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The Year 1968 in the Romanian Nationality Policy



The visit of NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU in Harghita County, Miercurea-Ciuc, 5 October 1976.
SOURCE: <http://fototeca.iiccr.ro>.

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FOLLOWING THE death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, on 22 March Nicolae Ceaușescu was elected general secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party.¹ After seizing power, during the first 4–5 years Ceaușescu gradually removed his political adversaries and created the domestic policy conditions needed for new guidelines in social and economic policy. The 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) was held in 1965 and it marked the beginning of a new political and ideological era.² The resolution of the congress stated that with the removal of exploitative classes, socialism had won a complete victory in the country, which as a consequence had reached a new phase of socialist development. Moreover, the resolution also stated that soon the administrative-territorial system was going to be reformed, the villages were going to be systematized, respectively the planning of national economy was going to be modernized.³ An important part of the consolidation of Nicolae Ceaușescu's power was to turn his back in a spectacular way on some elements of Gheorghiu-Dej's legacy, having "expo-

sed the negligence and abuses of the first Party leadership.” The removal of some of Gheorghiu-Dej’s high-ranking leaders (e.g. Alexandru Drăghici), the partial attention to society, and the ideological relaxation did not really change the core of the system. However, by improving economic welfare the general well-being and mobilizational willingness of society were improved.

After the cold years of national policy towards ethnic Hungarians during the last years of the Gheorghiu-Dej era (1958–1964), from 1965 there was a speck of color due to the fact that the Party leadership was seemingly interested in the specific issues of the Hungarian community, and the national issue became once again part of the political discourse. By reinterpreting the concept of national socialism and drafting the general directions of the new administrative-territorial division, the Party leadership also created a framework for a national policy. It was obvious that there could be no special interest in nationality or the collective rights that were recognized during the Hungarian Autonomous Region of the fifties, but in relation to the planned social-ideological-economic reforms the national issue was back on the agenda. The Party leadership was looking for a compromise (like on the level of the majority as well) with the elites of the minorities, and offered a rethought, occasionally expanded institutional integration.⁴

One of the most important milestones of the Nicolae Ceaușescu-defined national policy and, within that, of the policy towards ethnic Hungarians, was the year 1968. In this year there were events in foreign and domestic policy of such great importance in relation to Romania that they influenced the nationality policy of the Party. This could also mean that, regardless of previous examples, within some boundaries the Party leadership could grant more room for maneuvering in issues regarding the ethnic minorities. The administrative reorganization of the country with the associated economic and political changes, the change of elites and an active foreign policy for Romania (maverick policy) could be successfully carried through only with a “pacified” hinterland. An important role in this process was given to settling the relationship with the national minorities. During this brief period three important events took place, especially regarding the ethnic Hungarians (but also other national minorities): the administrative reform, meetings with ethnic Hungarian intellectuals and the creation of the Hungarian Workers’ Council (HWC).

National Policy and the Administrative Reform

IN ORDER to consolidate his position and to implement the economic and social transformation envisioned by the Party leadership, in 1967 Ceaușescu took another step, namely the implementation of the territorial rearrange-

ment and administrative reform. This reform was important in the Party's economic and social policies for several reasons. The smaller, transparent and more easily organized counties were more effective from an economic point of view and were meant to serve a decentralized industrial development. The reorganizations that took place during the reform also implied a great movement of cadres by which Party leadership placed in key positions groups of elites on whose loyalty it could count on the long term. The reform played an important role from the point of view of mass mobilization and propaganda, as the mobilization of local elites and population, partially taking into account their opinions and listening to them during local decision-making, only increased the Party's popularity.

The preparation and implementation of the 1968 administrative reform also played an important role in the Party's nationality policy. Preparations for creating the counties now as well followed the principles born in the fifties, according to which in Romania the nationality issue had been solved, thus the peculiarities of minoritarian existence did not have to be considered as separate interests. Nationally, during the preparations for the introduction of county system, the nationality issue arose only insofar that the future decentralized county institutions were going to ensure the proper press and school system for the nationalities living there.⁵ In spite of all this, the so-called nationality issue still had an effect on preparations, especially regarding the Szeklerland. The so-called Szeklerland issue presented itself as an administrative and economic matter. The essence of the first issue was if the new administrative modifications were still going to allow for the bigger part of the Szeklerland with an ethnic Hungarian majority to form a single administrative unit. On the other hand, during the preparatory discussions the desperate economic situation of the region and the lack of industrial development that resulted in the economic isolation of the region were underlined.⁶

According to the first draft, Szeklerland would have been divided into a "great Szekler county" named Odorhei-Ciuc and Mureș County, with the greater part of the region, about 7,459 sq m, in Odorhei-Ciuc. The planned county border would begin in the north with the Giurgeu Depression and end with the southern districts of Târgu Secuiesc and Sfântu Gheorghe. In this plan the county center would be Miercurea-Ciuc, smaller than both Odorhei and Sfântu Gheorghe, but located in the center of the region. The "great Szekler county" would have had a population of 364,196 with an almost 95% (342,044) majority of ethnic Hungarians.⁷

During the preparatory discussions there were three main arguments regarding the Szeklerland issue: reinstating the old counties that existed before 1950, creating a large Szekler county, respectively creating a "small Szekler county" (by annexing the districts of Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc to Brașov). During the discussions the issue of the economic and infrastructural backwardness of the Szeklerland kept surfacing. The majority of the leaders put in perspective a reorganization based on these considerations. The plans of the administrative reform

were made public on 14 January 1968. The ethnic Hungarian population of the region reacted with a vigour felt on a national level. In drafting the important parts of the reform the Party acted within the usual centralized system, but on issues regarding local peculiarities it asked for the opinion of the population, opinions that could be expressed during Party controlled forums (people's assemblies, deliberations, press) or in letters addressed to the leadership.

The draft for the administrative reorganization of Szeklerland was reshaped by a few, mostly local, events or movements. The Party leadership from Braşov, supported by party members from Sfântu Gheorghe, used every means to uphold the two Szekler districts (Târgu Secuiesc and Sfântu Gheorghe): they were lobbying during the meetings of the Party's Central Committee, they reached out to most of the ethnic Hungarian cadres from Sfântu Gheorghe, they tried to persuade the Party leadership with promises, threats, or manipulated people's meetings to obtain the decision they wanted. The debates divided the two districts' (Târgu Secuiesc and Sfântu Gheorghe) local leadership as well, as those from Târgu Secuiesc were leaning towards "a great Szekler county." Except for a few members of the local Party leadership, most of the population of Târgu Secuiesc did not want to be annexed to Braşov. Thus, the local intellectuals, within the legal framework, organized a resistance movement. As a result of the public opinion's request, "pressure," and of the intervention of high ranking Party activists (János Fazekas, Károly Király) a compromise was made. By merging the two debated districts on the territory of the old Trei Scaune (Háromszék), a new county named Covasna was created having its center at Sfântu Gheorghe.⁸

During the debates in Szeklerland regarding the creation of counties, the complications surrounding the creation of Covasna County were not singular. On 14 February 1968, during the Plenary discussing the final steps in creating the counties, an extraordinary case was on the agenda: a day before at Miercurea-Ciuc there had been demonstrations requesting that this city should be the center of Harghita County. One of the preludes to the first steps towards creating the "great Szekler county" was that for its center there were three candidates: Sfântu Gheorghe, Odorheiu Secuiesc and Miercurea-Ciuc. Based on its central location, Miercurea-Ciuc was chosen by the Party leadership as probable county seat. By creating Covasna County the situation changed and the status of county seat was given to Odorhei. This decision was perceived as a failure by the local Party leadership, intellectuals and the majority of the population of Miercurea-Ciuc. A demonstration with thousands of people was held. The Party leadership ended this inconvenient situation with a compromise solution. Nicolae Ceauşescu personally received the delegation from Ciuc, who eventually managed to have Miercurea-Ciuc designated as the seat of Harghita County, created by the merger of the districts of Gheorgheni and Odorhei. As a compensation Odorheiu Secuiesc was given the rank of municipality (county jurisdiction).⁹

On the territory of the historic Szeklerland three counties were created in 1968. The region of Trei Scaune became once again a county under the name of Covasna, while Ciuc, Gheorgheni and Odorhei jointly formed Harghita County, and Mureş Seat was included into Mureş County. The Szekler-Hungarian population formed a majority in two of the counties, Harghita (85%) and Covasna (79.5%), while the percentage of the same population in Mureş County was 44.3%. The idea of a unified Szekler administration based on collective rights, which would have been the successor of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, remained only an idea. Thus, the political elite in Szeklerland did not have the possibility to build up a unified political concept. At the same time, the Party elites and intellectuals of Szeklerland were not total losers of the implementation of the reform, as two counties, Harghita and Covasna, with ethnic Hungarian majorities, were created. After the creation of the counties, the ideological and local identity-creating processes further weakened the vision of a unified Szeklerland. The fact that Mureş Seat was annexed to a county with an overwhelming Romanian majority, now lacking in its name the “Szekler” attributive, resulted in the fact that the former Szekler region became marginalized on the mental map of Szeklerland.

In spite of all this, the economic policy conditions following the creation of the counties made it possible for many provinces (Mureş, the Hungarian Autonomous Region, Braşov, Stalin, the Mureş Hungarian Autonomous Region), except for Târgu Mureş, to somewhat reduce their large disadvantages by organizing themselves into county institutions. The new county centers, Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe, were given new political, economic and cultural institutional systems, which also meant new positions for the local elites. The administrative dissolution of territories with an ethnic Hungarian majority, the reaction to which had national echoes, reminded the Party that in spite of its official standpoint (that the nationality issue was definitely solved) it had to take into consideration the peculiarities of Szeklerland. At the same time, the Szekler counties did not benefit from the same assessment based on collective rights as the Mureş Autonomous Region. Another important result of creating the counties was the fact that the institutionally reorganized and strengthened Szeklerland gained a strong foothold in the political and cultural life of Transylvanian Hungarians.¹⁰

A New Step: Meeting with the Representatives of the Hungarian Intellectuals from Romania

THE NEW international developments of 1968 (e.g., the events in Czechoslovakia) further accelerated the internal processes started in the mid-sixties.¹¹ In the summer of 1968, more than ever the Romanian Com-

munist Party leadership needed the support of the whole Romanian society. Meeting, discussions between the Party leadership and the various intellectual groups become visibly more frequent, as well as the work-visits made in the more important counties of Romania.¹² These tactical gestures on behalf of the Party did not leave out the ethnic Hungarians of Romania. On the road towards a “conciliation” with society, the Party wanted to become closer to the Hungarian community. The nationality problem that stagnated at the beginning of the sixties now moved forward on the highest level Party forums. János Fazekas was tasked to mediate with the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals and the committee for minority affairs continuously provided the Party with information regarding the issues that concerned the intellectuals. Statistics were made regarding the situation of ethnic education, the number of students, and the possibilities for furthering their studies. In the summer of 1968 the Party leadership was ready for a meeting with ethnic Hungarian intellectuals. After compiling a catalogue of the issues and the needs and grievances, the list of representative Hungarian intellectuals from Romania was created.¹³ A letter of János Fazekas to Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer written in the summer of '68 anticipated the issues the Hungarian intellectuals were concerned with. Among other things, Fazekas mentions the poor representation of ethnic Hungarians in the national, Party and cultural institutions, a rethinking of the Hungarians' constitutional and legal status, the need for new radio and television programs, the need for the development of education in Hungarian and also the need for a new representative organization.¹⁴

One of the steps on the road to regaining the trust of the Hungarians from Romania taken by the highest-ranking Party leadership was the meeting with ethnic Hungarian intellectuals on 28 June 1968. On the initiative of the Party leadership, on the model of previous meetings with intellectuals, the Hungarian opinion leaders were invited to Bucharest. More than 50 ethnic Hungarian intellectuals (writers, poets, editors, artists, educators) were invited, out of which 26 was given the chance to speak.¹⁵

There were no prior consultations, but in what was said the major issues that according to the Hungarian intellectuals needed urgent attention were outlined. The first and most emphasized issue was finding a solution to the ethnic Hungarians' legal status and their representation in state bodies. Several speakers (Ernő Gáll, János Demeter) emphasized that a minority statute was needed in order to settle the specific, collective rights of the Hungarian minority.¹⁶ They requested for a state body to be created that would then coordinate the cultural life of the Hungarian minority. From a legal point of view, another topic was the rehabilitation of the Hungarian elites that had been convicted on false charges of treason in the fifties.¹⁷ Furthermore, they also brought up issues like

the lack of bilingual street names, the change of street names, respectively the use of mother tongues in public administration.

A second group of issues concerned education, the most important being the issue of education in their mother tongue. Most of the speakers mentioned the almost complete lack of vocational schools in Hungarian and other obstacles in university education, such as: preventing the creation of classes with Hungarian as teaching language, discriminative measures taken against ethnic Hungarian students during university admissions, the textbooks written for the minorities, the lack of Hungarian language in teaching Romanian geography and history, the problematic placement of Hungarian graduate students.¹⁸ The extent of the so-called cultural issues and grievances was similar. The discussions regarded issues ranging from the subsidization of traditionalist and amateur groups to the shortcomings of the theatrical world.

A great emphasis was also placed on the relationship between nationalities and the Romanian media. The participants, wanting to take advantage of the opportunity, requested new magazines, German and Hungarian radio and television programs, and improvements in the quality and quantity of the existing newspapers. The issue around book publishing in the language of the minorities was also brought up, with a request for an increased number of publications and separate publishing houses for the minorities. As a segment of cultural life, the role and position of minorities in Romanian scientific life was also touched upon, which according to the speakers did not reflect either the proportion of the nationalities or the quality and quantity of their activities in scientific life.

In 1968, the meeting and the discussion between the Party leadership and the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals was not a unique phenomenon, but it represented an important moment in the Romanian Communist Party's nationality policy. After 1948, the Party basically stated that the nationality problem was solved, the situation of the minorities did not represent a unique problem, as the freedoms offered by the socialist constitution did not justify the request for collective rights. Until 1968, except for the 1956 episode, the Party had not consulted in such a manner on the issues of minority groups (or any other religious, social groups etc.).¹⁹ There were no consultations in 1952, when the Hungarian Autonomous Region, so popular among the Transylvanian Hungarian and especially Szekler community, was created. Nor were there consultations when the region was partially abolished in 1960. The meeting was in any case a result of the partial relaxation initiated by Ceaușescu.

Based on the issues discussed during the meeting that lasted for several hours, the Party leadership compiled a catalogue of the problems raised, in which it summarized the problems, comments and the possible solutions. Taking the opportunity, the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals tried to break out of the canon established in 1948, requesting a minority statute which was however immedi-

ately refused by the Party leadership, just as every other request that would have resulted in the recognition of collective rights.²⁰

The success or failure of the conference must be analyzed starting from the given historical-political context. Out of the requests, few were implemented or partially implemented. The Party leadership repeatedly did not recognize the collective rights of the national minorities (or of any other community), thus it considered the request for a statute unfounded. Except for a few classes that could learn in their mother tongue, not much changed in the situation of vocational schools. The initiatives regarding use of mother tongue and bilingual street names got lost in the mazes of local party bureaucracy. Romanian geography and history were still taught in the Romanian language and no special Romanian language and literature textbooks were published for minority pupils. Starting with the early '70s partial achievements were gradually lost as well. However, one cannot dismiss the positive results of that meeting. The Party leadership was once again faced with the most urgent, especially cultural, issues of the Hungarian minority. The Hungarian elite was given a chance to present all this before an official forum. Shortly after this ominous meeting the *Kriterion* Publishing House was founded (1969) alongside the *A Hét* (Week) cultural weekly paper (1970), and the Romanian state television started broadcasting programmes in Hungarian and German. In the two counties created in 1968, and in other counties, during the early seventies there was a possibility to cultivate the local Hungarian culture, to erect statues and monuments connected to Hungarian culture.

Work-Visits at the Hungarians.

The Birth of the Ethnic Hungarian Workers' Council

DURING 1965–1968 Ceaușescu managed to gain the trust of most of the Transylvanian Hungarian elites. Through the “flexibility” shown when creating the counties, the dialogue with the Hungarian intellectuals and finally through the interest shown during meetings and visits, he managed to gain considerable sympathy. The ethnic Hungarian cadres elected to the Central Committee or other Party apparatuses and the Hungarian party activists kept in their positions after the administrative reform, the intellectuals that could share their opinions during meetings, were in many ways committed to the Party leadership. Sceptics, on the other hand, could only hope that the changes were going to be not only spectacular but also substantial.

The Romanian foreign policy connected to the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia desperately needed balance and unity in domestic policy and a calm hinterland. The Party leadership organized a veritable country tour. During August and September, the most important Party members, headed by Nicolae

Ceașescu visited several counties. First on the list were the counties located near the Western border, counties that also had a significant minority population, e.g. the Szeklerland that was important from the point of view of the Party's policy towards ethnic Hungarians and Cluj, the traditional cultural center of Transylvanian Hungarian culture. Counties that were important for propaganda and domestic calmness were personally visited by Ceașescu, while other locations were visited by important party members.²¹

Despite the fact that the Romanian Party leadership did not agree with the liberalization of Alexander Dubček and did not apply it in their own country, they also did not take part in the Czechoslovakian intervention of the Warsaw Pact. On 21 August 1968, Ceașescu, who was at the height of his power and popularity, condemned the military intervention in Czechoslovakia during a huge peoples' assembly. Just a few days after the peoples' assembly where the Warsaw Pact intervention was condemned, Ceașescu was already visiting the Szeklerland.²² At the peak of his popularity he arrived in Brașov on 26 August and from there he continued his journey and visited the two newly created "Szekler counties," Harghita and Covasna.²³ Since coming to power (1965), this was his second visit to the region. While his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, seldom made work-visits, Ceașescu recognized the political importance of making himself seen as frequently as possible. At the same time, it must be mentioned that in 1968 the Party leadership did not exclude a Soviet (and Hungarian) intervention just like in Czechoslovakia. His frequent visits to almost all major settlements of the Szeklerland carried an important political message for the locals. The leadership of the two counties were totally committed to the Party, but the majority of the population had also received the recent events with a certain positivity and hope. During his speeches Ceașescu acknowledged the economic backwardness of the Szeklerland and promised major investments.

The territories populated by the Szeklers, just as other territories in Romania, are economically lagging behind. Though during the years of socialism we have achieved successes, let's be honest, this is not enough. During the next five-year plan, we are going to found ten new plants in your cities and counties. Industrialization in the territories inhabited by the Szeklers expresses the right and fair directions of our industrialization and nationality policies

stated Ceașescu in Miercurea-Ciuc.²⁴ To these spectacular promises he also added some symbolic gestures important to the Hungarian minority. During these visits the people could speak in Hungarian and at the end of his speeches Ceașescu saluted the Party and the two counties in Hungarian. "Long live Harghita, long live the Romanian Communist Party!"—exclaimed Ceașescu in Miercurea-Ciuc.²⁵ The leaders and the population of the two counties as-

sured Ceaușescu of their trust and support for the Party leadership. The speakers (Károly Király, Anna Dukász, Árpád Tankó, László Bránis, Lajos Szávuj etc.) met the Party's expectations: they emphasized their loyalty, condemned the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact and stressed the importance of one of the basic doctrines of the socialist nation, the importance of "collective patriotism."

Behold our Party! That is why, here in this ancient and old city that is Odorheiu Secuiesc, we must firmly state that we do not agree with those Hungarian journalists, from Budapest or from any other country who have accused our Party of nationalism

underlined János Fazekas at Odorheiu Secuiesc.²⁶

A few days after their visit in Szeklerland—and after a busy work program in Bucharest—on 30 August the Party leadership visited Cluj County. In his speeches in Turda and Cluj, Ceaușescu emphasized the importance of unity around the Party and, taking advantage of the favorable public mood, he also promoted some of the most important political actions of recent years (partial relaxation, maverick policy, economic decentralization). Regarding the Party's nationality policy, he referred to his speeches from Harghita and Covasna without detailing what had been said there.²⁷ During Ceaușescu's visit in Cluj and Sibiu, respectively the visits made by the secretary of the Central Committee, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, in Arad, Timișoara and Oradea, it became clear that the Party leadership considered it important to stress the major moments of its policy towards ethnic Hungarians only in the counties of Szeklerland. During the other visits these issues were only referred to in the Party's general mobilizing policy.

Towards the end of 1968 a new phase of Ceaușescu's political and social transformation policy was implemented. Amidst the intensified foreign and domestic policies, to revitalize its sluggish mass mobilization, the RCP created a new organization, the Socialist Unity Front (SUF). The setup of the organization and its operating principles were discussed during the Plenary of the CC of the RCP held on 24–25 October 1968. In his introductory speech Ceaușescu proposed the name of the SUF and formulated its goals:

In the period between the elections of the representatives there was no permanent body that could ensure the regular cooperation of local organizations under the Party's leadership. Such a body would have given the opportunity for a multilateral exchange of views between the leaders of these organizations, and it would have made it easier to involve the large masses in the discussion regarding the development of our country. That's why, in accordance with the requirements for improving the social ties and the participation in economic, political and state matters, as

*well as in line with the instructions of the 9th Congress and National Conference, the Committee proposes the creation of a permanent political body.*²⁸

The SUF was built on the model of mass organization used by all dictatorships, and it clasped Romanian society at all levels.²⁹ In the structure of the organization the highest level was represented by the Central Committee, followed by county, municipal, town and village councils.³⁰ During the same Plenary, the Party leadership decided that similar organizations must be set up for the national minorities, organizations that were going to operate based on the model of the SUF and subordinated to it. They named these the Hungarian, German and Serb Workers' Council. The proposal of Lajos Takács to simply call these organizations German or Hungarian Nationality Councils was dismissed by the Party leadership. Probably this name would have sounded too "national" for the leadership and did not stress enough the fact that these organizations were created for "ethnic workers" and were not intended as separate representative bodies for any given ethnic minority. In his closing speech Ceaușescu referred to Takács' proposal, but subtly conveyed that it should be withdrawn. In contrast, Maurer very firmly dismissed the idea.³¹

The setting up and operation of the nationality councils were perfectly integrated into the Party's nationality policy. In order to keep balance in domestic policy, the Party created new a mobilizing tool and within it a special attention was given to minorities, especially minority elites, leading intellectuals. For the two major ethnic groups (Hungarians and Germans) that remained after the mass emigration of the Jews, the opportunities kept decreasing starting with the fifties. Though the general marginalization of the Germans in the forties was somewhat relaxed starting with the late fifties, this community was still faced with countless problems (education, culture in their mother tongue, proportional representation in politics and public life, maintaining relationships with relatives from the Federal Republic of Germany etc.), just as the ethnic Hungarians after 1956.

Creating nationality councils within the SUF resulted in tactical, propaganda and practical advantages for the Party. With this decision the Party showed to the public opinion (including the foreign one) that it had an interest to really solve the nationality issue. Since the abolition of the Hungarian Peoples' Union and other minority organizations (1953) the nationalities did not have separate advocacy organizations, forums. The new developments in this matter, the potential opportunities made the national minorities hopeful, and this guaranteed their loyalty towards the Party. The leadership fulfilled the request of the minority intellectuals. At the same time, as these councils did not have independent legal status and decision-making powers, they remained under the total control

of the Party. By setting up these councils, the Party successfully channelled and controlled the activities coming from the different nationalities.

The Ethnic Hungarian Workers' Council (EHWC) was not created to acknowledge the collective rights of the Hungarians from Romania, it was set up to convey the Party's policy.

*One of the important tasks of these councils is going to be their contribution to the political education made by the Party and community organizations for the cultivation of socialist patriotism, socialist internationalism, for the commitment to our new system, for a common motherland, the advanced development of communist ethics and against all obscurantist nationalist ideas and manifestations and for the continuous rise of the socialist consciousness of the masses.*³²

At the same time, besides its integrating role, in the spirit of linguistic separation that was accepted in the definition of the socialist nation, *in theory* the EHWC could contribute to

*the motivation of scientific, artistic and literary creation in the language of the cohabiting nationalities, in a strong unity with the development of the creations of the Romanian people and the spiritual progress of the entire country.*³³

The clause according to which the EHWC was going to get a role in the

*assessment of the specific problems of the community in question, to find the best possible solutions in harmony with general interests of the socialist society and ethnic citizens,*³⁴

gave hope that perhaps specific minority issues were going to be at least partially solved.

As already said, the EHWC was set up as part of the Socialist Unity Front and modelled on its structure. The Council's headquarters were in Bucharest and its members were appointed by the county councils of the Hungarian workers.³⁵ Both the German and the Hungarian council had a bureau that had the task to organize the daily activities. In counties where the Hungarian, German or other national minorities were present in great numbers, county councils were set up. Their members were nominated by the representatives of the given minority's workers. Practically this meant that the persons in question were nominated at the "proposal" and with the consent of the local Party leadership. The councils of the cohabiting nationalities were headed by a president and 2–3 vice presidents. There was also a secretary. However, the relative lack of weight of the

new organization is illustrated by the fact that its members “worked based on the principle of community service, there were no paid employees.”³⁶

The Ethnic Hungarian Workers’ Council was created on 15 November 1968 in Bucharest. The president of the council’s Central Bureau was Academician István Péterfi. Vice presidents were Lajos Takács, Károly Király, József Méliusz and Tibor Maros. Other members of the bureau were: László Bányai, János Demeter, Anna Dukász, Zoltán Kovács, Sándor Egry, Magdolna Fábíán, Mihály B. Kovács, Julianna Márton, Sándor Nagy, András Sütő, József Valter and Dezső Szilágyi.³⁷ The Council’s central body was extended in 1971 by an additional 24 members. The county councils of the EHWC were also set up in November. On Friday, 8 November, inaugural meetings were held in Bihor, Bistrița, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Maramureș, Mureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj, Sibiu and Timiș counties. These inaugural meetings were held in every case in the presence of the Party’s local leadership. Alongside local intellectuals, teachers, writers, the local councils also had members in economic positions (from plants and factories) and naturally members from among the workers.³⁸



Notes

1. For more details: Mariana Conovici, “Martie 1965—Nicolae Ceaușescu, noul lider al comuniștilor români,” *Analele Sighet* 9 (2001): 493–499; Lavinia Betea, *Partea lor de adevăr: Alexandru Bărlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu: Convorbiri; Maurer și lumea de ieri: Mărturiile despre stalinizarea României; Convorbiri neterminate cu Corneliu Mănescu* (Bucharest: Compania, 2008), 149–177, 343–353.
2. In 1965 the Romanian Workers’ Party returned to its previous name, i.e. Romanian Communist Party.
3. Alexandru-Murad Mironov, “Tot mai departe de Moscova: Politica externă a regimului Ceaușescu, 1965–1967,” *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 10, 3–4 (2002): 228–254; *Congresul al IX-lea al Partidului Comunist Român 19–24 iulie 1965* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 743–797.
4. Novák Csaba Zoltán, *Aranykorszak? A Ceaușescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája (1965–1974)* (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2010), 18–49.
5. For more details see Novák Csaba Zoltán, “A meggyésítés előkészítése és a nemzeti-ségi kérdés Romániában 1967–1968,” in *Integrációs stratégiák a magyar kisebbségek történetében: Somorja, 2005. június 9–10.*, edited by Bárdi Nándor and Simon Attila (Somorja: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2006), 405–421.
6. Novák, “A meggyésítés előkészítése,” 405–421.
7. From one of his later speeches it becomes clear that the idea of a great Szekler county was proposed by János Fazekas at the National Party Conference. The inclusion of this proposal into the actual plans was made possible by Ceaușescu’s approval. *Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Arhive Naționale Istorice Centrale* (Na-

- tional Archives of Romania, Central National Historical Archives Services) (ANR, SANIC), coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie (Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Chancellery), file 191/1967, fol. 20.
8. Novák, *Aranykorszak?*, 33–45.
 9. Novák, *Aranykorszak?*, 33–45.
 10. Novák, *Aranykorszak?*, 33–45.
 11. By 1968 the relationship between the Warsaw Pact and Romania was so poisoned that on 23 March, for example, Romania was not even invited to the Dresden Conference.
 12. For further information on the event see Alina Pavelescu and Laura Dumitrescu, eds., *PCR și intelectualii în primii ani ai regimului Ceaușescu (1965–1972)* (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2007).
 13. ANR, SANIC, fond CC al PCR—Secția de Propagandă și Agitație (Propaganda and Agitation Section), file 18/1968, fols. 98–102. The list of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals contained a total of 121 names from cities like Târgu Mureș, Cluj, Bucharest, Satu Mare, Oradea, Miercurea-Ciuc, Brașov, Arad, Sfântu Gheorghe.
 14. Informative letter of János Fazekas to Ion Gheorghe Maurer, 1968, Politikatorneteti Intezet Leveltara (Archives of Political and Union History), coll. 917, box 7.
 15. Participants to the meeting organized at the CC of the RCP headquarters were some key figures of the Party leadership (Nicolae Ceaușescu, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Leonte Răutu, Mihály Gere, János Fazekas) and the representative elite of the ethnic Hungarians from Bucharest (Géza Domokos, János Szász, Pál Bodor) and the more important Transylvanian cultural centers: Cluj (Ernő Gáll, János Demeter, Lajos Jordáky, Lajos Kántor, István Nagy, Gyula Csehi, Sándor Fodor, Sándor Kányádi, Elemér Jancsó), Târgu Mureș (Győző Hajdu, Zsolt Gálfalvi, András Sütő), Timișoara (Ernő Sisak) etc. In his memoirs Géza Domokos remembers that the night before the meeting he met with Pál Bodor and Gyula Szabó and formulated the text of their speech. Bányai Éva, *Sikertörténetek kudarcokkal: Bukaresti életutak* (Kolozsvár: Komp-Press Korunk Baráti Társaság, 2006), 140.
 16. The issue of a statute that would stabilize the legal situation of the Hungarians in Romania also arose in the interwar period and in the period right after World War II. Just before the peace treaty, on 6 February 1945 Romania declared the so-called Nationality Statute which stated that all its citizens regardless of race, language, nationality were equal and, connected to the use of language, it granted collective rights to the ethnic Hungarians of Transylvania. The RCP that seized power in 1947 and introduced a system of classes never again recognized the collective rights of the nationalities.
 17. Most of those convicted were released from prison in 1963–1964. However, the local Party leadership made it almost impossible for them to get back to their old jobs or to get new ones. The Hungarian elites requested that this situation be solved.
 18. After the local interpretation of the 1956 events, the issue of the so-called Hungarian separatism surfaced more forcibly. Thus, in order to “prevent separation from the majority population” of the ethnic Hungarian students, graduates, doctors, professionals, Hungarian graduates were posted far from their birth places, in regions with a Romanian majority.

19. In the autumn of 1956, the secretary of the cc, Miron Constantinescu, travelled to Cluj, where on 29–30 September he met with the local Hungarian intellectuals. For more details, see Benkő Levente, ed., *Az őszinteség két napja: 1956. szeptember 29–30* (Kolozsvár: Polis Könyvkiadó, 2007). A similar meeting was held in October 1956 at Târgu Mureș between local Party leadership of the Hungarian Autonomous Region and the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals. Both meetings were triggered by the echoes of the Hungarian 1956 events. An analysis of destalinization and of the Hungarian reforms was made, and some issues faced by the Transylvanian Hungarians were also discussed. It must be noted however that none of these meetings was as complex as the 1968 meeting.
20. Novák Csaba Zoltán, “‘A nyitás éve,’ 1968: A romániai magyar értelmiségiek találkozója Nicolae Ceaușescuval,” *Múltunk* 20, 2 (2008): 229–264.
21. The wave of visits peaked on a national level on 28–29 August 1968. Gheorghe Apostol visited the counties of Brăila, Vrancea, Galați, while Alexandru Bârlădeanu visited Neamț and Bacău counties. At the same time Emil Bodnăraș visited Vaslui and Iași, and Chivu Stoica Dolj and Mehedinți counties. *Scînteia* 38, 7809 (29 August 1968): 2, 3.
22. This step of the neo-Stalinist Party leadership was attributed by literature to the maverick policy of Romania. For more details: Mihai Retegan, *1968: Din primăvară până în toamnă* (Bucharest: RAO, 1998), 54–185.
23. Ceaușescu promised these visits during the planning of the administrative reform of creating the counties, e.g. to the members of the delegation from Miercurea-Ciuc that visited Bucharest in February 1968. The fact that the Party leadership visited not only the two county centres, but also the loser of the fight for the center of Harghita County, i.e. Odorheiu Secuiesc, was an important gesture on their behalf. The latter city was also given the status of municipality.
24. *Scînteia* 38, 7807 (27 August 1968): 5; ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 136/1968. fol. 39.
25. *Scînteia* 38, 7807 (1968): 6; ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 136/1968. fol. 39.
26. *Scînteia* 38, 7808 (28 August 1968): 1; ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 136/1968. fol. 48. In his speech Fazekas was referring to the dual attachment of the Hungarian Writers’ Association.
27. *Scînteia* 38, 7811 (31 August 1968): 5.
28. Shorthand minutes of the Plenary of the cc of the RCP, 1968. ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 178/1968, fols. 47–56.
29. During the years of the royal dictatorship the National Renaissance Front, created on 16 December 1938, was renamed The Party of the Nation (“single and totalitarian”) on 22 June 1940.
30. In Hungary, the Patriotic Peoples’ Front created by the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party was a similar cohesive mass organization. It did not have its own paper. With the dictatorship hardening, it gradually lost its minimal consulting, opinion-forming roles.
31. “Ceaușescu: There were a few objections related to the naming of these councils of the nationalities, as to name them simply German or Hungarian nationality coun-

cils. We think that it would be best to stick with the originally proposed phrase, councils of Hungarian and German nationality workers, and we would like to ask comrade Takács—as I believe he made the proposal—to withdraw his proposal. Lajos Takács: I was just suggesting to think about it. I. Gh. Maurer: To think about it? We are withdrawing it.” ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 178/1968, fol. 135.

32. Shorthand minutes of the RCP CC Plenary 1968. ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 178/1968, fols. 147–156.
33. ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 178/1968, fols. 147–156.
34. ANR, SANIC, coll. CC al PCR—Cancelarie, file 178/1968, fols. 147–156.
35. The EHWC and the EGWC were controlled both centrally and locally by the competent Party organizations that clearly decided who should be nominated and included as member.
36. *Vörös Zászló* (Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureș) 20, 255 (October 1968).
37. *Vörös Zászló* 20, 273 (November 1968).
38. *Vörös Zászló* 20, 26 (February 1968). The Mureș County EHWC Council was set up as follows: Prof. Tibor Maros as president, board members: Géza Fodor on behalf of the County Peoples' Council, Zsolt Gálfalvi, director of the theater, Márton Szöllösi from the railways, activist György Parajdi as secretary. There were an additional 42 members. At the same time the Mureș County organization sent 18 members to the EHWC National Council.

Abstract

The Year 1968 in the Romanian Nationality Policy

One of the most important milestones of the Nicolae Ceaușescu-defined national policy and within it the policy towards ethnic Hungarians was the year 1968. In this year there were events in foreign and domestic policy of such great importance in relation to Romania that they influenced the nationality policy of the Party. The preparation and implementation of the 1968 administrative reform also played an important role in the Party's nationality policy. On the territory of the historic Szeklerland three counties were created in 1968. The region of Trei Scaune became once again a county under the name of Covasna, while Ciuc, Gheorgheni and Odorhei jointly formed Harghita County, and Mureș Seat was included into Mureș County. During 1965–1968 Ceaușescu managed to gain the trust of most of the Transylvanian Hungarian elites. Through the “flexibility” shown when creating the counties, the dialogue with the Hungarian intellectuals and finally through the interest shown during meetings and visits, he managed to gain considerable sympathy. Towards the end of 1968 a new phase of Ceaușescu's political and social transformation policy was implemented. Amidst the intensified foreign and domestic policies, to revive its sluggish mass mobilization the Romanian Communist Party created a new organization, the Socialist Unity Front (SUF). The SUF was built on the model of mass organization used by all dictatorships and it clasped Romanian society at all levels. The setting up and operation of the nationality councils were perfectly integrated into the Party's nationality policy.

Keywords

Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romanian Communist Party, ethnic minorities, Hungarian Workers' Council