that the elections would possibly be fair when held so early (Ionescu 1990: 27). Just as the interethnic clashes had been controlled by elements from the old system, the same people would ensure FSN victory in the elections. Although, the May 1990 elections are in many respects misleading, results from the 1992 election, when political parties were established and a political elite had emerged, are more descriptive of the political landscape of Romania at that given time.

In the spring 1990, the FSN used the old communist infrastructure to secure their victory, and they were “endorsed by those who feared to lose from change – change to a competitive market economy or to political democracy.” Further, this “constituency included not only bureaucrats, security agents, and apparatchiks, but also miners working low-grade seams,

³⁷ Initially FSN had promised right after the revolution that they would not stand in the up-coming elections, but only serve as an interim government. Their promises were not upheld, although by the 1992 elections FSN had

blue-collar workers in inviolable ‘rust belt’ plants, peasants whose work ethic had been sapped, rhetorical technocrats and so fourth” (Rothschild & Wingfield 2000: 249). The opposition parties in Romania who chose unfamiliar returned émigrés, at the same time that they had little time to organize, suffered from harassment from FSN connected institutions and were given little prime time on national television. Consequently, FSN were secured a landslide victory on May 20th, 1990. The result showed that Iliescu had won more than 85 percent of the popular vote for presidency, and FSN collected 92 out of 119 seats in the Senate and 263 of 396 in the Assembly of Deputies³⁸. Respectively, FSN had got 66 percent, UDMR 7 percent and PUNR³⁹ as little as 2 percent of the vote. “International observers generally agreed that despite some intimidation by the [FSN], the outcome of the elections reflected the majority will” (Country Studies 1990). The lack of democratic tradition in Romania and the “basic authoritarianism in much of the working class and the peasantry” was the main reason for the return of communists (though former) to power (Gilberg 1990: 412).

The FSN had “exploited long-simmering interethnic tension to gain votes” (Country Studies 1990), and their lack of criticizing *Vatra* and other nationalist groups after the incident in Tirgu Mures was a well-staged strategy not to lose voters to the growing nationalist parties. In other words, FSN robbed PUNR for votes, and the latter only achieved a small electoral support in the 1990 election. As mentioned before, many in *Vatra* and FSN had dual membership, therefore the victory of FSN can not be viewed as a defeat of the nationalists, since several such elements were present in FSN politics and apparatus. The Hungarians formed an ethnic party, and voted for it in a compact bloc, and a Romanian “politician living in [this region] would stand a chance of winning only if he could persuade all voters of his own nationality that their group is under terrible threat from the other group (Verdery 1996: 91). As a consequence of the

dissolved and split up in several fractions, Iliescu would run the Social Democrats (PDSR) and Petre Roman established the Democratic Party (PD).

³⁸ Detailed election results from 1990-2000 can be found at: http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/electer/ro_er_nl.htm

³⁹ Officially called Alliance for Romanian Unity (AUR) in the 1990 election only, but normally referred to as PUNR then and in later elections.

interethnic clashes in Tirgu Mures, UDMR had the fuel to gather all the votes from the Hungarian minority in Romania, and PUNR had the equal opportunity to gain Romanian voters propagating a perceived Hungarian threat.

By the 1992 elections, Romania seemed more like a multi-party state. Iliescu remained President, while the Social Democrats (PDSR)⁴⁰ achieved the biggest single vote, 28 percent, followed by Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) got 20 percent, while UDMR got 7,5 percent⁴¹, PUNR got 7,7 percent and PRM 3,9 percent. The new PDSR government relied heavily on support from PUNR, PRM and other parties to receive majority in parliament. Although one can point out that “only” around 12 percent voted nationalistic in the 1992 election, while close to all Hungarians did so. However, this “understates their influence since they formed the most important bloc of swing votes and their [PUNR and PMR] natural political allies have been the parties of former Communist apparatchiks” (Verdery 1996: 90). One can also argue that Romanian nationalism never reached the unprecedented level as seen in the mass movement in the Tirgu Mures incident. However, this becomes an over-simplification and is not quite true, even if not all Romanians voted nationalistic, several of the other parties carried indirectly nationalistic undertones in their election campaign⁴², and on local levels a great number of people were involved in nationalist organizations such as the cultural organization *Vatra*. This is especially true in mixed areas, such as the Mures County and other places in Transylvania where Romanian and Hungarians live side-by-side. Strong sympathizers of nationalism are still found across Romania.

⁴⁰ In the election the party was called FDSN - Democratic National Salvation Front – but later merged and changed name to PDSR.

⁴¹ This number shows that close to 80 percent of the Hungarians voted UDMR, since the Hungarians constitute 8,9 percent of the Romanian population and UDMR received 7 percent of the popular vote. This would say that probably all Hungarians who voted in the election voted for UDMR if one deduct those who did not vote and not eligible to vote, i.e. those under-age or in prison.

⁴² Political figures frequently supported nationalists and were seen together with them on several occasions. One such example is President Ion Iliescu who during the national holiday in 1991 was “sharing a toast with extreme nationalist, all of them apparatchiks of yore” (Verdery 1996: 90)

4.3 Minority Rights Disputed: Hungarian Claims Continues

Although bilingual signs in Romanian and Hungarian soon became the norm in areas populated by Hungarians, debate arose again in 1995 when the parliament decided on an Education Law instead of Bill on Minority Rights, which would have included the same as the law on education. The repeated Hungarian demands for establishing a separate Hungarian University in Cluj sparked off further tension. Even if the University in Cluj had (and still have) several good offers to the Hungarians, and the most important classes are found either in Romanian or Hungarian, the demands for separation have prevailed. As the demands still continues today, the Romanians are repeating that a full separation of the University would create more separation, less interethnic understanding, and they argue that a common university produces integration, as well as cross-cultural understanding. Basically, young Romanians have been afraid that they would come out of touch with their Hungarian peers, and that this might create more tension. Even if Romania has not adopted several of the demands that sparked off the tension in 1990, several other new laws on Minority Rights have appeared in Romania after 1989. However, they have not come easily. One of the most important changes came with political shift in January 1996 when Emil Constantinescu became President and the CDR created a government with support from UDMR and others. Former Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn had for years tried to improve Hungarian-Romanian relations, and they finally reached an agreement in September 1996, five years later than scheduled. Despite these favorable developments, a majority of the Hungarians still perceive a conflict between the Hungarians and Romanians. After the 2000 elections, when PDSR and Ilescu came to power again they invited PRM into the coalition government, which showed that the link between Ilescu, the social democrats and the nationalists has continued for more than a decade. Nevertheless, a Law on Local Public Administration was decided in April 2001. This law grants minorities, if they substitute more than twenty percent of the local population, the right to be understood and informed in their

own language by the public administration. Additionally, if one third of the elected deputies in the town hall represent a minority group, meetings may be held in both languages⁴³.

In 2004, the government declined again demands proposed by UDMR together with the Szekely National Council (CNS) for the autonomy of “Szekely Land,” where Tirgu Mures would be likely to become again the regional center. When the government changed once more after the November 2004 election, hopes for the law were revived and CNS filed for the law to be passed in June 2005. However, this time UDMR responded that they would only lodge the draft in Parliament after the draft on national minorities had been adapted, then the question of decentralization and establishment of an autonomous region could be revived. Despite a huge outcry from CNS and other Hungarians, it seems like UDMR have learned the lesson to take one step at the time instead of trying to have everything at once.

4.4 More Polemics from Tirgu Mures

Political polemics peaked again in the build-up to the 2000 election, as several politicians would launch their Transylvanian campaign on ethnic issues related to the Tirgu Mures incident. Since the interethnic violence in 1990, politicians had made the city the playground for announcements on minority issues, ethnic harmony and Romanian-Hungarian relations. When Petre Roman announced his candidacy for the Presidency in mid-August 1999, he did this in Tirgu Mures. “Roman called for cooperation between the region’s minorities and the Romanian majority, which he said is now possible because ‘no one questions Romania’s territorial integrity today.’ But visiting the headquarters of the Targu Mures garrison, Roman professed that the officer corps’ concern about an alleged attempt about ‘Transylvania destabilization’ had made a big impression on him. Those familiar with [Roman’s] double-talk were hardly surprised” (Shafir 1999). President Constantinescu also went to Tirgu Mures that fall and expressed that as a “guarantor of the constitution” he would never agree to “separatist ideas.” (quoted in Shafir

⁴³ George Funar, mayor from 1992-2004 in Cluj-Napoca, refused to adapt the former measure in his city that is

1999). Since PDSR had lost the election in 1996 because of Transylvania it had become the battleground for the 2000 election, and Hungarian minority issues was at the core of the campaigns. After PDSR had won the 2000 election, Prime Minister Adriane Nastase asked the SRI to investigate any sign regarding about Hungarian revisionism. The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation claims that several politicians in the Tirgu Mures region had been searched, detained and interrogated by the police under orders from the SRI for carrying political material in 2003. Among them was Imre Fodor, the Deputy Mayor of Tirgu Mures, who was carrying political posters for the Szekely National Council (CNS), and Arpad Andrassy, President of the Ludus branch of UDMR, who distributed invitation for the same council. Also Lajos Marto, member of the Civic Association of the Hungarians was detained in Tirgu Mures while posting invitations to a meeting of the council (HHRF 2004).

4.5 What's Next?

Although the Tirgu Mures incident cannot be attributed to the sole cause of rising nationalist sentiments in Romania, it seems that March 1990 marked the point when Romanian nationalism became institutionalized. Tensions are still present in Romania, and Tirgu Mures is not a forgotten accident. However, little has been done to find out more about who was behind and many Hungarians are still waiting for the government to come with an excuse and to bring those who are responsible in front of justice. The immediate response of the government, and the following investigations and trials can be nothing but described as a public play. Still minority and human rights groups are waiting for a proper explanation to be given.

Fifteen years later, it seems like nationalism is on the decline and the seeds of democracy have finally taken roots. What we have to wait for now is to see if it will blossom. The main reason for the decline of nationalism in Romania is the fact that the country's democracy has matured, and the economic conditions are more stable. The aspects of Romania joining the EU

inhabited by at least 23 percent Hungarians.

in a close future have led people to realize that pushing the nationalist card only is counter-productive and will isolate Romania from the west⁴⁴. Subsequently, Hungary's "Relations with Romania in the second half of the decade have been civil, with Bucharest's hope for Budapest's support for its membership in the EU and NATO providing the impetus for improving Hungarian-Romanian relations in Transylvania" (Rothschild & Wingfield 2000: 281). As Hungary has become a member of the European family, the situation between the two nations has changed. Today, Romania depends more on Hungary's willingness to cooperate, and the economic ties to Hungary are becoming more and more important. One can see it as Sandor Janko Sep, a member of UDMR, noted: 'from a geopolitical view, all roads to Europe go through Hungary' (Janko Sep 2004: 221). As communist "shortage-economy" can be described as anti-integrationist, the prospects of a capitalist Romania might prove the opposite. As businesses start to flourish, ethnic division might become over-shadowed, and a new generation of Romanians seems willingly to lead Romania in the right direction. Multiculturalism in Transylvania is beginning to get a positive grasp among people, as they have started to appreciate the positive influence an ethnic diverse society can give. "It is the majority society that defines the parameters of success during the nation-state development working on the project of national homogenization. For the minority group assimilation could be the more advantageous way to higher social conditions. On the other hand, the higher status in the social hierarchy supposes higher qualifications, that theoretically, permits a more accepting and permitting attitude towards multiculturalism" (Csepele & Szekelyi 1999). Even though the Hungarian minority in Transylvania in most cases chooses not to assimilate, the prospect of social success in the whole of the Romanian society indicates that ethnic tension will dwindle for good.

The historical and political connection to the upsurge of violence in the days of March 1990 is comparable to the "societal response to the territorial losses of Romania in the summer

⁴⁴ Nationalism in Romania has been mostly build on anti-western sentiments, both preceding 1989 and in the interwar period. This attitude dwindles when the process of democratization is strengthening while closer political and economic ties and prosperity shows its fruits.

of 1940 with societal reaction stirred by the perceived threat of losing Transylvania in January-March 1990 (the Targu Mures interethnic clashes), one must conclude that while ethnic majority were passive in face of a genuine threat in 1940, in 1990 a great proportion was active when faced with a manipulated danger of an allegedly similar threat” (Petrescu 2004). There are little chances for new confrontations today, although relations still need to improve. In 1990 it seemed like the Hungarians miscalculated the situation preceding the revolution in 1989. They thought that Romanian nationalism was “an accessory to the Ceausescu regime, and its fall would diminish the nationalism as well” (Enyedi 2004: 141), but when communism fell throughout Central and Eastern Europe it found itself being increasingly replaced by nationalist elements. “Nationalism, an affliction that Adam Michnick aptly called the terminal disease of communism, already has been played *ad nauseam* in Romania. While it is true that national sentiment is strong, there is little reason to believe that it will take aggressive, violent forms” (Tismaneanu 1997: 443). Over a decade later, it seems like stability and future hopes have replaced the uncertainty that preceded the 1989 revolution, and over a decade of nationalism is now, hopefully, closing down.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Romanian nationalism resurfaced after the collapse of communism, and it is a burden that future Romanians will have to carry along with them for a long time to come. The first interethnic clashes, in a post-Communist country after 1989, resulted in little, compared to other areas in the Balkans. Nevertheless, it changed and affected the political situation in Romania and that spring the democratization process was halted, if not misguided. Instead of a unified Hungarian and Romanian attempt to create democracy that seemed so promising in December 1989, it created a split between the two ethnic groups. The events in Targu Mures (March 19-21, 1990), exemplified how deep rooted nationalist sentiments were in different institutions. The historical components together with the political culture of reducing problems to a nationality one should

not be ignored in this context. Although the involvement of former, current and new security agents during the clashes is difficult to pin-point; comments, interviews and other facts have made it highly presumably that they are partly to blame. Not only the interim government's response to the clashes, but also their involvement in establishing PRM and Iliescu's continued coalitions with nationalist parties, shows the nature of FSN's leadership. As forces behind the Tirgu Mures incident as well as Romanian politics have shown, both secret agents and the government played a vital role in the establishment and success of Romanian nationalism in 1990.

Although the clashes had great impact on the Romanian society in 1990 it has now been mostly forgotten or reduced to an interest in the elements behind the clashes, rather than the clashes itself. Sources on the subject have still not completely come to terms with what actually happened, and still Romanian and Hungarians contradict each other even if both sides agree that certain Romanians are to blame. As one highly respected scholar in the field, an ethnic-Hungarian, who wished not to be quoted by name, told me that one should not ignore the forces of Hungarian nationalism when one examines what happened between Hungarians and Romanians. Hungarians in Hungary, as well as Romanians in other regions than Transylvania, fail to understand the interethnic mix in Transylvania, and keep blaming each other. In one way, it is the two camps outside Transylvania who continuously perceive a problem in the region and propagate against the other. While most Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania do experience some kind of interethnic harmony, cooperation and cohabitation, scholars and politicians, most often non-Transylvanians, fails to see this. In this way, ethnicity has been politicised and institutionalised to an extent far more than desirable, and has begun to suffer from the same internal problems as nationalism in itself. On the other hand, economic improvements the last few years seem to diminish ethnic divisions. The solution seems to be economical rather than political.

Luckily enough, Transylvanian mentality, which to a high degree is common for the Hungarians and Romanians, has never been extremely violent. If otherwise, the interethnic clashes in 1990 might have escalated into civil war if either side had been tempted to use heavy arms in the fighting. Even if the conflict did not get balkanised as in former Yugoslavia, the incident should not be forgotten. First of all, the outcome of the clashes could have been far worse, and secondly, it shows how ingrained national sentiments and opposition to change were hidden in all corners of Romanian society in 1990. In this way, the resurfacing of Romanian nationalism became a tool to preserve certain Communist institutions and served as an opposition to western democracy. Therefore, the legacy of what happened in 1990 and Romanian nationalism deserves a more thorough examination.

APPENDIX I: Maps

County Map: CIA, 1990. *Atlas of Eastern Europe*, Washington D.C.

(http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/romania_pol96.jpg)



Map of historical Szekely Land

In Hupchich, Dennis P. & Harold E. Cox, 2001. *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of THE BALKANS*. New York: Palgrave, map 38.



APPENDIX II: Ethno-Demographic Data**Year: 2002****Region: All (Romania) County: All****Locality:**

Population structure by ethnicity

Romanians:19.399.597	89.47 %
Hungarians:1.431.807	6.60 %
Roma (Gypsies):535.140	2.46 %
Ukrainians:61.098	0.28 %
Germans:59.764	0.27 %
Russian-Lipovans:35.791	0.16 %
Turks:32.098	0.14 %
Tatars:23.935	0.11 %
Serbs:22.561	0.10 %
Slovaks:17.226	0.07 %
Bulgarians:8.025	0.03 %
Croatians:6.807	0.03 %
Greeks:6.472	0.02 %
Jews:5.785	0.02 %
Czechs:3.941	0.01 %
Poles:3.559	0.01 %
Italians:3.288	0.01 %
Chinese:2.243	0.01 %
Armenians:1.780	0.0 %
Csangos:1.266	0.0 %
Other ethnics:16.850	0.07 %
Non-stated:1.941	0.0 %

Total:21.680.974

Population structure by mother tongue

Romanian:19.736.517	91.03 %
Hungarian:1.443.970	6.66 %
Romani (Gypsy):237.570	1.09 %
Ukrainian:57.407	0.26 %
German:44.888	0.20 %
Russian-Lipovan:29.246	0.13 %
Turkish:28.115	0.12 %
Tatar:21.272	0.09 %
Serbian:20.411	0.09 %
Slovak:16.027	0.07 %
Bulgarian:6.735	0.03 %
Croatian:6.355	0.02 %
Greek:4.170	0.01 %
Yiddish (Hebrew):951	0.0 %

Czech:3.381	0.01 %
Polish:2.690	0.01 %
Italian:2.531	0.01 %
Chinese:2.266	0.01 %
Armenian:721	0.0 %
Other Mother Tongue:13.621	0.06 %
Non-stated:2.130	0.0 %

Total:21.680.974

Region: Centre **County:** Mureş

Locality:

Population structure by ethnicity

Romanians:309.375	53.26 %
Hungarians:228.275	39.30 %
Roma (Gypsies):40.425	6.95 %
Ukrainians:72	0.01 %
Germans:2.045	0.35 %
Russian-Lipovans:69	0.01 %
Turks:45	0.0 %
Tatars:6	0.0 %
Serbs:23	0.0 %
Slovaks:8	0.0 %
Bulgarians:14	0.0 %
Croatians:3	0.0 %
Greeks:17	0.0 %
Jews:150	0.02 %
Czechs:4	0.0 %
Poles:18	0.0 %
Italians:67	0.01 %
Chinese:4	0.0 %
Armenians:12	0.0 %
Csangos:4	0.0 %
Other ethnics:127	0.02 %
Non-stated:88	0.01 %

Total:580.851

Population structure by mother tongue

Romanian:324.546	55.87 %
Hungarian:231.381	39.83 %
Romani (Gypsy):22.709	3.90 %
Ukrainian:41	0.0 %
German:1.742	0.29 %
Russian-Lipovan:61	0.01 %
Turkish:46	0.0 %
Tatar:6	0.0 %

Serbian:7	0.0 %
Slovak:3	0.0 %
Bulgarian:11	0.0 %
Croatian:1	0.0 %
Greek:11	0.0 %
Yiddish (Hebrew):27	0.0 %
Czech:3	0.0 %
Polish:12	0.0 %
Italian:49	0.0 %
Chinese:4	0.0 %
Armenian:6	0.0 %
Other Mother Tongue:115	0.01 %
Non-stated:70	0.01 %

Total:580.851

Region: Centre **County:**
Locality: TÂRGU MUREŞ /
MAROSVÁSÁRHELY / NEUMARKT
AN DER MIERESCH

Population structure by ethnicity

Romanians:75.533	50.34 %
Hungarians:70.108	46.72 %
Roma (Gypsies):3.660	2.43 %
Ukrainians:31	0.02 %
Germans:304	0.20 %
Russian-Lipovans:32	0.02 %
Turks:21	0.01 %
Tatars:6	0.0 %
Serbs:5	0.0 %
Slovaks:5	0.0 %
Bulgarians:7	0.0 %
Croatians:1	0.0 %
Greeks:10	0.0 %
Jews:115	0.07 %
Czechs:3	0.0 %
Poles:12	0.0 %
Italians:40	0.02 %
Chinese:4	0.0 %
Armenians:11	0.0 %
Csangos:2	0.0 %
Other ethnics:75	0.04 %
Non-stated:56	0.03 %

Total:150.041

Population structure by mother tongue

Romanian:76.258		50.82 %
Hungarian:71.707		47.79 %
Romani (Gypsy):1.552		1.03 %
Ukrainian:12		0.0 %
German:246		0.16 %
Russian-Lipovan:34		0.02 %
Turkish:21		0.01 %
Tatar:6		0.0 %
Serbian:2		0.0 %
Slovak:3		0.0 %
Bulgarian:6		0.0 %
Greek:5		0.0 %
Yiddish (Hebrew):21		0.01 %
Czech:3		0.0 %
Polish:9		0.0 %
Italian:31		0.02 %
Chinese:4		0.0 %
Armenian:6		0.0 %
Other Mother Tongue:71		0.04 %
Non-stated:44		0.02 %

Total:150.041

Population structure by religion

Orthodox:70.136		46.74 %
Roman-Catholic:20.258		13.50 %
Reformed:45.104		30.06 %
Pentecostal:1.049		0.69 %
Greek-Catholic:3.909		2.60 %
Baptist:332		0.22 %
Seventh Day Adventist:1.409		0.93 %
Muslim:59		0.03 %
Unitarian:3.873		2.58 %
Christian by the Gospel:92		0.06 %
Old Rite Christian:6		0.0 %
Synod-Presbyterian Lutheran:369		0.24 %
Evangelic:87		0.05 %
Augustan Evangelic:87		0.05 %
Mosaic:126		0.08 %
Other religion:2.196		1.46 %
No religion:561		0.37 %
Atheist:150		0.09 %
Non-stated:238		0.15 %

Total:150.041

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