

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

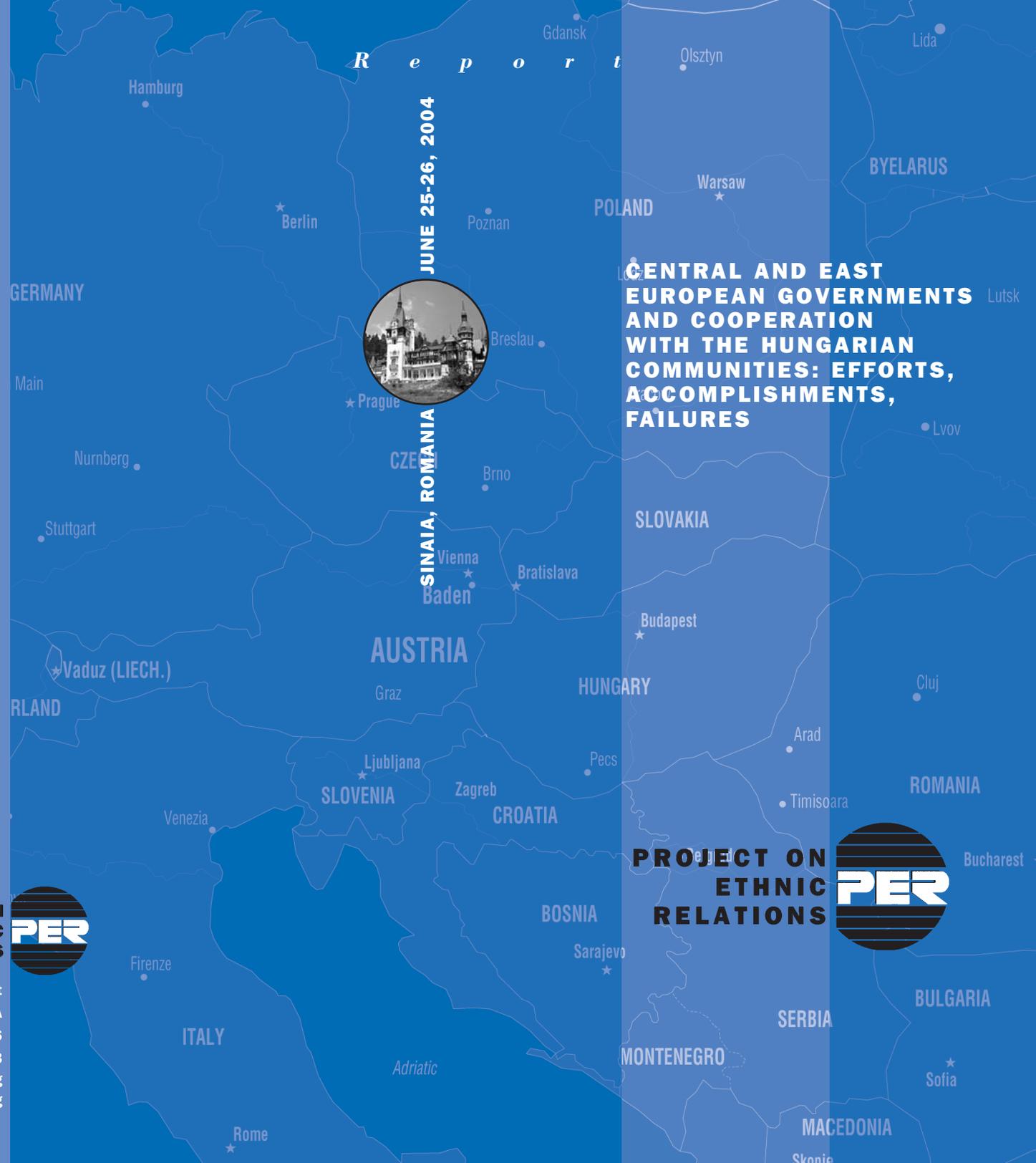
The **Project on Ethnic Relations (PER)** was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves 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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CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS AND COOPERATION WITH THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNITIES: EFFORTS, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, FAILURES

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SINAIA, ROMANIA

JUNE 25-26, 2004

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FOREWORD

Relations between Hungarians and their neighbors have been among the most difficult issues in Central European politics, and continue to define political processes in many countries of the region.

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) has been active on issues related to the relationships between Hungarians and their neighbors since the early 1990s. Working to resolve the often bitter interethnic disputes and encourage better relations between Hungarian minorities and the majority populations in Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia was one of the earliest, and most important, of PER's goals.

After more than a decade since the collapse of communism, some of the countries in the region are already members of NATO, and several have joined, or are on the way to joining, the European Union. All the countries of the region are members of the Council of Europe. In many cases representatives of Hungarian communities have participated in governing coalitions of these states. Though the debates between Hungarians and their neighbors are not as divisive as they were when PER started its work on these issues, they do continue, and the disagreements can sometimes be acute.

The present essay, which was authored by Adrian Severin, former foreign minister of Romania, is the product of a roundtable on *Central and East European Governments and Cooperation with the Hungarian Communities: Efforts, Accomplishments, Failures*, which was organized by PER in Sinaia, Romania on June 25-26, 2004. Elena Cruceru, the manager of the PER Regional Center in Bucharest, and Maria Koreck, PER representative in Tirgu Mures, were responsible for organizing the roundtable. Alan Moseley, PER Program Officer, and other members of the PER staff, edited this publication.

PER does not necessarily subscribe to the opinions expressed in this essay. Participants in the roundtable have not had the opportunity to review its contents before publication, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

Livia Plaks, *President*

Princeton, New Jersey
April 2005

PREFACE

This essay on the status of the ethnic Hungarian minorities in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Serbia, was inspired by a meeting on that subject that was organized on June 25-26, 2004 in Sinaia, Romania.

The event was sponsored by the new Project on Ethnic Relations Regional Center for Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The Center, with headquarters in Bucharest and with an additional office in Tirgu Mures, is a branch of the U.S.-based Project on Ethnic Relations (PER), which since 1991 has been the leading private-sector organization working on problems of interethnic relations in Romania and in the region.

The meeting took place under the title *Central and East European Governments and Cooperation with the Hungarian Communities: Efforts, Accomplishments, Failures*. It brought together Hungarian and non-Hungarian leaders from the region to discuss the evolution of their relations since the end of the communist period and to consider how they might be further improved.

I have used the occasion of the meeting, in which I was a participant, to prepare this essay, which presents some of my own analysis of this important topic and also incorporates some of the most important observations that were offered at the meeting by the other participants.



Left to right: Bela Marko, President of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania; Livia Plaks, PER Executive Director; Pal Csaky, Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia; Adrian Severin, Member of the Parliament of Romania; Allen Kassof, PER President; Bogdan Aureescu, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania.

I have a deep interest in these issues, having served as Romania's Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1996 to 1998, when I presided over the improvement of Romania's relations with its neighbors and initiated the Romanian-Hungarian strategic partnership. Indeed, my first act as foreign minister, only a few days after the new government was formed following the 1996 elections, was a visit to Budapest during which complete agreement with my Hungarian counterparts on all past controversies—including those related to the rights of minorities—was reached. It was decided to replace historic confrontation with historic reconciliation and to transform this reconciliation into a historic alliance. Later, I introduced European standards concerning minority rights (namely, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's resolutions on national minorities) into the international legal instruments signed by Romania with its neighbors (Ukraine and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). I also encouraged the leaders of Romania's Hungarian minority (and later the Slovak Hungarians) to fully participate in their country's governance as a way leading toward interethnic reconciliation and interethnic peace.

Recently, it has been my privilege to be associated with the Project on Ethnic Relations Regional Center in Romania, where I helped to oversee its founding in 2004 and where I serve as interim director. I attended the Sinaia meeting in that capacity and, together with Allen Kassof and Livia Plaks of the Project on Ethnic Relations, chaired one of the sessions.

I have tried to identify those portions of the text that refer to the contributions of the other participants, rather than to my own. ("As a participant noted..."). At the same time, following PER's practice of encouraging frank discussion by not making direct attributions, I have not identified their authors by name.

Adrian Severin, *Director ad interim*
PER Regional Center for Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe

Bucharest, Romania
April 2005

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE POST-COMMUNIST WORLD

Contemporary interethnic relations in Central and Eastern Europe must be understood in the context of the changes that accompanied the breakdown of the communist system in Europe.

As one of the participants from PER noted at the opening of the meeting, the end of the Cold War and of the bipolar world system opened the way toward freedom and democracy for the states and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. But the transition from a closed and controlled society to an open and free one was sometimes accompanied by the reemergence of interethnic problems. Because communist regimes had suppressed the right of ethnic communities to express and to organize themselves independently, the absence of real interethnic dialogue exacerbated the underlying tensions. At the same time, she continued, the communist regimes, especially during their final years, exploited nationalism in an effort to preserve themselves. These contradictory phenomena led to an explosion of identity politics as communism collapsed, sometimes accompanied by violence and wars that threatened European security itself.

Ethnicity and politics intertwine in almost every country, the participant continued. While ethnic or cultural differences are often blamed as the cause of violence within or between states, however, the real culprit is not diversity but nationalism. When nationalism takes on an ethnic component, it becomes a potent mix that feeds demagogues and extremists.

The intermingling of peoples, and the fact that state and ethnic borders typically do not coincide, mean that an ethnic group that is a majority in one state is often a minority in another. To be sure, the decreasing relevance of borders in Europe could, eventually, make all of us on the continent members of minorities. For now, however, there are problems of how to manage relationships between the minorities and their countries of cultural origin ("mother countries" or "kin countries"). Should these minorities enjoy *a priori* rights or should these rights be the subject of political negotiation among those concerned? In any event, we know that the failure to cope with these issues can lead to bitter and dangerous conflicts.

This has been the case so far in relations between Serbs and their neighbors and between Albanians and their neighbors, resulting in widespread suffering and destruction. It will be many years before there is any hope for stable patterns of accommodation.

Fortunately, other interethnic relations in the region have been managed peacefully, even when it is not possible to speak of complete resolution—for example, the relations between Bulgarians and their Turkish minority.

HUNGARIANS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS: SUCCESSES AND QUESTIONS

The participants agreed that perhaps the most successful and organized response to the interethnic challenge has been the management of relations between Hungarians and their neighbors. They emphasized the dramatic contrast between this achievement and much of what has taken place elsewhere in the region. Nevertheless, this is a dynamic and still unfolding issue that requires continuing attention, and adaptation to changing conditions.

Participants were asked to consider several key questions:

- What is the present situation of Hungarian minority communities in Central and Eastern Europe? What has changed, and what has been accomplished, in the post-communist period?
- What accounts for the improvement in relations between Hungarians and their neighbors? Why have they succeeded where others in the region lag behind or have failed?
- Are these improvements irreversible? What could threaten them—demographic changes, realignments of political parties, changing social and economic conditions? What can be done to preserve the accomplishments thus far? Are special institutional arrangements needed?
- Will Hungarians and their neighbors confront a new generation of ethnic problems that will require new efforts of imagination and determination in order to avoid future conflicts? Although we know where we have come from, do we know where we are going?

The Sinaia meeting began with a summary of the critical role played by the Project on Ethnic Relations in reaching Romania's present ethnic accord.

A participant from PER opened the discussion by asking the question of why the violence in Tirgu Mures (Romania) in 1990 did not spill over and was not repeated. Fourteen years ago it would have been impossible

to imagine the kind of structured cooperation that we now see between Romanians and Hungarians, or the peaceful outcome in Slovakia. He offered a brief retrospective of PER's involvement and experience in this evolution.

PER began its work with a conference in Bucharest in 1991 that brought together the leaders of all Romanian ethnic communities. It is worth recalling that at that time, relations between the Romanian and Hungarian leaders were so bad that at first they even refused PER's invitation to sit down around the same table and finally did so only as a personal courtesy to PER's leaders. Their first discussions were filled with bitter recriminations and expressions of mistrust. No one who was involved then could have predicted the kind of positive outcome that slowly developed from a continuing dialogue that, over time, became increasingly substantive and sophisticated and aimed at mutual solutions. (PER subsequently undertook a similarly successful process in Slovakia.)

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Despite these achievements, the participants agreed, history has hardly come to an end. Interethnic relations are in constant flux, and we are still in mid-course. Indeed, the discussions in Sinaia confirmed that there are conflicting views not only about how to best manage relations between Hungarians and their neighbors but about the treatment of minorities in Hungary itself.

HUNGARY AND ITS MINORITIES

A participant from Hungary noted that his country had escaped some of the interethnic problems facing neighboring countries that have large Hungarian populations. Hungary has a high degree of ethnic homogeneity and its minorities get only weak support from their "mother countries." In addition, there is a tradition of ethnic assimilation in Hungary that has significantly diminished the national consciousness of these minorities. Furthermore, the speed with which post-communist Hungary has entered

European institutions has improved the circumstances of all of Hungary's ethnic groups.

During the 1990s, he continued, Hungary crafted an approach toward its minorities that emphasized self-governance. Minority ethnic communities were given the right to elect their own leaderships and received allocations

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from the central budget to pay for community-based activities. (These measures had the greatest impact on Hungary's largest minority, the Roma.)

Nevertheless, he said, Hungary has still failed to assure the parliamentary representation of minorities despite the constitutional requirement to

do so. As a result, the participant continued, the practice of minority self-government has not really provided a serious challenge to Hungary, and has largely been limited to the cultural sphere. Even there, financial resources are always insufficient and there are no provisions to increase them. Meanwhile, minorities have virtually no organized voice in decision-making at the state level.

(Another participant, a leader of Serbia's Hungarian community, claimed that this failure has harmed efforts to assure political representation for Serbia's Hungarians, since the Serbs can rightly claim that no special provisions are made for Serbs in Hungary.)

Another participant noted that, indeed, some observers believe that Hungary's minority policy may have been designed primarily for external consumption, to show Western Europe a "model" for minority rights and to pressure neighbors to offer their Hungarian minorities privileges that Hungary's own minorities do not enjoy.

HUNGARIAN MINORITIES IN ROMANIA AND SLOVAKIA

Another participant noted that, in Romania and Slovakia, by contrast, the approach to managing relations with their Hungarian minorities has emphasized inclusion in the governing process at the national level. Although ethnic Hungarians were included in Slovakia's early post-communist governments, the practice of political inclusion was given its

largest impetus in Romania beginning in 1996, when the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), representing Romania's largest minority, became a part of the governing coalition. While UDMR did not join the coalition in the government that followed in 2000, it did engage with the ruling party through a series of contracts and agreements. Thus, during the last eight of the fourteen years of post-communist governance, Hungarians have been directly involved. In addition, Romania has a constitutional provision guaranteeing minimum parliamentary representation of the Hungarian and other minorities.

The successful record of Hungarian politicians and officials in Romania's governance, where they actively participate in general decision-making and not just in matters concerning the Hungarian minority, was the subject of favorable comment by the participants. They noted that, as a result of their strong record of competence, Hungarian candidates are often elected in districts where Hungarians are in the minority. (Candidates of the German Democratic Forum have had similar experiences.) When voters cross ethnic lines, it is a significant sign of reduced tensions. A similar tendency was noted among some voters in Slovakia, although it has not gone as far.

Because of this improvement in mutual trust, as well as because of the administrative decentralization that has resulted from the effort to conform to European standards, it became possible to enact very favorable provisions concerning the use of the mother tongue in schools at all educational levels, as well as in justice and administration. Most important, it led to a significant increase in the capacity of Hungarian communities to manage their affairs locally.

Thus one can say that Romania has become, *de facto*, a dualist (Romanian-Hungarian) governing system without becoming a federal state. (This is reflected in Romania's National Security Strategy, as enacted by parliament, which makes reference to Romania as a multicultural civic state.) This solution is reminiscent of the old Austro-Hungarian dualism, but this time in democratic circumstances and with full and formal recognition of human rights, including those of national minorities. There has, to a lesser extent, been a similar outcome in Slovakia.

According to many of the participants, this formula seems to satisfy the Hungarian communities from Romania and Slovakia, which still fondly recall the old dualism.

However, participation in governance—in partnership with whichever political party is ruling, for this is what dualism requires—raises some questions of principle and poses some problems of trust between the political elites of the majority and the minority. Some participants warned that, despite its many advantages from the point of view of improving interethnic relations, this informal dualism can also lead to suspicions of duplicity. Thus, they emphasized, in Romania it is important for UDMR to avoid the perception of doing political “ethno-business” when it shifts allegiance from one party to another on the sole criterion of remaining connected to power.

To this challenge, one official of the UDMR replied that an ethnic organization such as UDMR should not be expected to behave like a conventional political party since it does not represent a single political doctrine. Rather, the competition among political doctrines takes place within the organization, which then negotiates the “technical” or “techno-political” agreements of association with the mainstream political parties that have won governing mandates. He emphasized that this kind of balancing is essential if the influence of radical nationalist parties is to be held in check when the mainstream parties do not have clear majorities.

Another participant added that ethnic parties, since they are not bound to particular political doctrines but rather are responsible for assuring that the communities they represent have access to power, are fully justified in changing alliances when there are electoral shifts among the majority. This is not a matter of opportunism, but is required by rules of cohabitation that oblige the ethnic minority to acknowledge the political preferences of the majority. Indeed, this is the essence of successful political dualism.

However, in order to reduce the potential for ethno-political conflicts in the future, perhaps some consideration should be given to moving from a *de facto* to a *de jure* dualism. One participant maintained that there would be some advantage in moving from case-by-case negotiations to a stable, institutionalized arrangement for ethnic representation.

In Slovakia, where the participation of the ethnic Hungarian party in governance is more recent, the problem of perceived loyalty to the majority coalition partners has not yet arisen in such sharp form. But it is reasonable to expect that it may do so in the near future.

Several participants emphasized their hope that the participation of ethnic parties in governance would not lead to abandoning the goal of building civic and multicultural states, or to replacing the civic state with ethnically organized states. Thus, they said, the present Romanian pattern, which has also been adopted to some extent in Slovakia, ought to be seen as a transitional solution that will encourage interethnic confidence and the growth of democratic institutions. This, in turn, would ideally encourage voters from ethnic communities to choose from among parties seen as best representing their political views, rather than only their ethnicity.

Some participants noted, however, that within the Hungarian communities in Romania and Slovakia there are some political factions that insist that no form of dualism, whether informal or institutionalized, can serve the needs of Hungarians and that the only solution is ethnically based territorial autonomy.

HUNGARIAN MINORITIES IN SERBIA AND UKRAINE

Serbia and Ukraine, take a different approach to their Hungarian minorities. These countries, which like their neighbors are members of the Council of Europe, claim to base their practices on the “European pattern” embodied in the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. (In Serbia, some additional elements of autonomy have been introduced by a federal law in the form of the National Councils.)

Minorities tend to perceive governments as always granting less than they request, while the majority perceives the minority as asking for more than it is entitled.

In these countries, the notion that the “protection” of minority rights is something that is voluntarily granted by the majority prevails over the idea of structured participation by minorities in the governing process.

This paternalistic and dependent view makes for tensions as minorities are obliged to “ask” the majority to indulge them. Minorities tend to perceive governments as always granting less than they request, or breaking promises, while the majority perceives the minority as asking for more

than it is entitled. Moreover, the notion that minorities need to be “protected” also means that they will try to find protection wherever they can find it, especially from their mother countries. Thus, the Hungarian minorities in Serbia and Ukraine, have increasingly close—and dependent—relations with Hungary while Hungarian communities in Romania and Slovakia more and more exercise their independence.

In Serbia, interethnic relations involving the Hungarian community have been greatly affected by the crisis in Kosovo, stated a participant. In reaction to strong pressures from Kosovo Albanians for separation from Serbia, Belgrade has resisted any extension of national minorities’ rights to other communities, he said. This reluctance has colored policies toward Serbia’s Hungarian minority, which is aware of the successes of the Hungarian community in Romania, and which has escalated its demands with the encouragement of Budapest. But these Hungarian demands seem only to increase Belgrade’s resistance, despite the fact that Belgrade’s insistence upon autonomy for the Serb minority in Kosovo strengthens the Hungarians’ case that they are entitled to no less. For the time being, the resolution of this struggle in Vojvodina remains hostage to Kosovo’s unresolved status. Meanwhile, as the remarks of some participants from Vojvodina made clear, different views of how to deal with the Serbs—whether to adjust to the present system or to become more militant—are creating strains within Vojvodina’s Hungarian community.

In Ukraine, Ukrainian-Hungarian relations reflect the uncertain politics of a state that has only recently become independent and where democracy is not yet on firm ground. Ukraine’s own struggle for self-determination as well as some strong nationalistic tendencies have left little room to sympathize with the Hungarian minority, even though their rights are formally recognized, argued a participant. On the other hand, Ukraine, as a member of the Council of Europe, has been obliged to pay some attention. Thus, Ukraine’s minority law allows minority candidates for parliament to run on a common list, although the notion of a minority is narrowly defined. A language law has also been adopted, opening the way to official use of minority languages in certain situations. The law on national minorities allows for cultural self-governance, but fails to provide financial support. Nevertheless, an interethnic dialogue has been developing that could lead to future improvements.

The patterns of interethnic relations in Serbia and Ukraine have contradictory and paradoxical effects on the politics of the Hungarian communities. The unresponsiveness of governments to Hungarian demands might be expected to spur Hungarian unity, but it also reduces expectations and discourages activism. Moderates who emphasize cooperation with the majority are sometimes charged with being ineffective. These disagreements are reflected, for example, in the proliferation of Hungarian political parties in Vojvodina, where five Hungarian parties recently competed on separate parliamentary lists but only two succeeded.

Although there are also some divisions among Romania’s ethnic Hungarians (and, to a lesser extent, among Hungarians in Slovakia) their causes are different. Paradoxically, because the Hungarian party in Romania has already achieved many of its original goals, and indeed has become responsible for administering the results, it is success, rather than ineffectiveness, that has given rise to increasingly maximalist demands by a dissident radical faction.

HUNGARIAN MINORITIES IN AUSTRIA AND CROATIA

Although there were no participants at the meeting from Austria or Croatia, the situation of the Hungarian minorities there should be mentioned because it provides a significant comparison. While the situation in those countries is apparently as calm as or even calmer than that in Romania, the reasons for this are different.

While the Hungarians in Austria are close to being fully assimilated into a multicultural society, in Croatia the situation of minorities is no better than in other newly independent states (like Ukraine or Macedonia) where the majority itself is insecure about its own cultural identity. Rather, the relative passivity of the Hungarian minority in Croatia is explained in part by shared religion as well as by a commonality of geopolitical interests between Hungary and Croatia. Moreover, Croatia is favorably perceived by Budapest as having diminished Serbia’s power and, accordingly, its control over the Hungarians of Vojvodina. At the same time, Croatia is important to Hungary as a corridor for access to the Mediterranean. All of this illustrates the relevance of geopolitical considerations in shaping relations between the mother country and the outlying communities.

In accounting for some of these differences in the status of the Hungarian minorities in the countries bordering on Hungary, it is also worth noting that both Croatia and Slovakia are new countries, and that Serbia is the remnant of former Yugoslavia. Romania, in contrast, has a much longer national history, a deeper and more sophisticated experience with ethnic cohabitation, and a highly organized Hungarian minority. There are, in addition, some specifics of Transylvania's history that have had a positive influence, although this aspect was not discussed at the meeting.

ACCOUNTING FOR SUCCESS

The discussions in Sinaia reflected the fact that, despite some continuing disputes and discontent, the main trends among Hungarian minorities have been positive, that there is growing stability in their relations with majorities, and that “ethnic fundamentalism” has greatly declined. How can we account for these successes when things could have gone so badly?

The participants stressed that we will not have final explanations for many years, but that it is nonetheless interesting to speculate. For example, some participants sought an explanation in the fact that, as compared with some other pairs, the cultural or social differences between Hungarians and their neighbors are not very large. But others pointed out that, although differences between Serbs and Croats are not large either—they even speak more or less the same language—they ended up fighting one of the bloodiest wars in the region.

Other participants pointed to the self-restraint that Bucharest and Budapest have displayed in their relations. But this could by no means have been taken for granted at the outset. Indeed, a participant from PER recalled the 1992 meeting that PER organized in Bucharest between senior political advisers from Bucharest and Budapest, their first exercise of this kind. Relations were so strained and the partners so unfamiliar with each other that the Hungarian participants literally feared bodily harm in the “Romanian jungle” and had to be reassured that PER would safeguard them. No one could have predicted that, only a few years later, Romania and Hungary would sign their first state treaty.

Another reason offered by participants was the magnetic attraction of Europe and the wish to be part of the Euro-Atlantic world. However, this very same magnet failed to work in former Yugoslavia, which enjoyed

conditions that were certainly not worse than those in other countries inhabited by Hungarian minorities.

Yet another reason suggested was the pressure of the international community for accommodation. But these pressures were ineffective in Bosnia, or in Kosovo, where the interethnic wars stopped only after armed foreign intervention.

One participant noted that it was very helpful for majorities and minorities in Central Europe to go through a confidence-building process. This reduced mutual suspicion and transformed tense initial contacts into constructive dialogue. (To underline the change, another participant recalled the public outcry over Recommendation 1201 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the notion of bilingual street signs, as well as the anxiety that used to accompany meetings of the region's Hungarian leaders in Budapest. She noted that, today, such events are routine.)

This positive change can be attributed to the increasing self-confidence in the countries concerned as well as the impact of regional confidence-building measures organized by NATO and the EU, offered another participant. However, this does not explain the relatively satisfactory situation of the Hungarian minority in Croatia, a country which is not yet a member of either NATO or the EU, and that continues to be entangled in a number of unsettled disputes with its neighbors from the former Yugoslavia.

Another participant suggested that the positive outcome in the case of Hungarian minorities was to some extent a matter of accident and good luck. In the case of Romania, he said, it was an accident that PER began its work there; PER's executive director speaks Romanian and Hungarian and had maintained contacts with the leaders of both communities; that persistence led to an expanding dialogue—albeit a difficult one that more than once threatened to break down. Still, this dialogue would have led nowhere without the good fortune of having pragmatic leaders among both the Romanian and Hungarian negotiators—key participants who came to realize that their own self-interest could be advanced by doing the right thing with the other side and who were willing to consider practical ways to resolve their disputes. A different set of leaders might well have refused any compromise, so both accident and luck played important parts.

Of course, once an opening was created, he said, something more was required: the political craftsmanship and wisdom necessary to fashion agreements and trade-offs, to build new institutions, and to win over public opinion. The present question is whether, and how, the arrangements that have emerged from this new interethnic accord can be made durable.

While the discussions in Sinaia confirmed the role of luck and accident, they also underlined the contribution of a favorable regional and international environment.

First, relations between Hungary and its neighbors greatly influence the situation of the Hungarian minorities. To the extent that the protection of their rights could be seen primarily as a pretext for promoting Budapest's geopolitical interests rather than a genuine concern over Hungarians abroad, this tends to aggravate relations between the Hungarian minority and the majority; these strained relations then negatively affect bilateral relations, in a kind of vicious circle. (An example of this pattern is the present tense relationship between Hungary and Serbia, which contrasts with the positive relations between Hungary and Romania. It is no accident that such differences in the inter-state relations are accompanied by similar differences in the relations between the Hungarian minorities and the respective majorities.)

Convergence between the strategic objectives of Hungary and those of its neighbors also has an impact. When they coincide—as in the case of European or Euro-Atlantic integration—bilateral cooperation helps to enlarge mutual trust. And when Hungary and its neighbors become members of the same grouping or alliances, interethnic tensions generally ease. For example, the Hungarian-Slovak dispute on collective rights receded when both countries entered the European Union.

A second factor is the level of democratic development. A high degree of de-centralization in state administration is conducive to smooth interethnic relations, while a deficit of democratic processes is a negative influence. So, too is economic underdevelopment, especially when political leaders deliberately escalate interethnic tensions to mask economic shortcomings and failures.

ARE THE RESULTS SUSTAINABLE?

The discussions in Sinaia touched on a number of factors that could have an impact on the sustainability of the current interethnic arrangements involving Hungarian communities and whether the rights that Hungarians have secured are “natural” or should be seen as the result of political negotiation.

One participant criticized what he argued was a “commercial” approach to minority rights. This approach can lead to a kind of barter whereby the majority “exchanges” recognition of the rights of minorities in return for peace and stability. In this approach, he complained, each party hopes to shift the cost-benefit equation in its own favor in a game that has no real winner. Such “political ethno-business” severely strains interethnic relations.

Such “political ethno-business” severely strains interethnic relations.

Another participant maintained that in Romania the majority did not “give” anything to the Hungarian minority in exchange for peace, since these rights are “natural” and inherited. “Romanians recognized certain rights of the minorities, not as part of an exchange, but because they believed this was the right thing to do,” he said. “We should reject the idea that the Romanian government accepted the right of the Hungarian minority to speak and learn in their mother tongue in return for UDMR votes,” he continued. Other participants underlined that a strong minority is important for both minority and majority communities, and that it is crucial for the majority to understand this.

One participant claimed that the political vulnerability of minorities is often a result of their willingness to “sell” their political support to any party coming to power, which can leave the impression of opportunism. This weakens minorities by reducing their capacity to enter long lasting alliances. Only alliances based on common principles are predictable, efficient and durable. From this point of view, the participant argued, Hungarian parties should take care to join only alliances based on the coincidence of views on minority rights.

Other participants argued that, on the contrary, minority rights are best achieved through negotiation. Those rights appear to be “recognized” rather than “granted.” This may be the case with Hungarian minorities.

But this is only because Hungarians and their neighbors share similar values and have built a unique model of interethnic cohabitation through centuries of confrontation and negotiation. This model, which

Only alliances based on common principles are predictable, efficient and durable.

is especially developed and stable in the older Hungarian communities, has reached its highest level of evolution in Transylvania, but is not found in other ethnic communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

In this regard, another participant noted that the basis for claims to rights needs to be examined. In fact, he pointed out, there is no *acquis communautaire* when it comes to minority rights. The very use of the word “framework” in the title of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities tells us that we are dealing with “soft law.” The gaps must be filled in, and provisions and principles worked out, at the national level. So long as European standards for treating national minorities are not binding, it is left to each government to determine the rights of minorities through internal negotiations, based on each country’s traditions and conditions. “Rights don’t exist in the abstract and are not preordained,” he continued, “they are the result of negotiations between the interested parties. Sometimes, after long practice, rights previously agreed on become traditional, and therefore appear to be natural, as something external to the interested parties. But a closer examination shows that rights that now seem to be beyond discussion were at some time in the more distant past born in political conflict or warfare.”

However, this does not mean that there are no contemporary guidelines. Those who argue that negotiation is the key to obtaining minority rights do recognize some larger principles. Even in the absence of an *acquis* for minorities, there are some standards. The Copenhagen Criteria is only one of several that try to synthesize and present those standards, and their implementation is continually monitored, since this is regarded as a condition of European stability and accession to the European Union. Moreover, while they may be negotiable and historically specific, minority rights have as their core value the right to identity, and its corollary, the respect for diversity; this is part of a universal humanistic outlook. Finally, if negotiations between the majority and minorities are indispensable, they should at least be based on reasoning and the methods of

animus cooperandi (in this case *animus convivendi*) and on *afectio societatis*, and not on tactics more appropriate to mere selling and buying.

THE ROLE OF THE “MOTHER COUNTRY”

A much debated problem is the role of the “mother country” or “kin state” in interethnic relations. What is the experience with Hungary?

The very term “mother country” evokes the idea of an asymmetrical relationship between those who live in the motherland and members of the same ethnic group living in neighboring areas as national minorities.

Indeed, the idea of “mother” suggests that minorities are the cultural creation of a country different from the one where they live, in some cases from time immemorial. It also implies that they are under the spiritual wardship of the mother country. But, in fact, Hungarians in countries where they or their ancestors have long lived, or who became minorities as a result of border changes, have no less a claim than their majority neighbors to be fully equal citizens.

Although the “mother country” may have both interest in and moral obligations toward these minorities, it has no special rights concerning them.

Their rights in these countries are therefore primary rather than derivative. They did not immigrate to their present locations, and they cannot be considered to be foreigners. Although the “mother country” may have both interest in and moral obligations toward these minorities, it has no special rights concerning them.

Finally, proclaiming a state to be the “mother state” of a certain ethnic community and assuming that it must patronize and protect all the members of that community wherever they live comes close to the idea of an ethnic state—a concept that is antithetical to the ideas of today’s European community. Indeed, today’s standards hold that Hungary is not only the state of ethnic Hungarians, but rather the state of all the citizens of Hungary regardless of their ethnic origin. In international practice a state has obligations toward the minorities who live on its territory, but not toward ethnic kinsmen living in other states. One must distinguish between the “civic nation,” comprising all the citizens of a state, and the “cultural nation,” made up of individuals who consider themselves members of a certain culture or ethnic group. A state may

legitimately devote resources to supporting a “cultural nation” outside its borders, but this represents a unilateral political initiative. It must first be acceptable to the minority communities at which it is aimed and to the states where they live.

An example of the conflict that can occur when these considerations are ignored can be found in the case of Hungary’s Law on the Hungarian Minorities Living in Neighbouring Countries. Both Hungary and its neighboring states agree that cultural rights are legitimate, but the latter assert that the provision of these rights on their territory is exclusively their prerogative and must be carried out within their domestic legal framework. The states concerned, moreover, insist that economic rights cannot be granted according to ethnic identity, as this would be unfair. Some members of the Hungarian minority nevertheless continue to demand special economic privileges for their communities.

The participants addressed other aspects of the “mother country” question, including the significance of Hungarian-Hungarian dialogue; how Hungary has defined its strategic priorities; the relationship between Hungary’s domestic political dynamics and Budapest’s attitude toward Hungarian minorities in the neighborhood; and the potential for divided loyalties.

Hungarian-Hungarian Dialogue. None of the representatives of the Hungarian communities questioned the importance of past contributions made by the Hungarian-Hungarian dialogue and the Hungarian Permanent Conference (MAERT). (MAERT is a body composed of Hungary’s parliamentary parties and organizations in Hungary and neighboring countries.) Many pointed out that extreme rhetoric is much less evident than it was in earlier years and that there is now a more moderate and gradual approach. This change is partly explained by the shift in attitudes among both minorities and majorities that has been brought about by the influence of a united and democratic Europe. Participants pointed to a virtuous circle whereby the increased security of Hungary and its neighbors resulting from their integration into European and Euro-Atlantic alliances has diminished the fear of majorities about Hungarian ethnic minorities. This, in turn, has promoted greater moderation among Hungarian minorities. The reduction of tensions has accelerated integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, further strengthening regional security and the stability of the countries involved.

Because of this, the role of MAERT and the Hungarian-Hungarian dialogue has diminished. Some participants said that MAERT has become a body lacking content, that it is less and less relevant. So long as the Hungarian minorities had only one reference point, Budapest, they showed a uniform interest in pan-Hungarian dialogue and ethnic solidarity. However, since globalization has added Brussels and Washington as new points of reference, each Hungarian minority has developed a somewhat separate agenda for its dialogue with Budapest, and this is greatly influenced by the relations of their countries of residence to international capitals. For example, the priorities of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, a member of NATO and the EU, are different from those of the Hungarians in Ukraine, which has a special partnership with NATO but no chances for EU membership in the near future. Hungarians in Serbia, which has tense relations with NATO, meager prospects for early European integration, and serious constitutional problems, also have an agenda that takes these specificities into account.

This has led to a paradox: Hungary pursues dialogue with its neighbors in an increasingly multilateral environment, even while the Hungarian-Hungarian dialogue requires less and less multilateralism and a more bilateral focus. The multilateral framework will of course not be abandoned, but it will become more a symbolic, rather than a political and pragmatic, exercise. Managing this new kind of dialogue may be difficult for Hungary.

One participant suggested that it is important to determine whether or not Hungary regards itself as a “mother country.” To answer this question one must establish how Hungary defines its strategic interests: as broadly European, or as regional and limited to Central Europe. Participants’ disagreements on this point reflected Hungary’s own oscillations over the last century. Some were of the opinion that, if Hungary hopes to be a European actor it must behave less as a “mother country.” They believe that in a united Europe minority rights will be ensured by civic nations and collaboration among them, not among ethnic nations. The changing role of the nation-state in the EU dictates that direct engagement with its neighbors, rather than contacts with Hungarian minorities, is the best way for Hungary to improve the situation of these minorities.

Some participants noted that Hungary has already begun shifting its attitude about the “mother country” in this regard. For Hungary, the most important problem in the coming years will be establishing an

effective and proper approach toward Hungarian minorities in countries that will not soon join the EU.

One participant dissented from this Eurocentric view and argued that Hungary, in establishing itself as a regional actor in Central Europe, could increase its political influence by assuming the role of political leader and legitimate protector of the Hungarian minorities. If this is to be Hungary's approach, he argued, the paradigm of "mother country" and minorities is irrelevant. In this case it would be more appropriate to speak of one Hungarian "political nation." Indeed, he continued, "There is only one Hungarian political nation, manifested in different places, using different instruments to represent the same interests. Currently the Hungarian political nation is weak, but this can be changed. Hungary does not export its political vision and does not build a system of alliances outside its borders, but it is rebuilding a cohesive political nation based on a common history, culture and mentality." In conclusion, he suggested that the project of Great Hungary is superior to that of Great Europe (the EU), because it is more achievable.

The majority of the participants rejected this view. As one participant put it, "from the point of view of minority politics the term 'mother country' is used to express a psychological stage. Hungary must appear as the cultural center of the Hungarian nation. But it must understand that not all its goals, even if well intended, can be justified. Communities of Hungarian minorities are politically autonomous and, therefore, from a political point of view, Hungary should not behave as their mother country."

The relations between Hungarian minorities and their countries of residence are complicated by Hungary's domestic politics. There are diverse political forces both within Hungary and the countries of residence that influence Hungarian minorities' behavior. As a result, the minorities often speak with more than one voice, and this can lead to accusations of duplicity against the minorities. A relatively new and paradoxical phenomenon is that the ethnic majorities now prefer to deal with unified Hungarian minorities because they need reliable and stable partners for governing and negotiation. They have come to understand that a weak minority is unpredictable and sometimes prefers rhetoric to intelligent compromise. By contrast, parties from the "mother country" sometimes believe that they are better served by minorities that are not united, because such factions can be more easily manipulated for the purposes of Hungary's internal political struggles.

Discussion of these points led to a vigorous debate. One participant emphasized that Hungary's domestic politics have a very complex relationship with the activity of Hungarian ethnic parties from Hungary's neighborhood. "The politics of these ethnic parties becomes an extension of Hungarian internal politics," he said. Others argued that this situation is unique in Central and Eastern Europe. (Even Albanian and Russian communities are not as attached to the political processes in their "mother countries," and are not used in the internal political struggles of those countries.)

Representatives of the Hungarian communities who addressed this topic stated that their relations with the political parties from Hungary are supplementary to those with the Hungarian government and that this is only one among many connections with the mother country. At the same time, they also expressed their strong rejection of efforts made by some Hungarian parties to monopolize relations with the Hungarian minority communities. "As an ethnic community we are not organized on an ideological basis and for this reason we should not be asked to have relations with just one party from Hungary," said one participant. "Minority organizations have grown up and now we maintain relations with all the parties from Hungary as well as with all the parties, except the extremists, from our countries of residence," said another.

Some participants noted that disputes among parties in Hungary are often exported to Hungarian minority organizations abroad. This leads to a transfer of conflicts that originate in domestic confrontations in Hungary to the political life of the Hungarian minorities. It explains why Hungary cannot bring to the same table all the relevant representatives of all the Hungarian minorities. There are some factions among the Hungarian minorities who, together with some parties from Hungary, refuse to participate in the debates organized by others, and this is one of the causes of the increasingly fragmented and tense dialogue. If this tendency continues it may jeopardize the achievements in relations between Hungarians and their neighbors. Three rules were recommended to avoid this: do not involve minorities in one country in the political fights of another; do not use political pressure to censor the

To whom should the Hungarians from outside Hungary be loyal, and who should be loyal to them?

cultural values and symbols that minorities choose to identify with; and do not intervene to influence the internal dynamics of minority communities.

The relations between Hungarian minorities and the “mother country” raise the problem of loyalties. To whom should the Hungarians from outside Hungary be loyal, and who should be loyal to them? One participant expressed the opinion that the members of any ethnic minority have a “triple status,” which implies triple loyalty. First, being a citizen of the country of residence has a legal character as well as moral implications. Second, an individual’s ethnic identity determines the link between him and his culture, as well as with his cultural nation. Third, as a member of the minority ethnic community, each individual is involved in socio-political relations with the community’s leaders and political superstructure. All these relations require simultaneous loyalties: between state and citizen, between cultural community and those who adhere to it, and between the elected leaders of the minority and their constituents.

A participant addressed the question of how these three loyalties can be reconciled when they conflict. If representatives of an individual’s cultural nation or his civic nation try to intervene in the relationship between a minority’s members and their leaders, there can be a crisis. If cultural loyalties interfere with citizenship obligations and community members are asked to give priority to their cultural identity over their state of residence, another kind of crisis can arise. To avoid these conflicts, it is necessary to define the different obligations that are associated with each “status”—legal, cultural, and political.

Another participant replied that the idea of loyalty itself has no place in the discourse on minorities. He gave the example of the Hungarian minorities in Serbia and Croatia, which, he said, are both self-defined as Slavic states. Both Serbia and Croatia enlisted Hungarians in their armed forces, and in the war between these two states Hungarians were put in the situation of killing each other for a national cause that was not theirs. The participant stated that he cannot be loyal to such a state. Moreover, this example demonstrates the danger of infusing national politics with ethnicity. If Serbia and Croatia define themselves according to ethnic criteria, and if the war they fight is considered an ethnic conflict, then that exercise is outside the “civic zone” and can no longer claim the citizen-based loyalty of national minorities. To avoid such confusion states must be civic, not ethnic states; they must be conceived as multi-cultural states and not as ethnically homogenous. At the same time,

cultural identity and everything connected to it should be detached from territorial connotations, and thus from geo-politics.

HUNGARIAN MINORITIES AND EUROPE

To what extent will Europe’s political organization influence the effectiveness and sustainability of interethnic arrangements between Hungarians and their neighbors?

Some participants argued that “European standards” are desirable in the field of minority protection. In the current political language, “European standards” are understood as the *acquis* developed in the framework of the EU legislative process. However, the *acquis* is not especially concerned with minority rights and the problem of interethnic relations is not the subject of specific European legislation. Nevertheless, the EU has adopted political documents (for example, the Copenhagen Criteria) that establish several cardinal points regarding the status of national minorities. These points were included in the accession criteria for EU candidate states from Central and Eastern Europe (among them Hungary and its neighbors), but were not included in the European Constitution as obligations of member states. It can thus be argued that invoking EU-based “European standards” in support of minority protections is an ineffective strategy.

On the other hand, the EU is not the only pan-European institution. The Council of Europe also commands sufficient legitimacy to establish common European standards. Under the aegis of the Council, a series of European conventions have become legal instruments after having been adopted by the member states. The Council of Europe (especially its Parliamentary Assembly) has also adopted resolutions and recommendations that represent firm political commitments even if they are not legally binding. Failure to observe these commitments can lead to embarrassing political isolation.

Unfortunately, the work of establishing pan-European standards in the area of minority rights is incomplete. Some definitions and rules are missing (for example, there is no definition of a “national minority,” and a document outlining minorities’ cultural rights has not been agreed upon). Additionally, many regulations are characterized only as “principles” or “framework norms.” This leads both to contradictory interpretations of their content, and to the need for national legislation regarding implementation. Such legislation is often not adopted. Moreover, the

lack of legal procedures for adopting these standards makes them subject to uneven application across member states and to poorly sequenced implementation across and within member states. An example is the recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that enlarging local autonomy may ease tensions. Some have interpreted this recommendation as a standard that obliges the state of residence to respond favorably to any request for territorial autonomy on ethnic criteria. Others claim that such requests can be satisfied only under specific circumstances, which are not spelled out by the Council of Europe and thus must be worked out by each individual country. Still others maintain that this recommendation covers only one possibility among others. Indeed, inconsistent interpretation and implementation of Council of Europe standards can weaken their effectiveness.

The controversies over supranational (mostly European) standards and their interpretation are a permanent source of tension and a threat to the durability of interethnic agreements. Under these circumstances the solution is either to completely abandon any reference to European standards—a policy that would not only be difficult to put into practice but would unjustifiably discard a conceptual and legal framework built with considerable time and effort—or to improve the standards and to monitor their implementation. The second option would require the improvement of the procedures for adopting the standards as well as the development of a proper judicial system that could standardize good practices and could promptly, efficiently and credibly fill the gaps in current rules.

The debates revealed another interesting aspect of this topic. Many minority representatives preferred to have continuing support from their “mother country” (which usually behaves like a partisan ally rather than as an arbitrator) in order to improve their negotiating position, instead of more effective international monitoring, even when the standards follow a “European pattern” and European rules. Thus, the international community is seen as a complementary means of pressure, while the “mother country” is primary. Several participants underlined the extraordinary ability of Hungary and the Hungarian minorities to organize themselves politically and to internationalize their problems and aspirations. In contrast with most Albanian minorities in the region, for example, Hungarian minorities have brought their agenda to national and international debates in mostly diplomatic and political ways. (The violent

incidents in 1990 in Tirgu Mures represent the exception.) Whereas Albanians prefer direct international involvement in drafting and implementing agreements with ethnic majorities, Hungarians want to negotiate agreements on interethnic relations themselves, and to “self-monitor” their implementation. For them, the international organizations are only a forum of last recourse to be used when the improvement of the minority rights is in doubt.

The participants also discussed some of the incompatibilities between the agendas of Hungarian minorities and EU integration. One participant complained that some laws that responded to the demands of the Hungarian minority had been dropped in order to harmonize national legislation with the European *acquis*. Other participants deplored the fact that Hungarian minorities in certain countries will be left outside the EU’s boundaries after enlargement. It was underlined that the concept of Euro-regions represented and still represents a successful formula for defusing interethnic tension by organizing common projects and activities on territories disputed by Hungary and its neighbors, and where, under specific historical circumstances, a complex multiethnic social tissue had developed. The demolition of these Euro-regional structures as a result of the new Schengen frontier may stir up old tensions and frustrations and reopen old wounds.

A representative of one Hungarian minority expressed the dissatisfaction of his co-nationals that, since Hungary’s integration into the EU, some ethnic Hungarians need visas to travel to their “mother country.” In his opinion, this is another negative effect of EU enlargement. In conclusion, the participants stressed that the EU should take more care not to disturb interethnic relations in Central and Eastern Europe when designing its enlargement strategies.

HUNGARIAN MINORITIES AND THEIR OLIGARCHS: INTERNAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF THE HUNGARIAN MINORITIES

What is the impact of the internal socio-economic dynamics of the Hungarian minorities from Central and Eastern Europe on their interethnic relations? Participants turned to the growing prevalence and social consequences of socio-economic cleavages within the Hungarian minority communities.

After the collapse of the communist system, the extreme economic and

social polarization that took place in transitional societies occurred within Hungarian minority communities as well. A new class of Hungarian minority “oligarchs” found that their interests more closely corresponded to those of the majority’s oligarchs than with those of their co-nationals.

After using their minority identity to pursue their economic and political ambitions, the emerging minority oligarchs joined their counterparts from the majority. This not only deepened the economic polarization within minority communities but directly challenged the established minority cultural elites.

In a way, the common interests of minority and majority oligarchs that led to close personal ties also promoted better interethnic relations. At the same time, these new connections may have diluted the relations of the minority oligarchs with their co-nationals, especially the old cultural elites. (Some accused them, ironically, of behaving the same way as majority leaders had toward the minority in the past.) Blaming their problems on this alliance of oligarchs, some members of the Hungarian minority have translated their social dissatisfactions and demands into the language of identity politics and called for cultural segregation based on administrative separation.

The participants raised the question of “representation” and “representativeness” in the context of these socio-economic cleavages, and of the identity confusion that accompanies them. Debate centered on what one participant called the “temptations for political monopolization by the minority’s oligarchy,” as well as on the perception among radical Hungarian minority groups of “discrimination against ethnic Hungarian organizations with respect to their participation in the election process.”

Initially, the political organization of the Hungarian minority was structured according to the tactical preferences of the various leaders and their supporters. The alternatives facing them were: open conflict *versus* cooperation with the governments of the countries of residence; acceptance of a gradual progress *versus* immediate insistence upon all possible rights; interethnic dialogue *versus* nationalist rhetoric; negotiation of compromise formulas *versus* support for unilateral radical programs; participation in governing responsibility *versus* demanding unilateral acts of governmental protection; managing interethnic disputes on the local level *versus* internationalizing them; and involving the “mother country” in interethnic conflicts *versus* including only the Hungarian minorities and others in their countries of residence in the dialogues. As the situation of the

Hungarian minorities improved, moderate political leaders were able to attract majority support from their co-nationals. This promoted unity within the Hungarian minority political organizations, or at least the consolidation of Hungarian ethnic organizations into coherent coalitions. One can say that this consolidation of forces represented a unique and positive phenomenon that distinguishes the Hungarian minorities from others and accounts for their success and their relatively good relations with other ethnic groups.

The deepening of intra-minority social conflicts has sharpened the rivalries among different minority political organizations.

At the same time, the stratification of fortune and power within the Hungarian minority has led to some political splintering and the re-emergence of pluralism. The deepening of intra-minority social conflicts has sharpened the rivalries among different minority political organizations and shifted the nature of the alternatives under consideration. The newest question is “integration versus segregation.” Even though the Hungarian minority groups previously included segregationist factions, they never achieved broad support except at times of interethnic crisis. Thus the debate was always framed as “assimilation versus integration.” But the very success of the pro-integration policies of the Hungarian minority’s main leaders, combined with the socio-economic cleavages, has led to a new factionalism in which some leaders have started to promote more radical alternatives.

Some participants asserted that a politically divided and “pluralistic” Hungarian minority community is to be avoided, since such divisions will reduce the influence of Hungarian minorities and the impact of their political initiatives. If this should happen, the dissatisfaction within the minority communities could be destabilizing.

Other participants warned against what they described as political “pseudo-pluralism” within the minority community. These participants stated that many ethnic Hungarian organizations that have recently emerged reflect nothing more than the personal ambitions of their founders or the marginal interests of some insignificant splinter groups. This “pseudo-pluralism” creates confusion and dilutes electoral power, compromising efforts to increase the minority’s influence and consolidate the protection of its identity.

The participants then took up the need to strike a balance between the principle of free association and the desire to limit the political atomization of the Hungarian minority. Such a balance might be found, some suggested, by distinguishing between the right of free association, which must have no limits, and legitimate restrictions on the right to run candidates in elections. This means insisting that organizations claiming to represent the interests of the minority prove that they actually have a certain minimum number of supporters or be disallowed from putting forward candidates. While political aspirations cannot be denied, at least an organization should be asked to prove its legitimacy, they concluded.

Other participants rejected this notion, asserting that political pluralism within a minority community is a form of internal democracy. Such pluralism strengthens the minority, they argued, because it selects the most capable representatives, consolidates political cohesion by strengthening their legitimacy, and enhances the collective force of the community. On the other hand, limiting democratic freedoms within a minority community wastes its power, demoralizes its members and reduces its capacity to compete outside the community. The argument for political unity masks the monopolist aspirations of the present leaders—the current minority oligarchy—who do not want to lose their accumulated power or make its exercise more transparent.

Some participants in the roundtable criticized election laws that discriminate against newly formed ethnic minority parties and organizations under the pretext of having to establish their representative character. (The law on local elections in Romania was cited as an example.) Participants asserted that established ethnic parties use their presence in national parliaments to gain unfair advantage. These participants described such tactics as “collaborationism” with the political elite of the ethnic majority. The accusation was made that, in exchange for abandoning the real interests of the Hungarian minority, established Hungarian parties have received from mainstream parties a virtual monopoly right to that community’s parliamentary representation. They cited the “exorbitant” conditions that new ethnic parties must fulfill to be allowed to participate in elections.

Representatives of mainstream parties from Hungary’s neighboring countries argued, to the contrary, that the proliferation of ethnic parties and organizations, each claiming to represent minorities within a minority, when combined with the guarantee of minimal parliamentary represen-

tation, would lead to an inflation of parliamentary representation that would be resented by the majority and would weaken the collective cause. This larger number of representatives would not in fact reflect the actual ethnic structure of the society and would give the parliament an inappropriate ethnic coloration. In this connection the phenomenon of “inventing” new minorities by identifying new branches of the main minorities, often based on irrelevant or even questionable considerations, was criticized by some participants. These “branches” are tempted to organize themselves politically, mostly in order to obtain advantages for their leaders or as an extension of personal conflicts among their leaders rather than to protect the rights of an ethnic group with a well defined identity. One representative of the Hungarian community cited the situation in Romania, where during the last 14 years the number of ethnic organizations represented in parliament increased from 14 to 20, and where minorities now have approximately five percent more parliamentarians elected on an ethnic basis than would be justified by their actual weight in the total population of the country. He warned that without a more rational system the real representation of minority interests will be replaced by “ethno-business.” He suggested that minimal quantitative standards should be established to determine whether or not an ethnic organization or party is representative, and that rights should be based on these standards.

Another possible solution to this dilemma was proposed, which was that minorities should be recognized explicitly by law, and that each would receive the right to participate in elections on a single list. To create this list each minority community would organize preliminary or primary elections, in which each political party or organization of the respective ethnic minority would have the equal right to participate. The results of the preliminary elections would establish without any doubt which participants are representative.

Another formula proposed by some participants to resolve the conflict between pluralism and representative legitimacy was the establishment of national councils of Hungarian minorities. The councils would “represent the community at the state level and would manage in its name and on its behalf the constitutional provisions regarding parliamentary representation, access to public finances and the like, and at the same time would ensure fair internal competition.” These councils would be the only organizations to participate in elections on an ethnic basis. The results of primaries inside the respective councils would determine their electoral lists.

ADMINISTRATIVE OR ETHNIC AUTONOMY?

The discussions reflected the fact that most of the representatives of the Hungarian minorities favor autonomy for their communities, although there were many nuances in their reasons. For some, autonomy is a response to their dissatisfaction with dialogues with the majority; for others, it represents the extension of what they have already achieved through dialogue. For some, the desire for autonomy is a consequence of the failure to integrate in a society where Hungarians are in the minority; for others, it represents the recovery of the Hungarian national idea and serves as a surrogate for independence. For some it is a condition of a continued, respectful cohabitation “contract” with the ethnic majority; for others it is separation from an ethnic group next to which, as a result of historical and geographic accident, they have the misfortune to live. For some it is the basis of a happy heterogeneity; for others, it is the foundation for an elegant divorce.

A number of problems in connection with the issue of autonomy were discussed.

Ambiguous Terminology. Some participants pointed out that the discourse on autonomy uses several sets of terminology, all only approximately defined. The participants referred to autonomy variously as “ethnic autonomy,” “cultural autonomy,” “territorial autonomy,” “administrative autonomy,” “personal autonomy,” “administrative autonomy on a territorial basis,” and “territorial autonomy on an ethnic basis.”

“Autonomy” has become a magic word to which all the hopes of Hungarians and the fears of their neighbors are connected.

The participants discussed the definitions of these different varieties of autonomy, and the problems that can arise when claims for one or

another form of autonomy conflict, for example when different groups entitled to certain rights of autonomy inhabit the same territory.

All agreed that the definition of autonomy remains unclear, and that there is a great deal of confusion about what is meant when demands are made for autonomy. This confusion explains why “autonomy” has become a magic word to which all the hopes of Hungarians and the fears of their neighbors are connected, even though both may be exaggerated. The escalation of tension that accompanies these heightened expectations

(both optimistic and pessimistic) leads to increased ethnic conflict, at least at the level of rhetoric and ideas.

Several participants were of the opinion that the debate should be less theoretical and more concrete, and instead of dealing with definitions of abstract terms should try to find pragmatic solutions to real problems. In addition, as one participant stated, “the notion of autonomy itself is being abused; some of those who speak of autonomy are thinking of something else and use the idea of autonomy as a vehicle to accomplish hidden objectives.” Some participants encouraged the Hungarian representatives not to obsessively use the word “autonomy,” since the term has different meanings for different people, but rather to formulate specific demands, proposals and arrangements. They also noted that similar disputes in the past over similarly ambiguous concepts (collective rights, positive discrimination, multinational state, subsidiarity, etc.) were resolved without having to settle every issue of definition and that the passion for abstract formulations died as soon as the rights that had been demanded were obtained.

The Goals of Autonomy. It was notable that when asked to specify the rights and obligations associated with their demands for “autonomy,” none of the participants could identify an important demand that had not already been accepted. The remaining demands had to do with symbols or the full implementation of rights that have already been recognized, or that pertained to the general interests of some local communities regardless of ethnic structure. “What we have gained in the last fourteen years—the right to use national symbols, to use our mother tongue in public life, collective rights such as the autonomous right of the minority representation in parliament and other state institutions, bilingual signs, the right to collect local taxes, the subordination of the police to local authorities—all of these things are elements of autonomy,” stated one participant. He added that with European integration the authorities of states with Hungarian minorities will transfer some competencies to supranational institutions. This will result in even greater power for local communities in relation to national authorities, he said.

Some participants emphasized that, in their view, autonomy means the right of local communities to take decisions on their specific problems, and to express their points of view on matters of both general and local interest. It was observed that, using this understanding of autonomy, local administrative autonomy is a desideratum for all citizens, whatever

their ethnicity. Thus, general administrative decentralization and the implementation of the principle of “subsidiarity” would be a way to satisfy the aspirations for autonomy of Hungarian minorities as well. It follows from this argument that administrative autonomy does not have an intrinsically ethnic aspect, and that any progress toward administrative

Local administrative autonomy is a desideratum for all citizens, whatever their ethnicity.

autonomy to the benefit of minorities contributes to the general progress toward decentralization for the country as a whole. Therefore, community members should fight for such national progress, rather than for peripheral autonomy in states with over-centralized and highly bureaucratic administrations. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the reticence of some of Hungary’s neighbors to grant more administrative autonomy to Hungarian minorities may not be a matter of ethnicity so much as a different conception of governance.

Arguments linking culture and geography (territory) do not take into account the fact that culture belongs to a homogenous group of people, while the same territory often belongs to several cultural groups that have equally legitimate rights to it. For this reason it is important to separate cultural from territorial rights. The former should be administrated on an ethnic, the latter on a civic, basis.

Ethnic Autonomy and Ethnic Segregation. Some participants argued that interethnic tension could be eliminated if the states of residence would agree to grant autonomy to their Hungarian minorities. They explained that once ethnic Hungarians were granted self-governance, they would have no other significant disputes with the ethnic majority. Other participants stated that, on the contrary, autonomy can create tensions when it leads to ethnic segregation, because segregation can isolate and alienate the autonomous minority from the society of their country of residence. These participants noted that the development of common projects based on cooperation between the majority and the minority better engender mutual respect and trust than do segregation and isolation. The lack of communication inherent in segregation, they predicted, would be a constant source of misunderstanding and potential conflict.

Some minority communities’ preference for segregation even where interethnic integration is at an advanced stage is paradoxical and goes

against the current transborder integrationist trends. As European integration opens borders and leads to greater acceptance among majority populations that state identity should be based on civic rather than ethnic dimensions, minorities sometimes try to preserve their distinctiveness by seeking ethnically based administrative governance, and demanding territorial divisions along ethnic lines.

The solution to this problem would seem to be greater democracy, the modernization of mentalities, the reduction of corruption, and the increase of overall economic and social cohesion in each state.

Interethnic Relations Within Autonomous Regions. A sensitive theme was that of Hungarians’ seeming indifference to other ethnic communities that would live inside autonomous regions. Clearly, inhabitants of ethnically defined autonomous regions would include many who are not Hungarian. Those who are in the ethnic majority nationally would become a minority in such an ethnically autonomous territory. Some participants noted that Hungarian politicians, as well as Hungarian ideologues living in the countries that neighbor Hungary, lack any coherent plan to protect the minorities with whom they would supposedly cohabitate. Such complacency significantly reduces the appeal of ethnic autonomy, as other ethnic communities feel abandoned and even threatened by the prospect.

Some participants, however, noted that the problem of ethnic majorities living in territories dominated by minorities has been addressed in international documents. According to these documents, in cases where granting regional autonomy results in an ethnic minority becoming the majority, this new majority may not limit the rights of the other cohabitating minorities. Thus, autonomous territories should not be considered outside the state context, for they may not be allowed to disregard or attempt to replace the laws of the state in which they are situated. At the same time, granting autonomy does not allow the state to dispense with its obligation to protect all minorities living on its territory. Autonomy, then, does not in itself fundamentally restructure the legal framework.

Participants then considered how non-Hungarian communities would react if Hungarian autonomy were accepted. There was a consensus that territorial autonomy should not be granted to a minority unless it can demonstrate that it can behave as democratic majorities are supposed to, respecting the rights of all ethnic minorities. The Hungarians seeking

territorial autonomy have a double obligation: the moral and psychological obligation to reassure the ethnic minorities with which they would cohabitate; and the political obligation to prove that they know how to respect modern standards regarding the status of other minorities.

Some participants pointed out that granting territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds could set off a chain reaction that would lead other minority communities within the newly autonomous regions to seek similar arrangements for themselves. This would lead to an endless process of territorial re-division and carry with it great potential for conflict. One participant considered such a chain reaction, saying: "If Kosovo becomes independent, the Serbs from Kosovska Mitrovica will demand autonomy for the north of the region, where they live. In this case the Serbs from the Republika Srpska (in Bosnia and Herzegovina) will demand self-determination and will probably seek to incorporate their lands into Serbia. Then the Bosnian Croats will demand autonomy in the framework of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and will probably attempt to join Croatia. A domino effect will be generated that cannot be stopped." Another participant suggested that if territorial autonomy were granted in Romania's Harghita County, where 85% of the population is Hungarian, the Romanian 15% would demand autonomy based on the same arguments. Such examples show that establishing ethnically based territorial autonomy impacts not just the state in question, but also regional security and stability.

Administrative Autonomy, Territorial Division, Economic Viability.

If ethnic homogeneity is the goal, then of course territorial boundaries should be arranged so as to concentrate the minority population. From an administrative point of view, however, the autonomous territory should be economically viable. But these criteria are rarely compatible. Typically, the greater the administrative viability, the less the ethnic homogeneity.

Several participants noted, however, that civic autonomy can be an indirect route to ethnic autonomy. In EU countries, ethnically based territorial autonomy and special territorial status for national minorities are not explicitly mentioned. Autonomy in these countries is only civic, not ethnic. Catalonia, in Spain, or the regions inhabited by Swedes in Finland, have only *de facto* ethnic autonomy. *De jure*, they have the same kind of autonomy as the other regions in these countries, which have local parliaments and budgets. But they also have more or less ethnically

homogenous populations. So it may be that the solution for the Hungarian minorities is administrative-territorial division in the framework of an overall national decentralization process. To this end, the borders of the newly created administrative-territorial units should be delineated taking historical considerations into account.

Whatever form internal territorial sub-division takes, there are two overriding needs: good governance and EU integration. Moreover, any arrangement must be acceptable to the society as a whole. Finally, traditionally defined regions do not always coincide with modern needs for efficiency and economic performance, so we have to ask which is more important, identity or material well being.

Some participants warned that this issue is connected less with history than with present ethnic realities. Certainly, historical considerations have a role to play in territorial delimitation, but these criteria should not take precedence over the present-day demographic situation. Further, "historical regions" do not always coincide with "ethnic regions." Under such conditions, since historical criteria cannot solve the problem of ethnic autonomy, the vital question becomes: Who establishes the regions' borders? As one participant asked, "Who is the cartographer?" He then provided his own answer: "The governments of the respective states will draw the borders, so that Hungarians will not be a majority anywhere. It would be good if minorities were given a word to say!" The process of delimitation itself, then, emerged as another potential source of conflict that could poison interethnic relations.

Autonomy, Subsidiarity and the Distribution of Power. The discussions revealed that, while some forms of autonomy can be good solutions, autonomy is not a panacea and cannot defuse social tensions if it does not take into account present-day realities. It is of central importance that the population as a whole not only accepts the principle of territorial autonomy, but also agrees that autonomy is appropriate to today's conditions. Therefore, examples of autonomy elsewhere are useful as points of reference but not as models to be imported. Autonomy is a product of the inner-workings of state and society; it is determined by the internal dynamics of society. Any autonomy imposed from the outside that ignores these dynamics is dangerous and can lead to new conflicts.

One of the key topics of discussion was how and with what precision competencies should be divided among the various levels of government

when an autonomous territory is part of the equation. Some participants believed that a clear definition of competencies would promote better cooperation among the several levels of government, as well as greater overall unity at the state level. They argued that well-defined competence and authority would reduce the problem of overlapping and competing policies, and would thus lead to less conflicted relations. Other participants rejected this argument, asserting that a vertical division of power between state and local communities can lead to divergent objectives, different agendas, a contest of priorities, and eventual conflicts over power. They further noted that such negative consequences of delimitation would be worse to the extent that the ethnic factor is allowed to intrude. In sum, participants found that strictly delimited powers have the potential both to increase cooperation and to generate clashes.

Given this difficulty, policymakers might be well advised to turn to the concept of “subsidiarity,” which involves the limitation of state competences. More precisely, subsidiarity means placing decision-making authority at the level where there is the best access to information; where the decisions will be carried out; where attention to the issue at hand is greatest; and where the decisions have the most direct consequences. It is important to design adequate legal and functional mechanisms for concretely establishing and aggregating these levels.

Subsidiarity involves a special kind of relation between the state and the local communities, as well as among those at the sub-state level. Such relations do not necessarily have an ethnic dimension. Furthermore, subsidiarity may be extended either to specified territories or set forward as a guiding principle of the national government. In this regard, subsidiarity can allow for cultural autonomy without the inconveniences of territorial delimitations. In so doing, it gives concentrated ethnic minorities a greater voice in their governance without redefining ethnic relations at the state level, and without provoking the ethnic tension that ethnic autonomy might cause. In actuality, both minorities and majorities can benefit from subsidiarity. Each would enjoy the same rights and protections, and by bringing ethnic politics closer to the local level, this might reduce overall tensions.

The greatest challenge posed by territorial delimitation concerns the control over local resources. This problem also exists under a system of subsidiarity, though several participants asserted that it would be less

serious. In any event, one participant’s assessment, which found widespread agreement, was that “to talk about autonomy means to make politics, and in the end it is really all about who gets and holds power. The more frankly we acknowledge this, the closer we will come to finding solutions.”

In the end, it can be argued that ethnic autonomy is not a right of minorities and is not the subject of any acknowledged standards. Rather, autonomy requires negotiation among a number of actors—minorities and the majorities, central power and local communities. History and demographics do not provide answers but are only two among many considerations. Moreover, because, by definition, the minority is weaker than the majority, successful negotiation requires a high degree of responsibility, a willingness to compromise, realism and positive attitudes, mutual trust and respect, political cooperation and cultural compatibility. For this reason, intervention by the “mother country” or by the international community in such negotiations is not helpful. As a matter of principle, the issue of autonomy lies outside the sphere of minority rights and is the exclusive internal prerogative of the state concerned. And, from a psychological point of view, such intervention raises unrealistic hopes among minorities and counter-productive fears within the majority.

NEW DISPUTES: HUNGARIANS AND HUNGARIANS?

By and large Hungarian minorities living in Hungary’s neighboring states have adopted successful strategies for promoting their interests, protecting their rights and improving their status. At the same time, both Hungarian minorities and the surrounding ethnic majorities have learned to talk to each other and to cooperate. Given this reality, a question arises: notwithstanding the familiar disputes (many of which have been neutralized as a result of the agreements and arrangements of the last decade and a half) can one foresee future conflicts of a new kind that will require new approaches and solutions? The answer to this question would appear to be affirmative: ironically, the future now holds the possibility of intra-community disputes among the Hungarians themselves.

The extensive discussions in Sinaia confirmed that, in general, Hungarian minorities have received most of the rights they hoped for, when measured by current European and international standards. In some cases, for

example Romania, the situation is very good, in others, for example Ukraine, it is less so, but two facts are fundamental: 1) The principles and standards of Hungarian minority rights are nowhere contested or disputed, and 2) problems with the implementation of these standards and the distribution of power are being addressed through dialogue and not violent confrontation.

The future now holds the possibility of intra-community disputes among the Hungarians themselves.

Though demands for autonomy are under consideration they are not based on the idea of minority rights, but rather on the idea of a social contract between minorities and the majority. Even if such contracts are still far from realization, in practice there have been promising advances toward subsidiarity and at least some elements of cultural/ethnic autonomy.

The successful resolution of major interethnic problems has, however, led to increasing intra-communal Hungarian disputes, as well as disputes inside the larger Hungarian “cultural nation.” Three remarks made by Hungarian participants in the meeting illustrate the seriousness of the accusations that Hungarians now sometimes bring against one another. One participant claimed that in Ukraine “minority self-governance does not really serve the Hungarians,” and suggested that it actually serves the interests of the majority. As he explained, “despite the fact that it is led by Hungarians, self-government does not involve itself in solving their problems.” Another participant complained that the three Hungarian organizations in Serbia do not cooperate, and that one even worked with the governing coalition to exclude the other two from the political process. Several representatives of the Hungarian minorities in Romania severely criticized the intervention of Hungarian parties (particularly FIDESZ) in both their internal affairs and in their interethnic debates with the Romanian majority on the subject of electoral laws. They suggested that Hungarian behavior in this respect has been motivated more by political interests relating to the internal balance of forces in Hungary than by a genuine concern for the fate of the Hungarian minorities. (The significance of these examples is evident from the fact that FIDESZ did not send representatives to the Sinaia meeting, and that several other Hungarian ethnic parties tried to persuade the organizers not to invite members of Hungarian political groups which they considered radical or dissident.)

Some participants observed that there is a positive aspect to such disputes inside Hungarian communities: they allow their moderate political leaders to openly fight against nationalist extremism from within the ethnic majority and isolate the minority’s extremists, publicly criticizing their ideas and refusing to collaborate with them. It helps, they said, to isolate their own extremists, for it makes them more credible when they pressure the ethnic majority to renounce nationalism and populism.

The main sources of division within the Hungarian community are, according to some participants:

- The needs of some leaders of Hungarian minorities to prove their legitimacy even after the original aims of the Hungarian communities have been more or less attained. Such leaders have adopted irrational and radical rhetoric that separates them from the mainstream of their communities, which fears that this radicalism will jeopardize what they have achieved.
- The emergence of socio-economic cleavages inside the Hungarian minority, for the reasons mentioned above. The new economic elite is regarded with hostility by both the poorer classes and the traditional cultural elites of the Hungarian minorities. This internal debate is then partly projected onto disagreements concerning relations with the ethnic majority.
- The temptation of some political forces in the “mother country” to use Hungarian minorities to advance Hungary’s foreign policy objectives. Hungarian minority leaders and groups who resist being used in this way, fearing that their achievements will be put in danger, have come into conflict with these forces in Hungary. In response, competing political interests within Hungary seek allies among the Hungarian minorities who will support them in their internal conflicts. (This explains why some FIDESZ leaders were involved in local elections in Romania, campaigning against UDMR’s official candidates and in favor of certain Hungarian “independent” candidates.)
- The intensifying nationalist discourse in the ongoing confrontations between right- and left-wing parties in Hungary inevitably involves the minorities from Hungary’s neighboring

countries and divides them politically. This disunity of the minorities, in its turn, can result in conflicts with the ethnic majority.

One participant noted that “if, in the 1990s, conflicts between the ethnic majority and the Hungarian minority in a given country caused conflicts between that country and Hungary, nowadays political conflicts within Hungary generate internal conflicts inside the minorities from the neighboring countries. These conflicts inevitably lead to disputes involving the respective minorities and the ethnic majorities from their countries of residence.” Political conflicts in Hungary as well as those within the Hungarian minority communities influence the political situation in the countries of residence. At the same time, political struggles in the countries of residence influence interethnic relations as well as relations between the mother country and the country of residence. The first phenomenon is increasingly common, while the second is receding.

It can be argued, however, that external actors (from within and outside the mother country) have no right to be involved in the dialogue between minority communities abroad and the majorities in their respective countries. Such outside actors should play the role of mediators only if accepted by all parties, to ensure that, despite the existing asymmetries, the interests of each side are fairly represented.

Responding to these remarks, one participant stated: “We have been focusing our discussion on minorities, mostly on the Hungarian minorities from Hungary’s neighboring countries. However the fundamental problem is not the minority, but rather the relations between minority and majority. By being preoccupied with the situation of minorities we risk ignoring the fact that minorities must live together with majorities in very complex systems. The problems of minorities will not be solved by listing the rights they should have or wish for, but by establishing proper relations between majorities and minorities, in order to guarantee minorities’ rights.” It is extremely dangerous for outside actors to intervene in these relations, assuming the role of direct participants with interests in the outcome of negotiations.

In sum, this discussion suggests that a new era of interethnic tension could be produced by the emergence of Hungarian-Hungarian disputes. Containing the impact of these disputes on majority-minority interethnic relations in Hungary’s neighboring countries will represent a new challenge in the coming years. Interethnic dialogue involving Hungarian

minorities and the majorities in their countries of residence should once again play a central role in promoting peace and interethnic cohabitation. The international community should only provide a framework, and guarantees to ensure that power asymmetries will not negatively affect the interethnic dialogue.

A EUROPE OF MINORITIES

A new era of interethnic problems will be influenced by the circumstance that, while patterns of minority-majority relations were shaped in an environment dominated by the logic of the nation-state, the future united Europe (which will include Hungary and its neighbors), will be a Europe of minorities. These minorities will not have a majority as a counterpart with which to negotiate questions of power and the improvement of their status. Thus, today’s solutions may no longer be applicable.

Unfortunately, Europe (and the international community as a whole) is not aware of this evolutionary change. At the insistence of Hungary and Romania, a paragraph on minority rights was added to the draft of the European Constitution. The paragraph describes the issue using the old terms, according to which the nation-state is an ethnic state. This equivalence, though valid in the nineteenth century and through most of the twentieth, is no longer appropriate. The previously ethnic states that were created upon the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, have become, or will soon become, civic multicultural states.

Reacting to these observations, several participants argued that the EU should be directly involved in defining the standards for this new historical stage, as well as in creating new mechanisms for interethnic negotiations and for guaranteeing minorities’ rights. The EU should take upon itself the responsibility in this regard, leaving to “mother countries” matters concerning cultural solidarity only, and should develop a new approach for interethnic relations, they said.

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