

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

The **Project on Ethnic Relations (PER)** was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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R e p o r t

FEB. 22-24, 2001



PREDEAL, ROMANIA

**POLITICAL WILL:
ROMANIA'S PATH TO
ETHNIC ACCOMMODATION**

**PROJECT ON
ETHNIC
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Bucuresti (Bucharest)

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PREFACE

This is a report of a discussion that would have been all but impossible to imagine ten years ago: Romanian and Hungarian political leaders from Romania sitting down to review and analyze their successful cooperation in building that country's program for ethnic accord—and to consider what must be done to preserve that achievement.

When the Project on Ethnic Relations began its work in Romania in 1991, it took almost a year to persuade Romanian officials and leaders of the ethnic Hungarian community just to gather around the same table, so deep was the mistrust. But once they did, it marked the beginning of a lengthy, and continuing, political process that makes Romania a uniquely successful example of what can be accomplished. The path was not, and is not, easy. It involved hard, often bitter, debates between Romanians and Hungarians, intensive political bargaining and trade-offs, and many setbacks and disappointments. And yet a group of key leaders, although deeply loyal to their own communities, saw that compromises were necessary. They were willing to take political risks to realize their vision of interethnic harmony.

Any interethnic accommodation is inherently fragile. It is easily upset by political opportunism, economic difficulties, or outside influences. So Romania's accomplishments are neither complete nor permanent. The debate over interethnic arrangements will go on indefinitely—as it should in any democracy.

On February 22-24, 2001 the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) held a seminar in Predeal, Romania to review and evaluate Romanian-Hungarian relations in the wake of the November 2000 elections that



Left to right: Mona Musca, Valeriu Stoica, Viorel Hrebenciuc, Cosmin Guse.

brought to an end the coalition government in which the Hungarians had been participants. Surprisingly, the new ruling party, the PDSR (which was returning to power after a four-year hiatus) and the ethnic Hungarian party, the

UDMR, managed to work out a protocol of understanding that not only preserved many of the measures that had been instituted under the previous, interethnic, coalition, but promised additional major steps, especially concerning administrative decentralization and the use of the mother tongue.

We do not yet know the ultimate outcome of these initiatives. Nevertheless, the reader who wants to take measure of what has been accomplished in Romania over the last decade will have it in this report. The debates between Romanians and Hungarians (and the Roma) at the Predeal meeting were civilized, self-analytical, and modest, even when there were disagreements. Above all, each side was well informed and aware of the needs and interests of the other, and was at least willing to take them into account and to discuss them if not always to act on them.

Participants included representatives of the presidency, cabinet members, and leaders of political parties including the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Christian Democratic National Peasant Party (PNTCD), and the Roma Party (PR). Officials from NATO, the U.S. Department of State, and the United States Embassy also participated.

The agenda included a dialogue on the impact of the 2000 elections on the status of minorities in Romania; European and national standards on minority issues; the protocols between the PDSR, UDMR, PNL, and the Roma Party; the legislative agenda; the recent experience with electoral change and political succession; the passage of the UDMR from opposition to power and back to opposition; and the significance of extremism in politics. The domestic and international importance of the agreements between politicians representing the majority population and national minorities was the subject of an address delivered on behalf of President Ion Iliescu at the opening of the roundtable.

Western participants underlined that Romania had gone further than most countries in Central and Eastern Europe in changing the tone of interethnic relations. They noted this was the result not only of the participation of the UDMR in the coalition that governed Romania from 1996 to 2000, but of the unprecedented protocols signed after the 2000 elections by PDSR and UDMR—unique examples in a region filled with ethnic tensions and conflicts. They also observed that these arrangements had been devised by political leaders from Romania, not imposed

from outside. Romania's interethnic progress, they said, will be an important asset in the quest for NATO and EU membership.

(Since the Predeal seminar, Romania has promulgated a Law on Public Administration and has outlined a comprehensive strategy for the Romani communities in Romania.)

This report was written by Dan Pavel, director of PER's Bucharest office and edited by the PER staff in Princeton. Participants have not had the opportunity to review its contents before publication, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey
July 2001



Left to right: Bela Marko, Peter Eckstein-Kovacs, Constantin Dudu Ionescu.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Romania's ethnic Romanian majority and ethnic Hungarian minority has already seen a complex post-communist history. A long time has passed, it seems, from the interethnic violence in March 1990 to the present-day participation of the Hungarian political leaders in the country's political scene. The Project on Ethnic Relations has been involved in many of the steps taken on this front during these years. Its efforts have consistently been geared at encouraging political moderates to engage in constructive initiatives to promote the interests of both the majority and minority communities.

THE EXPERIENCE OF POLITICAL ALTERNATION: THE UDMR'S ROAD FROM OPPOSITION TO POWER AND BACK TO OPPOSITION

The president of PER opened the meeting by observing that the country-to-country situation as regards interethnic relationships varies considerably throughout the region. Few countries have come so far on this front as Romania, he said, adding that this positive experience is not a matter of chance, but of political wisdom. Next to speak was the organization's executive director. She expressed hope that both the country's political leadership and its public will take advantage of the opportunities ahead—working to fulfill the next stage of requirements for EU accession, being in line for the next round of NATO expansion, bolstering its partnership with the United States, and successfully following through on its OSCE chairmanship. With a new government at the helm in Bucharest, she observed, perhaps now all major domestic political forces will finally decide that the time has come to put Romania truly on the map of Europe.

While there is no denying that more sacrifices are in store for much of the nation's population, acknowledged PER's executive director, the time has come for Romania and its leaders to realize that there is no other solution than going ahead with reforms on all fronts. Romania has a unique opportunity for yet another reason: with the region's ethnic disputes far from resolved, it can continue being a good example of ethnic understanding and progress. Measures taken by the new government, especially in its first year at the helm, will be closely scrutinized

for signs of tolerance not only by the nation's electorate but, of course, by the international community. Recent anti-Semitic incidents, for example, were noted and condemned in the United States. Competition for international attention is only intensifying: Bulgaria has earned itself a reputation as a model of ethnic understanding in the region; further, Yugoslavia is now also vying not only for international approval, but, concomitantly, for badly needed resources.

The time has come for Romania and its leaders to realize that there is no other solution than going ahead with reforms on all fronts.

What has been accomplished? PER applauds the efforts Romania has made thus far in minority policy in the fields of education and media. Both the ethnic Hungarian and the Romani communities have specific needs that must be addressed under the present government if Romania is to continue enjoying the support of the U.S. and west European governments. Most of these objectives can be met rather easily, such as designing and implementing a comprehensive policy toward the Roma and allowing the use of the minority languages in local public administration in communities where a national minority group accounts for 20% or more of the total population.

She concluded her remarks by suggesting that less focus on ideology and more on practical cooperation between the country's political forces and with international partners will foster a smoother and speedier process of Euro-Atlantic integration. In the last ten years Romania has made great strides, but could have accomplished more. Let this be the year for a big push ahead.

Next, a key presidential advisor read a statement by Romanian President Ion Iliescu addressed to the seminar positively evaluating PER's role in Romania in the last decade.¹

The president of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) began his remarks by observing that recent years have seen many changes in the relationships between the Romanian majority and Hungarian minority in Romania. Some changes have been superficial, others profound. The first decade after the fall of communism can be divided into three periods in this respect, he said.

¹ See the appendix for the complete text.

The first was that between the December 1989 revolution and the 1996 elections. This was a period of conflicting rhetoric and political confrontations, of searching and experimentation. At the start of this period, the leaders of the Hungarian minority made two important decisions. The first was to found the UDMR; the second, to participate in the Romanian Parliament. As it turned out, he said, the use of political means to promote the interests and values of the Hungarian community paid off in both the short run and the long run.

The second period saw the participation of the UDMR in the governing coalition that ruled between November 1996 and December 2000.

The presence of the UDMR in government was a vital factor in bringing about a general perception that ethnic minorities have a legitimate role to play in national politics...

The party's change of status from a pure opposition force to one that governed had major consequences, he observed. The leaders of both the (ethnically Romanian) senior party in this coalition and those of the (ethnically Hungarian) junior party had the courage to collaborate at the highest political level. Given that Romania's Hungarian minority is one of the largest European

minorities, and that the region is certainly not free of more serious ethnic conflicts, this move set an example for the whole region.

The presence of the UDMR in government was a vital factor in bringing about a general perception that ethnic minorities have a legitimate role to play in national politics, said the party president. This change affected not only large segments of the country's population as a whole, but also political parties, including, of course, the UDMR. However, these changes, profound though they were and continue to be, are not amenable to statistical or quantitative measurement. While opinion polls did suggest some new perceptions of this sort among the public at large, the profound albeit subtle change in ways of thinking that did indeed occur was harder to gauge. It should be noted here, he stressed, that the period between 1996 and 2000 was not Romania's best in terms of economic reform and prosperity. The failures of the coalition in this respect were also those of the UDMR. Most important, however, was the sheer fact that the organization representing Romania's Hungarian minority participated in the common effort to design a governmental program—an effort that saw several political parties work together to

change the legislative framework for the status of national minorities. The new law on education was the most important product on this front. Both in drafting this law and others, the interethnic coalition created and implemented new tools for the management of minority issues. The most remarkable product was the Department for the Protection of National Minorities (DPMN), which also included the National Office of Romani Affairs (ONR). Other examples of progress were the sundry decrees that various ministries issued concerning national minorities.

The UDMR leader went on to say that the third period began in December 2000, after the most recent national elections. The largest opposition party, the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), came out the victor. While many leading figures in this party had previously expressed anti-Hungarian sentiments, he said, the PDSR also includes moderates. During this party's previous tenure at the forefront of government, before 1996, when the UDMR was likewise in opposition, the UDMR had managed to achieve almost nothing in legislative terms. While in opposition, from 1996–2000, the PDSR often boycotted coalition efforts in Parliament, especially those related to the then-draft education law.

The governing party has the most important responsibility in the coming period in defining the evolution of interethnic issues.

For the UDMR, said its president, the PDSR's return to power and its own return to the status of an opposition party representing the country's largest ethnic minority certainly did not seem auspicious. A surprise came, however, when the new prime minister, Adrian Nastase, proposed a political protocol to the UDMR leadership, which the UDMR then signed. In February 2001, only two months after its signing, it is still too early, said the UDMR leader, to appreciate the consequences of this document. He remarked that it is "obvious" that the governing party has the most important responsibility in the coming period in defining the evolution of interethnic issues.

The UDMR president cautioned, however, that the above-mentioned protocol has been jeopardized by the efforts of ultra-nationalist forces. The election success of the extremist Greater Romania Party (PRM) and the support it gave the PDSR between 1992 and 1996 is cause for concern. Given that Romania has already lost most of what opportunity it

had to promote reform and integrate into NATO and the EU, any such obstructionism can damage public interest all the more, he insisted. The period that ensued after the latest elections represents a new chance for Romania to strengthen its political and economic standing—a chance that must not be squandered.

The president of a major political party associated with the UDMR in the interethnic coalition that ruled from 1996 to 2000 stressed that the change in the UDMR's status is significant indeed. Passing from life as a party in power back again to that as an opposition party signifies the beginning of "normality," he explained. Before 1996, he said, the UDMR was perceived only as an ethnic party. He went on to acknowledge that in order to secure political benefits (not least, votes), "nationalists and cynics" had manipulated the hostility that dwelled in some segments of the public at large against an ethnic party with a supposedly hidden agenda. Public opinion was much confused on such questions at the time. But once the UDMR joined the governing coalition, its agenda became much more diversified, allowing the public to see that this party was attentive to economic, political, and social issues as are other parties. No longer was the UDMR generally perceived exclusively as an ethnic party. Moreover, said this participant, the Hungarian minority came to be seen as part and parcel of the population at large; for the problems it faced, as reflected by the issues that the party representing it took upon itself to address, were similar to those of the majority population.

No longer was the UDMR perceived exclusively as an ethnic party. The Hungarian minority came to be seen as part and parcel of the population at large; the problems it faced were similar to those of the majority population.

Another leader of this party, someone who had held a top cabinet position, stressed that ethnic Hungarian cabinet members had demonstrated a sense of political aptitude and responsibility in line with their ethnic Romanian colleagues; which is to say, they showed interest in a broad range of political issues that went well beyond the ethnic agenda. The only difference, he said, was that they were known as members of the UDMR.

One of the leaders of the present governing party, the PDSR, next spoke. Echoing a previous speaker by emphasizing Romania's progress toward normality, he said that the presence of the Hungarian minority in a governmental coalition, and its signing of a protocol with the now-ruling party, are signs of this normality. Another politician, from an opposition party, observed that the PDSR had been compelled to change its stance toward the UDMR only after the latter, in 1996, joined the governing coalition. Thus the Romanian public had the opportunity to see that there is nothing particularly threatening to its interests about the UDMR being in power, much less any conspiracy to latch Romanian territory onto Hungary proper.

Thus, he said, ethnic Hungarian politicians came to be accepted as legitimate participants in the nation's political life. This was extremely clear in the municipal elections of the year 2000, when the PDSR and the UDMR joined forces to select mutually agreeable candidates for the leadership of several county and city councils. Such cooperation would have been impossible four years before, in the 1996 elections. Indeed, remarked this participant, some analysts, journalists, and politicians, reflecting on the outcome of the 2000 parliamentary elections, affirmed that the Greater Romania Party won many of the votes it did using rhetoric that had nothing to do with nationalism. This was the case in the capital, Bucharest. The situation in Transylvania was different. As this participant recounted, Gheorghe Funar, the nationalistic mayor of Cluj, the cultural capital of Transylvania, had campaign leaflets disseminated warning voters not to vote for the PDSR because, he alleged, the party had a secret agreement with the UDMR to form a coalition government. As "proof," Funar pointed to the local campaign agreements between the PDSR and the UDMR. The Greater Romania Party went on to garner many votes in Transylvania and the Banat—supposedly those regions of Romania where democracy has historically had the strongest foothold and where a sense of civic responsibility and interethnic harmony is said to consequently reign in many minds. Thus, observed this participant, it is premature to pronounce that ethnic tensions have faded away just because the UDMR was part of a coalition from 1996 to 2000 and recently signed a political protocol with the ruling party.

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THE UDMR'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE POLITICAL MAJORITY BEFORE AND AFTER THE 2000 ELECTIONS

Next to speak, another top UDMR official stressed the importance of avoiding simplistic answers to complicated questions. Romania has had varying political experiences in the three periods of the post-communist era, he observed. And the UDMR has had a different experience in each period with the party or parties in power. Yet another UDMR participant insisted that talk of ethnic cleavages in Romania is vastly exaggerated. Many circumstances confirm this observation, he pointed out, among them the fact that an ethnic minority was able to join a government. This is not to mention the protocol the newly-in-opposition UDMR signed recently with the ruling party, which for years had been seen as its political enemy. These and other examples demonstrate that the UDMR worked hard in order to avoid—successfully so—a situation that might truly be characterized as ethnic cleavage.

The leader of a Romani organization confirmed this point. He noted what he said is the little known fact that Romania is the only country in the world where there exists a signed political protocol between the leading Romani political organization (the Partida Romilor) and a ruling party (the PDSR). It is no coincidence, he said, that the PDSR signed protocols with both the Hungarian party and with the main Romani party.

An opposition party parliamentarian said it was important to note that the relationship between the UDMR and the other parties appears quite different when the focus is shifted from the country's population center, Bucharest, to those parts of Transylvania where the Hungarian minority is concentrated. Among the various examples she cited was the Transylvanian town of Gheorgheni in Harghita County, where in the most recent local elections the ethnic Hungarian candidates for seats on the city council ran on the ticket of the National Liberal Party. After they joined the city council, she said, they reverted allegiance to the UDMR and she found this quite natural.

Nationalists can be defeated, said another party president. The second round of the 2000 presidential elections demonstrated that in the face of a serious prospect of backsliding, democratic parties can work together, whether they are in power or in opposition, whether they represent the ethnic majority or a minority.

A ruling party representative cautioned against generalizations about the

PDSR–UDMR protocol. And he responded to criticisms from UDMR participants who described the county-to-county employment situation of Hungarian public servants in Transylvania. Relative to the proportion of Hungarians in Romania's population as a whole, the UDMR members had pointed out, that of ethnic Hungarian public servants was much lower, nay, sometimes nonexistent, in counties with sizable Hungarian minorities. The UDMR representatives alleged that this showed clearly that after the PDSR had come to power, Hungarian public servants had been forced to leave their positions with no regard for the protocol signed far from Transylvania, in Bucharest, by the leaders of the two parties.

The PDSR participant roundly denied the suggestion of ethnic discrimination behind this claim, even while recognizing that his party, in city and county councils nationwide, had in fact replaced public servants whose jobs had been tied to their political affiliation with the previous coalition. But the former government had done the very same thing on coming to power at the end of 1996, he insisted: It had replaced all PDSR loyalists with people close to the Democratic Convention (CDR), itself composed of several parties; the Social Democratic Union (USD); and the UDMR. A like move by the PDSR is unjustly dubbed ethnic persecution, he said, stressing that ethnic Hungarian public servants were not replaced due to their ethnicity but their affiliation with the former governing coalition—a coalition which, he added, had brought Romania only “disasters.” Thus, he insisted, the notion of an “oppressed minority” is false.

The same politician noted that, despite what he had just said, the protocol with the UDMR would bolster efforts to hire ethnic Hungarian public servants in various counties or cities dominated by the PDSR. Yet the situation differs from place to place. Where the local branches of the PDSR are more organized and work closely with the central branch, no problems are anticipated in realizing such hiring efforts. These are the branches where Vadim Tudor's party (the Greater Romania Party) failed to convince voters about “secret” post-election agreements that supposedly had been in force between the PDSR and the UDMR. However, other local branches do not pay heed to orders from party headquarters, and any attempt to force them into submission could backfire. Such complex relationships between the party's central branch and its local hubs are not related in particular to interethnic issues, he explained. For this reason, even if there is a political protocol signed between the lead-

ers of the two parties, the situation at the local level must be addressed taking into account the character of those branches and, not least, the personalities of their leaders.

The same speaker also addressed the lingering, unresolved issue of demands by many ethnic Hungarians to establish a publicly funded, Hungarian-language university in Romania. This is perhaps Romania's most controversial interethnic relations issue of the last decade. Even those parties with which the UDMR formed the new government in 1996 were less than enthused to back the idea of funneling state money into a university where instruction would occur only in Hungarian. No such political problem exists with respect to private universities, at which teaching solely in Hungarian is already underway with no controversy. However, explained this participant, the aversion of many Romanians to the idea of such a state university is by now a historical reality, one that extreme nationalists could well exploit to win more votes. He proposed a simple, politically feasible compromise: to establish a university of this sort, but one that also offers programs and classes in Romanian.

As an ethnic Hungarian politician now pointed out, the "university issue" can not be avoided for long. It must be addressed sooner or later, he said, and if the PDSR has proposals to form a basis for negotiations, the UDMR will also put its own proposals on the table. The protocol between the two parties has some priority, and what happened in the first two months of the present government has shown that the UDMR, as an opposition party, can work much more smoothly with the PDSR, a party in power, than with its own coalition partners from 1996 to 2000. The most palpable indication of this, he said, is the draft law on public administration, which would close a protracted debate on whether members of an ethnic minority should have the right to use their language in municipal administration where their minority represents at least 20% of the local population. For the time being, he said, such achievements are satisfactory enough for Romania's ethnic Hungarians. The participant added that if the PDSR seriously takes into consideration what Tudor's party is proposing, this could harm the efforts of both the UDMR and the PDSR. The PRM should not be given such tacit permission to subvert the political protocol of the two parties, said this UDMR representative.

THE POIANA BRASOV AGREEMENT² AND THE MEANING OF EXTREMISM IN POLITICS

As one participant observed, political moderates have come out on top in Romania for the moment. But, he added, such a victory should not be taken for granted. As Romanians have witnessed over the last decade, relationships between political players can change promptly and profoundly in certain political or economic contexts or owing to international developments. The Poiana Brasov Agreement (adopted at a PER sponsored roundtable in 2000) was signed by many among those who are also on hand for the Predeal seminar. The anti-extremism message it comprised was not pure rhetoric, he added, but positive thinking that had practical effects—positive effects on the 2000 elections, that is. After its signing, many doubts were voiced as to its grounding in reality. Even those parties that had formerly exploited declarations by radicals now refrained from conducting a nationalism-charged campaign. As another participant in the seminar acknowledged, his party had boosted its percentages at the polls in 1992 and in 1996 by appealing to nationalist sentiments. The decision not to do so in the latest election campaign had cost his party many votes—lost votes that, he said, amounted to an indirect gift to the Greater Romania Party. It is obvious that regardless of such rational and moral decisions to avoid nationalist themes in campaigns, a stable slice of the electorate is open to such discourse, open and willing, in effect, to be manipulated by the force of such popular sentiment.

Political moderates have come out on top in Romania for the moment. But such a victory should not be taken for granted.

In this participant's view, Tudor's party was much lower in opinion polls than the final result would indicate, benefiting only from a sudden rise in popularity in the last month of the campaign. The Greater Romania Party is in many respects synonymous with Corneliu Vadim Tudor, he argued, explaining that the ascendance of its leader's personal approval rating rubbed off on the party. And so the party is not such a problem, said this participant, Tudor the individual is the problem. Rather than

² For the text of this agreement, which the leaders of Romania's main democratic parties signed at a February 11-12, 2000, meeting in Poiana Brasov, Romania, see the PER report "The Year 2000 Elections in Romania: Interethnic Relations and European Integration."

representing a social or political phenomenon, Tudor was a creature of television talk shows that transformed the election campaign into entertainment. He is a “clown,” this participant remarked. People wanted a “great big show full of scandals,” and he gave them what they wanted. This show was based on the poor economic performance of the previous coalition and also on the “disaster” represented by the “rule of law,” which is, he said, a semi-fiction in Romania. Tudor’s campaign slogan, “Sus Patria, Jos Mafia!” (Motherland Up, Mafia Down), expressed both a nationalist obsession and a desire for justice. The strongly patriotic

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appeal here came not directly from chauvinism, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Hungarianism, or anti-Romani slogans, like before, but from a popular perception that national dignity was under siege by corruption and the mafia. Another participant, someone who had held a top cabinet post in the previous government, expanded on this analysis of the PRM by observing that Tudor and his party’s success was based on the way the country was ruled. This phenomenon can in fact be summed up, he said, by updating a satirical saying from communist times. What used to be “They pretend to pay us, we pretend to work,” has since become “They pretend to govern us, we pretend to elect them.” In this participant’s opinion, given the change of government that occurred in 2000, attention need no longer be focused on Tudor, for the cause of dissatisfaction—namely, the previous government—has been removed by popular vote.

A participant from the UDMR begged to differ. As he saw it, Tudor had become so dangerous only because the nation’s justice system, being so weak, had insufficient will to judge him in accord with the gravity of his acts. Tudor was and still is quite dangerous, he insisted, because Romanian political leaders treated him with the very sort of passivity they exhibited when other dangerous phenomena came to public attention. By way of example, he mentioned all the controversy having to do with the statue of Marshal Antonescu, Romania’s leader during World War II, and the controversy over the renewed Legionnaire Movement.

In the opinion of one participant, the success of a party like the PRM stemmed from the inability of other parties—including the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Christian Democratic National Peasant Party (PNTCD), and the PDSR—to assume “positive” nationalist discourse. The party led by Senator Vadim Tudor thus achieved a corner on the market of nationalist discourse, which came out negative indeed.

The president of the UDMR said it would be a major mistake to consider the rise of an extremist party like that led by Tudor as simply a matter of chance. Some analysts, journalists, and politicians have attributed its success, he acknowledged, not to its ultra-nationalist message but to the deep disappointment many voters felt toward the coalition that governed from 1997 to 2000, of which the UDMR was also a part. There is some truth here, said the UDMR leader, while stressing that the PRM never switched its fundamental orientation from extreme nationalism to anything else. He explained that it was only an election tactic, a successful one, that saw the party voice issues that resonate with the public: corruption, poverty, injustice, and so on. Immediately after the elections, observed the UDMR president, Tudor and his party were back in Parliament spouting the same old extreme nationalist sentiments they had previously. For this reason, he said, the protocol between the PDSR and the UDMR is also an attempt to block the rising influence of the PRM in Parliament. He noted that most of the parliamentary initiatives of the Greater Romania Party were related to blocking legislation of benefit to minorities.

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Indeed, the UDMR leader strongly disagreed with the participant who had suggested that Tudor was a problem only as an “individual,” not as representative of a larger phenomenon. Even if Tudor is his party’s shining star, he said, this is not to be taken lightly at all, particularly given what happened many years ago in Nazi Germany.

A western participant said that he is impressed by the quality of the discussion. He observed that Brussels, Washington and other western capitals are hardly aware of the achievements Romania has made in the area of interethnic relationships. The election success of Vadim Tudor and

the Greater Romania Party have obscured those achievements, he said. In this crucial period as regards the potential for NATO integration, politicians from Romania should do their utmost to make known internationally such positive developments. It is not the Romanian army that is applying to NATO, he stressed, but the whole country. If Romania is to join NATO's fold, it must spread the good news of interethnic peace, a rarity in the region. Economic reform is crucial, he acknowledged while emphasizing that a country with strong economic results but divided by ethnic tensions stands no chance of achieving NATO membership. What happened in Romania after 1996 and after 2000 should be widely publicized in the western world, he said, and at NATO headquarters in particular.

In the opinion of a UDMR parliamentarian, the success of Vadim Tudor and his party at the polls marked the end of several political myths. One such myth was that Transylvania and the Banat are regions where a fundamental atmosphere of harmonious interethnic relations prevail. Tudor's ascension can be attributed to lingering fears that many Romanian voters feel toward ethnic minorities, particularly toward Hungarians. Such fears can of course also be found in western countries such as Austria and France, he said, except that there they are generally tied to the presence of foreigners. Hungarians are not foreigners in Romania, emphasized this participant: they settled in the region a thousand years ago. But there are still political forces that treat them like foreigners. The PRM can yet come to power with such discourse. The ultimate fate of Tudor's party has much to do with how other parties relate to it, he observed.

A previous speaker now took the floor again, saying that he could speak about Tudor and his party for days. Indeed, he proceeded to analyze Tudor's success in detail. This success, he said, stemmed not from the desperation of the poor, as many believed. Instead it had to do with the relative strength or weakness of the PDSR's local branches from region to region. For example, in Moldova, the poorest part of Romania, Tudor had netted only a few votes. In this region, the PDSR has very strong local branches. But in Transylvania, where the PDSR has weaker local branches, Tudor took many votes despite the fact that this is the country's most prosperous region. As for the common view that the young generation voted for Tudor, this participant pointed out that only 35% of young voters cast their ballots for the PRM. It was instead the older

generation that voted in large numbers for Tudor and the PRM.

A Romani politician stressed that some post-election rumors attributed a large Romani vote in some areas to Tudor. For example, in the fifth sector of Bucharest, where Partida Romilor estimates that 35% of the population is Roma, Tudor nearly beat out Iliescu. The rumor was that Romani voters strongly favored Tudor, but this participant considers such news manipulative at best. A PDSR politician responded that many Romani voters are not aware that Tudor promotes anti-Romani discourse, while they do agree with his anti-Hungarian propaganda.

One of the western participants said that the international media has contributed to the misperceptions that prevail about Romania abroad. When the crucial law on public administration was debated and brought to vote in Parliament, said this participant, the media paid notably less attention than it did when the PRM made unsuccessful attempts to block legislation on education. Perhaps more attention should be paid by the media to positive achievements, to constructive politics, than to confrontations and unsuccessful attempts to block progressive legislation.

EUROPEAN AND DOMESTIC STANDARDS ON INTERETHNIC RELATIONS;

THE IMPACT OF THE 2000 ELECTIONS ON THE STATUS OF MINORITIES

As a former minister responsible for the issues of national minorities put it, the next six months could be crucial to Romania's efforts at NATO and EU integration. In this respect, it is important to see what position the Romanian government takes on the delicate issue of the Council of Europe Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. This document contains eighty-five paragraphs, at least half of which must be signed. Some of the legislative initiatives of the previous government could serve as a basis for the continuous effort to improve the situation of the country's minorities. The PDSR should not treat those issues as it treated others, said this participant, as if it were engaged in "a struggle with the enemy." Certain "positive" endeavors of the previous government should be viewed on their merits, not from the narrow perspective of party interest. For example, Ordinance 136/2000 on preventing all forms of discrimination has no match in all of Central and Eastern

Europe. The present cabinet must follow through on such measures. This year, he said, the new government should establish the proposed National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination. Only thus can it prove its good intentions. In the same vein, Ordinances 13/1997 and

Several ethnic Romanian politicians, both from governing and opposition parties, now broached the prospect of their own parties including more ethnic Hungarian politicians.

83/1999 concerning the restitution of church property should be extended. A representative of the ruling party answered immediately that the PDSR has decided to settle all property-related controversies involving churches and national minorities within a year and a half.

Several participants presented data and arguments intended to counter what they believe are popular

myths. For example, some insisted that the notion that Transylvania is much more developed than the other regions is inaccurate. Indeed, they pointed out, Hungarian-dominated counties including Harghita and Covasna have regions that are underdeveloped not only relative to other regions of Romania but to much of Southeastern Europe. No wonder many young ethnic Hungarians face a quintessential and most difficult dilemma: Should they stay in the land of their birth or emigrate to Hungary? For such young people, especially those who are well educated, Hungary offers a host of opportunities. In Hungary they are not in danger of losing their ethnic identity.

As someone else then noted, Romania is home not only to young Hungarians, but quite a few young Romanians who face a similar dilemma. As yet another participant now observed, Romani young people face the bleakest opportunities, whether or not they emigrate or stay in Romania.

Several ethnic Romanian politicians, both from governing and opposition parties, now broached the prospect of their own parties including more ethnic Hungarian politicians. Offering examples, they concluded that before long the UDMR's future would be in question. If ethnic Hungarians in Romania achieve much of what they want, they suggested, there will be no further need for a political force that represents their interests. If the interethnic problem fades away, the Hungarians could join parties on the basis of their ideological orientations or material interests, as do other citizens of Romania.

Several participants now exchanged views on the situation of the Roma. For some, it was clear that the major differences between the two largest

national minorities in Romania, the Hungarians and the Roma, derive in part from the way the two communities have managed to organize their interests in the political arena. While Hungarians have succeeded in forming parliamentary groups in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies after all four national elections since the fall of communism, the Roma have gotten only one representative into the Chamber of Deputies, like all the other, fifteen-plus national minority groups. While the Hungarians participated

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in a broad-based coalition government from 1996 to 2000, and signed a political protocol with the PDSR after the 2000 elections that assures them a pivotal role in Parliament, the Roma managed to sign a protocol with the governing party, but one that addresses only minor issues. Such differences, explained these participants, help explain why it was possible to make such substantial progress in eight years as regards the problems particular to ethnic Hungarians in Romania, while the problems of the Roma will take more time to address.

POLITICAL PROTOCOLS AND THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

As the UDMR leader noted, the first political protocol signed by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania was with the Democratic Convention (CDR), its main coalition partner starting in 1996. Actually, back in 1991 the UDMR had helped found the CDR. In 1995, for a number of reasons, the UDMR had opted out of the CDR. But in November 1996, the UDMR entered into a coalition with the CDR and with two other social democratic parties, the Democratic Party (PD) and the (Social Democratic Party of Romania-PDSR, later incorporated into the PD's fold). This coalition was based on the aforementioned, earlier political protocol. After the November 2000 elections, the UDMR reacted favorably to the PDSR's proposed protocol.

And, said the UDMR president, his party's support for several legislative measures of the present cabinet have not been in vain. Indeed, he said, the UDMR has been surprised to see how constructively the PDSR has addressed most of the political objectives of Romania's ethnic Hungarians. The best example is the law on local administration, which had been awaited for years not only by Hungarians but by other national

The PDSR presently has political protocols with the organizations that represent the interests of both the Hungarians and the Roma.

minorities in Romania. The UDMR's coalition partners and friends after 1996 failed to approve this law, noted the UDMR leader. Although for years the PDSR was the UDMR's political foe, he said, something crucial has now happened within the PDSR and within Romania. As a consequence the UDMR is no longer perceived as

the fierce rival it once was. The meaning of this political protocol is insufficiently appreciated, he stressed, calling it the basis for political and social stability in Romania.

A participant representing the ruling party compared distinct periods of the PDSR's history as to its propensity to sign protocols. It is obvious that the mistakes the party had made in the past were now avoided, he said; for the PDSR presently has political protocols with the organizations that represent the interests of both the Hungarians and the Roma. The PDSR approaches each protocol with utmost seriousness; this is made easier, he said, by the fact that the agreements refer to specific issues, most of which are related, naturally enough, to the situation of national minorities. He distinguished these protocols from another the PDSR signed, with the National Liberal Party (PNL); that document is much more ambitious, he said, for it refers to a broad spectrum of reforms.³ The liberals had pushed the ruling party for constitutional and economic reforms, and the PDSR agreed, he said, because these reforms are in the general interest of Romania.

This participant asserted that the protocol with the UDMR had already seen specific consequences. One such consequence involves the delicate problem of property restitution. The PDSR intends to give back properties confiscated by the communists to various churches and national

³The PNL, for various reasons, has since renounced this protocol.

minorities—from Catholics and Protestants to Jews and Germans. He explained that concerns over potentially hostile reactions by key segments of the general population had delayed the process of restitution for some time. Another important consideration as regards the PDSR's protocol with the UDMR is how the agreement will be implemented in those areas covered by the PDSR's local branches. This PDSR official estimated that in 70-75% of such areas, implementation will pose no problem. There is also a notable difference between the reaction of PDSR politicians in the two parliamentary chambers. In the Chamber of Deputies, said this participant, the protocol went over reasonably well, while in the Senate it was more difficult to convince those with nationalist sentiments high on their minds to be accommodating.

A top parliamentarian remarked that the PDSR-UDMR protocol demonstrates the maturity of Romania's political leadership. This step forward occurred only recently, and it must be promulgated. When the protocol was signed, the Romanian public had the opportunity to witness that both ethnic Romanian and ethnic Hungarian politicians were capable of coming to terms with the past. The political parties representing them showed that they could abandon clichés and instead work together in the national interest.

CONCLUSIONS

The president of PER concluded by noting that the phenomenon of extremist nationalism is quite complicated not only in Romania but all over the world. Romania's most recent elections had suggested that it is a serious problem indeed. But then came the protocol between the ruling party and the opposition UDMR—an agreement that demonstrated that the moderate trend is nevertheless strong in Romanian politics. Recent legislative achievements as well as current and prospective administrative measures have the potential to settle old disputes and encourage national minorities to realize their legitimate desires. If these achievements remain unnoticed internationally,

Recent legislative achievements as well as current and prospective administrative measures have the potential to settle old disputes and encourage national minorities to realize their legitimate desires.

Romania could be perceived in a negative light. Thus he urged the country's government to do something sooner rather than later that will echo positively abroad, something to call the world's attention to the progress underway in Romania. The promotion of ethnic Hungarians as diplomats would certainly bolster such efforts, he said.

The discussions in Predeal suggest that a profound change has occurred over the past decade in Romania, said PER's president. From President Iliescu to members of a variety of parties, political leaders have assumed a discourse that would have been unimaginable ten years ago; and this is the result of a decade of increasingly deliberate, persistent, open dialogue. This process is now coming to fruition. People of many political persuasions have participated; and they have done so in order to create a national consensus, even if an imperfect one, on issues of national importance. The international community has played a role. But most important, he said, was the quality, sophistication, and dedication of Romania's political leadership. Concrete changes on the local level would be the most meaningful changes of all, he added; and this can be done bearing in mind that people want to be secure, to live in peace.

The stance that politicians from progressive-minded parties take toward Vadim Tudor, emphasized PER's president, will be a decisive factor in Romania's development in the coming months and years.

Romania must follow through on what it has accomplished over the last five years, he said. The international community is not fully aware of the meaningful progress that Romania's political leaders have achieved in the complex field of interethnic relations. This is why, he concluded, Romania should do its utmost to spread the news in particular, in NATO and EU capitals.

APPENDIX

Address by President Ion Iliescu⁴

Honorable guests,
Distinguished audience,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am especially pleased by the opportunity to reaffirm my special interest in the work of your foundation.

As you are aware, the talks we have had since 1992 and the expert-level discussions initiated by this organization have represented a pioneering activity in Romania, not least through their contribution to launching diplomatic negotiations between Romania and Hungary. The Project on Ethnic Relations' engagement with and participation in the overall efforts of our society and political leadership to resolve minority issues have undeniably helped illuminate many general and specific issues pertinent to this area.

Today, at the beginning of a new century and a new millennium, I believe that the moment has come for us to acknowledge that a particularly challenging era is drawing to a successful close both in Romania and at the European level: the era of securing human rights as a major point of reference in each and every democratic state.

In today's Romania, the system of values based on democratic freedoms that serve the citizen and uphold human rights has become not only a basic tenet of public perception and a reality in the public's social conscience, but also a building block in the doctrines of mature political parties and a major instrument of the rule of law and its enforcing institutions.

As I have already mentioned in my address to Parliament and the Romanian people on the occasion of my inauguration as President, on December 20, 2000, ethnic and cultural diversity is not a weakness of Romania but a tremendous resource to its advantage—one that we should utilize effectively. Democratic pluralism encompasses the pluralism of ideas, cultures, and identities. No one has a monopoly on absolute truth, so we must draw on the diversity of ideas and identities as an inexhaustible resource of solutions for the development of con-

⁴ This text was supplied to PER by the President's staff.

temporary society. The same applies to the concept of diversity in the area of minority issues, where it is essential for us to eliminate phenomena of exclusion based on ethnic identity, religion, social group or class, gender, or political loyalty.

It is to the credit of the whole of Romanian society to have assimilated and implemented this system of democratic values, whose message has so often been conveyed by those who consider it—as is the case with all of you—their duty to work for the welfare of the community, by laying the foundations for the essential mechanisms of civil society.

An equally important role has been played in this respect in Romania by delegating more authority and responsibilities to local administration within the overall process of decentralization.

That this achievement, built upon a tenacious, open-minded effort to change ways of thinking, has been completed, does not in any way mean that we can consider it the end of the matter—especially not when so many persistent problems indicate that there are no ultimate, miraculous solutions for tackling ethnic tensions. Indeed, we have witnessed in our proximity violent conflicts stemming from intolerance toward ethnic or religious minorities. Such tensions are not only the result of cultural stereotypes—they have deeper historical, social, and economic roots, often reactivated by all too immediate political interests.

The challenges posed by economic transition, social disparities, the dissolution of authority, and the neglect of policies with the potential to ensure solidarity amidst diversity, are by definition the most dangerous seeds of all forms of intolerance. We will not be able to design and implement effective public policies without fully embracing the idea that political, ideological, and cultural differences are an integral part of every democratic society. The promotion of a culture of dialogue and tolerance and the opening of the public sphere to the expression of diverse collective identities are not only basic principles of the society that we strive to build, but also practical instruments for assessing and developing much needed solidarity policies.

The fact that there are large numbers of minorities in our country that aspire to enrich their identity should not divide but unite us. We must no longer build ourselves conflicting identities but attempt to build bridges of understanding among all citizens of this country. Those who feel entitled to narrowly define their identity are often one and the same

as those who nurture cultural stereotypes. When we draw imaginary boundaries between us and them, irrespective of whether us or them is the majority or minority, we lay the ground for additional obstacles on the way toward solidarity, toward the harmonious assertion of our different identities.

Therefore, just because we have constructed institutional mechanisms capable of ensuring the rights of ethnic minorities and embedded those rights in law, we should not assume that we are immune to relapses of intolerance.

I believe that we must remain permanently alert and better coordinate the activity of public institutions with the dedicated institutional or individual efforts of people such as you. This is all the more true when we take into account that the practical, managerial, and even conceptual challenges in this field are neither few nor simple.

For example: How will we be able to better use the rich, invaluable experience of our having lived together in diversity, as well as our institution-building record of achievements? Are we adequately prepared to undertake a new means of managing our cultural and spiritual diversity, the great variety of expectations? All these virtues of our rediscovered spirituality cannot be relegated to a “museum of political ideas,” where they would never be translated into reality; on the contrary, they could provide solutions for a rebirth of Romanian society—a society that has been put to such a severe test during the last four years of poverty, desperation, and intolerance.

We must rise above politics in managing minority issues and always bear in mind that cultural identities themselves are not immutable, that they are not frozen relics of the past. Here lie new challenges no less important than the previous ones. For instance: How will we relate to the young generation, which—attracted as its members are to the virtual worlds of technical feats—will freely opt for a second language of use which is neither their mother tongue nor Romanian; and which will opt for a lifestyle ever more dependent on what the labor market offers; for a form of spirituality in which the legacies of tradition acquired in their parents’ home are replaced by the novelties of the Cyber world? How will we persuade this generation to preserve and adopt the values of particular minority and/or majority culture(s)?

Coercion will not help, nor will political laments or pronouncements

charged with the theme of ethnic identity or conflict.

Next comes the question of equal opportunity. A child educated in a single language spoken only by a closed community will never have the same opportunity as a child raised in a multicultural environment. How can we make the right decisions in such a complex situation, one that requires not only a favorable framework for their development but adequate economic, financial, social, and administrative policies?

I have briefly reviewed the substance of some new challenges in order to underscore that we in Romania have completed that stage in our national development that has seen us acknowledge diversity; and that we have entered a new stage, that of managing diversity.

Are we prepared to manage diversity so as to turn it into an advantage, a resource of the process of European integration, and not a hotbed of tensions? Do we have a blueprint for the preservation of all forms of identity in a way acceptable to the future generations? Do we have the solutions to protect our heritage, whether buildings, museums, ceremonies, costumes, or ritual objects? I would not further elaborate on the issue of the dominant culture of the day, but I believe that only by taking into account all these factors in a detailed and professional manner can we avoid the emergence of situations likely to generate specious tensions and local or regional conflicts.

The process of European integration both emphasizes and complicates such questions. Thus it is imperative that we find solutions to manage cultural diversity and train the young generation to administer those resources.

Furthermore, we must help young people discover and understand the values of tradition. We must guide them in their fervent quest for the right balance between a “Cyber” identity and their grandparents’ identity, so that the young person of Romania, whether born in a Transylvanian village or a southern one, no matter the given name or the family name, be able to value to the full both the potential for intercultural communication acquired in the contemporary world and their cultural heritage—what their grandparents have taught them about the traditions into which they were born.

This is a spiritual alliance—one that we need more than ever today, when information technologies, labor opportunities, and international exchange systems are shaping our own cultural baggage fast indeed.

Cultures change, and we change; our society must improve, and strive to perfect its instruments for managing upcoming challenges.

What we need today is a renewed vision of today’s rapidly evolving cultures, of the symbolic bridges that must be built across our imaginary differences, before they grow into ethnic or social intolerance. Once the contours of such evolutions are defined, we will be able to say legitimately: “These are our values! These are the values we believe in! These are our European values!”

Ladies and gentlemen, my regret that I could not personally honor your invitation is balanced—and in fact mitigated—by my confidence that the debate you have undertaken will serve to substantially increase awareness of such issues and, hopefully, to further the search for the best solutions.

I wish you every success in your seminar and in the overall endeavor of the Project on Ethnic Relations, a genuine forum of the noble exchange of ideas, one that has consistently found a fortunate consonance with the real world and with the lives of our communities.

Ion Iliescu
President of Romania

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