

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

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

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R e p o r t

FEB. 11-12, 2000



POIANA BRASOV, ROMANIA

ROMANIA

THE YEAR 2000 ELECTIONS
IN ROMANIA: INTERETHNIC
RELATIONS AND EUROPEAN
INTEGRATION

PROJECT ON
ETHNIC
RELATIONS

PER

Bucuresti (Bucharest)

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PREFACE

Despite the difficulties that have beset Romania in its transition from communism to democracy, it boasts a most important success in interethnic relations. Few would have predicted, after the disastrous violence between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Tîrgu Mureş in 1990, that only six years later the ethnic Hungarian party would be a respected member of Romania's governing coalition.

The Project on Ethnic Relations was an active participant in bringing about this result, initiating the first discussions and negotiations between leaders of the preceding government and the Hungarian minority, and replacing confrontation with a pattern of dialogue that persists to this day. The achievement, however, is uncontested by time. With the year 2000 elections underway in Romania, ethnic issues are already being raised in the campaign.

The Project on Ethnic Relations convened the leaders of the principal parliamentary parties to discuss the problem of campaign rhetoric during this sensitive period. The meeting, which took place in Poiana Braşov on February 12-13, took up the question of how to protect the considerable progress that Romania has made in managing its interethnic affairs against the temptation to garner votes by appealing to ethnic grievances and differences. Because the ethnic Hungarian party, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (abbreviated as UDMR in Romanian), is a member of the present governing coalition, there is a question of whether the opposition, eager to return to power, might target the Hungarians because of their participation in the present government.

Leaders of the two mainstream opposition parties—the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PSDR) and the Alliance for Romania (ApR)—joined with all the parties of the governing coalition not only in coming to the meeting but in contributing to a sober and reasoned discussion about the ethnic issue. All of the participants were keenly aware of the



Gyorgy Frunda, Bela Marko



Adrian Nastase



Valeriu Stoica, Zoe Petre

value to Romania of keeping a good interethnic report card as it seeks membership in the European Union and NATO. The conferees concluded by signing an agreement, publicized in the press, to avoid exploitation of ethnic issues during the campaign.

It may be too much to expect full conformity with the pledge of moderation. Intense political competition often brings out the worst rather than the best in interethnic relations. But the acknowledgment by all of the mainstream parties of the need for restraint is itself a positive sign. We do not know whether the Hungarians will be part of a future governing coalition, but if flexible political participation by minorities is the key to managing interethnic tensions, then the appearance of the Hungarians in a successor government would be another important accomplishment for Romania and for the region. The discussion that is reported here provides a fascinating insight into the evolution of political behavior and interethnic relations in today's Romania.

This report was prepared by Dr. Dan Pavel of PER's Bucharest office and was edited by the PER staff. The participants in the meeting did not have an opportunity to review the text, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

*Allen H. Kassof, President
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June 2000*

INTRODUCTION

The conduct of Romanian elections in the year 2000 will greatly affect relations between Romanians and the Hungarian ethnic minority of that country. Hungarians make up approximately seven percent of the population. The ethnic Hungarian political party UDMR (in English, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) entered the present government as a coalition partner following the 1996 elections—a historic first. But this has made the party, and the Hungarians, tempting targets in an election year. Whether Romania is able to preserve its considerable achievements in promoting interethnic accord or whether the elections will produce new acrimony will affect not only the prospects for domestic tranquility but can also tip the scales in the integration process of Romania into NATO and the European Union (EU).

The Project on Ethnic Relations organized a meeting in Poiana Brasov, Romania on February 12-13 that brought together political leaders from the main ruling parties as well as the opposition, to discuss how they might approach the interethnic issue in the upcoming elections. Given the high national and international political stakes involved, some of the most important political leaders from Romania attended.

A short history of previous elections will provide the necessary context. In 1990, after the collapse of Communism, the first free elections took place in Romania.¹ Ethnic Hungarian political and civic organizations were voted into the first parliament in Bucharest. One was the UDMR, which is the only party—Romanian or Hungarian—that has been in every Romanian parliament since 1990 in its own right and under the same name and identity rather than under an electoral umbrella with other parties.

The first parliament was a Constitutional Assembly. From the very beginning, the ethnic Hungarians contested the constitution. Specifically, they objected to the first article of the 1991 constitution which defined the state as a national (that is, Romanian) state.

In the 1992 and 1996 elections, extremists and populist Romanian political leaders attacked the UDMR for being anti-national and a danger to the national sovereignty and unity. Calls by the Hungarian community to preserve its cultural identity were declared to be a threat or an international plot to undermine the national state. As historians know, this is the rhetoric that nationalists frequently employ in times of economic woe.

In November 1996, the then opposition parties won the election in Romania, and the UDMR became a part of the ruling coalition.² To their new political partners, the Hungarians reiterated their requests for bilingual education at all levels; the use of the mother tongue in public administration and the justice system; bilingual signs; and autonomy in local administration. But plans to implement such provisions were often caught up in political disputes and wrangling. The Hungarians consider that some of their key requests remain unfilled despite earlier promises by their partners. Nevertheless, despite numerous delays and postponements, many requests indeed became law, and several new institutions were established.

The entry of the UDMR into the post-1996 ruling coalition provoked a heated debate within the ethnic Hungarian community. Still, one should recognize that such a step was a logical consequence of the historical decision taken by several Hungarian leaders in December 1989. At that time, those leaders chose to participate in the Romanian political process and to become a part of the national political body. “Radical” Hungarian leaders disagreed with both objectives and created great resentment among Romanians when they sought to enlist pressure from the outside by raising the problems of the ethnic Hungarian minority in Strasbourg or Brussels rather than in the Romanian parliament.

Not only was Romania the first country in the region to have an ethnic minority party in the ruling coalition, it had also gone further than any other country in enacting these types of measures. The international community welcomed such developments. In 1999, at the Helsinki EU summit, Romania received approval to start negotiations for integration into the European Union.

Such achievements, however, are recent and are untested by time. Many believe that the populist, anti-Hungarian rhetoric of some of the current opposition parties and the prospect that they may return to power could challenge the consolidation of democracy and European integration.

The meeting in Poiana Brasov provided the framework for an open discussion and debate about these issues.

THE UDMR: IN POWER AND IN OPPOSITION

A leader of the UDMR began the discussion with an evaluation of the situation before and after the 1996 elections. He emphasized that after a decade of political activity, it was crucial for ethnic Hungarians to convince the Romanians that they were reliable partners. The decision of the Romanian elite at the time of the 1996 elections to accept the Hungarians’ offer of cooperation meant that the potential for a serious, perhaps violent, conflict had been successfully transformed into an ordinary political competition.

While the UDMR was still in the opposition before 1996, he said, political partnership was not even a consideration. This was because the then-ruling party, the PDSR, was closely affiliated with two radical nationalist parties, the PRM and the PUNR. At that time, he said, official policy was to act against the interests of the Hungarian minority and promote hate-speech.³ The only positive achievement during this period—thanks to the good offices of the Project on Ethnic Relations—was to put moderates from the PDSR and the UDMR at the same table.⁴ One important outcome of these PER meetings was the founding of the Council of National Minorities.

The passage of government measures and parliamentary legislation in favor of the ethnic Hungarian minority finally became possible with the arrival of the post-1996 governmental and parliamentary coalition. However, the speaker continued, if the next election replaces the parties now in power with those in the opposition, the fear is that ethnic Hungarians and other minorities may lose much of what they gained between 1996 and 2000. Some PDSR leaders have threatened that, once they regain power, they intend to overrule all the legislation that has been passed by the coalition now in power or decreed by the current government.

During its almost four-years of participation in the present coalition, the speaker continued, the UDMR has helped to create a framework for

The entrance of the UDMR into the coalition of democratic forces depended on the commitment of the Romanian partners.

resolving the problems of the minorities in Romania. There have been three areas of significance. First, the Department for the Protection of National Minorities (DPMN) was introduced in the executive branch to address minority issues. The coordinator of this department is a UDMR politician and a member of the cabinet. Another UDMR representative, also a member of the cabinet, serves as minister of health. In addition, the UDMR has state secretaries at the Ministries of Education, Culture, Agriculture, and Public Works and Land Planning; advisers to the prime minister; and directors at the Ministries of Religious Cults, Industry, etc. However, no ethnic Hungarians serve in key positions in the army, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or in the intelligence agencies. According to the participant, this reflects the lack of trust that still pervades interethnic relations in Romania.

The second area of significance is represented by changes within the legislative framework. Following an intense struggle, an important new education law was passed. But other crucial steps have yet to be taken. These include the restitution of church properties and laws regarding local administration and the use of the mother tongue. And in this electoral year, it is important for the Hungarian population to promote other new laws.

The third area, the participant concluded, concerns changes in people's attitudes. In years past, some political observers looked pessimistically on the participation of the UDMR in the coalition; they even foresaw a civil war in Transylvania. The political reality has shown these predictions to be false. In fact, the Romanian majority now perceives the political participation of ethnic Hungarians to be the normal state of affairs. Nevertheless, central authorities have yet to take proper measures against the anti-Hungarian policies supported by certain social groups and promoted by several national and local level politicians—such as Gheorghe Funar, the mayor of Cluj.

In response, a representative of the PNTCD said that one should first count the accomplishments of the Romanian-Hungarian political partnership, and only then the failures. Indeed, many of the accomplishments of the UDMR have meant losses for their Romanian partners. Romanian parties have lost many percentage points in public opinion polls because of their partnership with their Hungarian colleagues. Consequently, any reproach by the UDMR leadership should be carefully measured and balanced against the costs paid by Romanian democra-

tic leaders. He continued that in such a partnership—which is a novelty in Romanian politics—we should make an appeal for mutual understanding. This is the current mentality of the country: whoever is pushing too much and too fast will end up a loser. Moderation, rationality, and caution require taking into consideration certain collective mentalities, even when they are not so modern or pro-European.

COALITION POLITICS AND THE STATUS OF MINORITIES

A Romanian participant insisted that the entrance of the UDMR into the coalition of democratic forces depended on the commitment of the Romanian partners. Indeed, during that time some observers and politicians warned that a civil war would ensue if such a coalition were formed. Although a war did not result, the UDMR faced difficulties. He acknowledged that the coalition often failed to assume its responsibilities toward the UDMR—using the excuse that the national sentiments of the coalition partners' supporters intimidated the coalition. In effect, some members of the coalition felt that this lack of cooperation had compromised numerous legislative initiatives. For example, whenever it came time for a vote in the parliamentary committees or in parliament, the members of senatorial or parliamentary groups often disregarded decisions taken at the highest levels of the coalition and their own parties.

THE UDMR AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE OPPPOSITION

A senior political leader of the PDSR noted that the Poiana Brasov gathering marks the first time that the leadership of the PDSR and the UDMR had met since the November 1996 elections. At that time, he noted, the PDSR lost, and the UDMR entered into the ruling coalition. Actually, the Poiana Brasov meeting is the first face-to-face encounter between the PDSR and the UDMR since a 1995 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. (The meeting in Atlanta was also organized by PER.) According to this participant, if one reflects on the series of PER meetings between moderates from both the Romanian and Hungarian sides, one realizes the error in considering November 1996 as the starting point of democracy in Romania—it was much earlier, and took place under the PDSR. It would also be a political mistake to demonize the PDSR—

especially considering that it negotiated and signed the Romanian-Hungarian Treaty of September 1996. In fact, current popular support for the PDSR runs between 40 and 45 percent.

For the PDSR, the participant continued, any debate on the next elections needs to be realistic. To involve the international community in an attack against the main opposition party in Romania—one that, in all probability, will be the next ruling political force—shows a lack of political imagination. When one considers the next electoral campaign from the point of view of the PDSR, there are at least two delicate problems that deserve attention. If the PDSR plans to criticize the current coalition for its incomplete political and economic reforms, why should such a political critique be considered chauvinistic, that is, as an attack against ethnic Hungarians? As a leader of the PDSR has said, we consider the UDMR to be a political party that has contributed to the current disaster of Romania; we don't view it as an ethnic party. At the same time it would not be accurate to accuse the PDSR as a constant troublemaker for the ethnic Hungarians. The same participant went on to say that the passage of the Education Law, which was debated in parliament, had been possible only with the vote of the PDSR. At a crucial moment, we were able to negotiate in a constructive way, and we helped pass an important law for the Hungarian minority.

A second example is related to the law on local administration, continued the participant. The PDSR voted for it in the Senate, but the law is presently blocked in the House of Deputies. The leadership of the PDSR is convinced that the current coalition does not have the political courage to pass that law, and that they are waiting for the PDSR to take responsibility for it. If they do not have the courage to vote for such an important law, we will have to.

A prominent leader of the ApR considered that four major risks arise from the participation of the UDMR in the present government:⁵

- 1) For some political parties, nationalist propaganda is an attractive means to regain political ground. A Hungarian party in power can be a pretext to provoke tensions between the majority and the minorities. But we could fight such a threat if we agree to a one-year moratorium on nationalistic propaganda, the participant suggested.
- 2) The attitude of the UDMR in the pre- and post-election contexts could be a source of problems in the future. Politically, the ethnic Hungarian organization defines itself as a loyal partner of CDR.⁶

This alignment distinguishes the UDMR from any other party in Romania. Therefore, if there is a power shift after the next election, it will be difficult for a political organization of Hungarians to represent the interests of ethnic Hungarians properly—assuming that we accept the idea that being in power is the best position, the participant added. Given this changed climate, it would be wise for the ethnic Hungarian leaders to approach the opposition forces. If the UDMR were to be left outside future political arrangements, we can expect problems in the period 2000-2004.

- 3) There is a serious chance for growing dissent within the UDMR regarding participation in the government in power. Issues such as dual citizenship (Romanian and Hungarian) or ethnic autonomy could lead to confrontations with the majority.
- 4) A growing gap may occur between Romania and Hungary in the processes of NATO and European Union integration. Public declarations in support of special status for ethnic Hungarians in Romania could turn Romanian public opinion against Hungarians. Some politicians from Hungary have also talked of providing dual citizenship and passports for ethnic Hungarians in Romania. These actions would open up the Schengen space for ethnic Hungarians while excluding other Romanian citizens.

Another ApR leader expressed serious doubts about the effects of the UDMR entering into an interethnic dialogue with the largest opposition party (PDSR). If such a dialogue were to take place, the interaction between the PDSR and the PUNR could radicalize the PDSR.⁷ This radicalization—from a nationalist point of view—would be similar to the situation during the 1996 election campaign. At that time, Iliescu, then president of Romania, denounced the “Hungarian threat.” When the PDSR wants to replace the PUNR with “Vatra Romaneasca” something is wrong, the participant said, adding that perhaps the PDSR does not appreciate how ambivalent is its position and should be warned by others.

EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND NATIONAL REALITIES

A PDSR leader mentioned the existence of double standards in national and international politics. International standards are clear and accept-

able for Romania, but the UDMR is trying to impose other, more stringent standards. Even though Hungary has not made substantial efforts to accommodate minority demands within Hungary, Hungarian diplomats are constantly pushing the Council of Europe to accept higher standards for Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries.

The participant went on to say that the problems with the UDMR have to do with the ambiguous status of the organization. It is never clear whether we are dealing with a civic association representing the Hungarian minority or with a political party, he remarked. As with any other group in Romania, ethnic Hungarians should be politically represented both in power and in the opposition, but they are currently represented only in power. This will backfire: the UDMR is as responsible as the other ruling coalition parties for the decay of living standards and lack of reforms.

The same opposition leader insisted that we should worry not only about the election campaign in Romania, but also the election campaign in Hungary. He illustrated this by quoting an aggressive anti-Romanian and revisionist article from a Hungarian newspaper. At this point, a UDMR senator interjected that one should be careful about the type of articles he or she quotes, since, for example, this Hungarian publication is, in fact, similar to the Romanian nationalist weekly magazine, *Greater Romania*. He went on to say that it would be a mistake to quote extremist and racist publications in a meeting of rational politicians. Accordingly, the UDMR leaders had refrained from mentioning in this debate the positions of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of the extremist Greater Romania Party.

Several participants offered conflicting views about the influence of government politics on the situation of minorities in the neighboring countries. A U.S. participant said that it is necessary to separate the relationship between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Romania from the relationship between Romania and Hungary. Another participant said that ethnic Hungarians in Romania want to decide their own fate and rights, regardless of who is in power in Budapest. One of his colleagues stressed the same argument; he insisted that the fate of ethnic Hungarians in Romania should be decided in Bucharest, not in Budapest.

Another participant from PDSR characterized the nature of Romanian politics as a zero-sum game. In his opinion, the philosophy of the

UDMR can be represented by the saying, "What is mine is mine; what is yours is negotiable." Nevertheless, globalization and European integration are going in opposite directions: the world is not heading toward separatism, but rather toward diluting identities.

Another participant noted that the discussion had shifted from the status of the UDMR to the status of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. When the problem of standards is discussed, it is important to keep in mind just how different European and international standards are from national realities. Such examples are Kosovo and Chechnya, Finland and Belgium, Corsica (France), and Gagauzia or Transdnistria (in Moldova), and so on.

A prominent politician from the opposition reminded everyone about another model for resolving minority issues—the Yugoslav model. Until 1990, it was wonderful; now it is broken into pieces, he said. For that reason, he warned, that we should be careful about calling Romania a model for interethnic relations, as U.S. President Clinton did. He emphasized that those who disregard European standards should think twice.

MEANINGS OF ANTI-HUNGARIANISM

A prominent UDMR politician raised what he characterized as some delicate issues concerning former and current Romanian-Hungarian tensions. In his opinion, the events of March 1990 in Tîrgu Mureș were not an anti-Hungarian or anti-Romanian explosion of hatred, but a "Securitate" diversion.⁸ Gheorghe Funar, the nationalist mayor of Cluj, is still in office and will probably be re-elected, thus indicating that the phenomenon of "Funarism" is a consequence of the policy flaws of the current coalition. The participant elaborated, stating that the mayor of Cluj had committed a series of serious crimes, but the judicial system never touched him. Funar's popularity is one possible explanation, but the corruption surrounding him is another. When judges serve the interests of the national-Communist clientele, the participant said, it is no wonder that they never put a promoter of anti-Hungarian and racist hate-speech on trial. Someone had even called for a common candidate of the democratic political forces (Romanian and Hungarian) to stand against the nationalist mayor of Cluj. But it would be almost impossible to convince local branches of the parties to give up their own electoral ambitions in favor of a more general political interest.

One of the ethnic Romanian participants claimed that nationalist rhetoric was the problem of the entire Romanian political class. The public is fond of such rhetoric, he said, but despite such popularity, nationalism should be addressed in a rational way. Anti-Hungarianism is, in most instances, a populist tactic.

The participant asked for how long and to what extent will the Romanian political class rely on nationalist feelings? When will it have the courage to renounce them? These are open-ended questions, he declared. There is a kind of timidity when it comes to relationships with the ethnic Hungarian minority, and only a rational approach will work to resolve such fears. For example, immediately after the November 1996 elections, there was serious resistance by Romanian politicians to the idea of having an ethnic Hungarian as minister of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities (DPMN). They even suggested a six-month postponement for the creation of that department. But UDMR leaders insisted that there would be no public objections, and DPMN was founded. After more than three years, the DPMN works without problems or tensions. There is no need for similar postponements when you see that normality is a state of fact in Romania, he summarized.

Hungarian and Romanian politicians at the meeting agreed that the media often play a dangerous nationalist game. By sensationalizing issues, or giving in to obscure group interests, they not only lower journalistic standards but infringe upon human rights. As one participant noted, every time there is a minor local incident, the media exaggerate and help to create an anti-Hungarian psychosis.

POLITICAL EXTREMISTS AND MODERATES

There is no political party in Romania without extremists, stressed one ethnic Hungarian participant. Regardless of their official line or political strategy, you can hear those radicals in the halls of the parliament. They threaten you in a low voice, and they vote in commissions or the parliamentary sessions against the decisions of the leaders of the coalition or of their own parties, he claimed.

One of the discussants noted that "Uncle Janos" and "Uncle Ion" do not have problems at the local level, but its rather when politicians stir things up that problems appear.

Another problem is the aggressive and abusive behavior of the majority, the participant added. For that reason, we should define exactly what is in the national interest. According to this participant, the national interest lies in NATO and EU integration. Implicitly, this integration means prosperity. Being active in national politics in Romania today means working toward this integration. Whoever is against integration—whatever is promoting another political agenda—is against the national interest. In our days, the national interest is tied to European and trans-Atlantic openness, he said, not nationalist extremism.

In response, another participant said that the partnership between ethnic Hungarians and Romanians started immediately after 1918, when the historical leader of the National Party, Iuliu Maniu—who, before World War I, was a member of the Parliament in Budapest for years—proposed a set of democratic principles for interethnic relations. This pattern of moderation defined the relationship between the PNTCD and the UDMR in the ruling coalition. All political parties in Romania that consider themselves democratic and pro-European should follow such a lead.

MAJORITIES AS MINORITIES

Some Romanian politicians, both from the ruling coalition and the opposition, raised the problem of the two *judete* (counties) that have a predominantly ethnic Hungarian population, and where Romanians are in minority. In Harghita and Covasna counties, Romanians complain that they are treated badly, even persecuted, the participants noted. Local and central authorities do not take the needs of Romanians into consideration. Romanians expect the same treatment that ethnic Hungarian minorities receive in the rest of the country. At national meetings of major opposition parties, Romanian representatives from Harghita and Covasna voice complaints about their problems. UDMR politicians replied that such complaints should be monitored and assessed in the field. They stressed that it is the responsibility of politicians from both the UDMR and the Romanian parties to witness the reality of the situation and to follow up with appropriate measures to resolve the situation. Several times during the debate, participants stressed the difference

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between a civic-political nation and an ethnic nation. Extreme nationalism at local and regional levels is a major impediment to the creation of a civic society. If the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania is truly interested in a democratic partnership with the Romanian community, such a partnership must work at local levels, too, especially in the regions where ethnic Hungarians are in the majority, participants stated. The Hungarians should treat the Romanians—the minority in the region—exactly as they expect to be treated by the Romanian majority in the rest of the country.

One of the ethnic Hungarian politicians reminded his colleagues that there is also another important ethnic minority in Romania that should not be forgotten—the Roma. It is in society's interest to integrate the Romani community. It would be a great mistake to work only on the democratic partnership between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians and leave aside the problems of the Roma. Moderates from both political communities should work together to facilitate the participation of Romani leaders in the political arena.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNS WITHOUT NATIONALIST RHETORIC

During the debate, some politicians from the ruling coalition and the opposition repeatedly criticized the UDMR for changing its appearance to suit the audience or to mask its ultimate goals. This ambiguity is often the cause of a nationalist reaction, they claimed. One participant stressed that the opposition parties are still unclear about the UDMR's ultimate goals. If the Hungarians obtain something, you can be sure that in the following months or even weeks, they will ask for something else. This is a never-ending story, he commented. The opposition parties do not know when the UDMR will be satisfied, he continued. Ethnic Hungarian politicians from Romania never tell their Romanian colleagues what they really want. A reasonable course of action would be to hear what they want and then to discuss it. But it is a tricky game. The UDMR wants to obtain more than European standards, even while Hungary is working to raise the European standards. When you criticize this strategy—a criticism that has nothing to do with nationalism—you are considered nationalist. In a similar way, if you criticize the UDMR—just as you would criticize any other party in the ruling coalition—for the political disaster of their government, you are also considered to be a

nationalist. For that reason, leaders of the opposition may promise to forget about the Hungarian topic in the election campaign, but they cannot forget about the political activity of the UDMR—a political activity that is identical with that of the Romanian parties involved in the ruling coalition.

One of the participants warned about the practical consequences of nationalist discourse in the election campaign. Whoever uses hate-speech will lose the elections, he said. This happened in 1996, when the PDSR and its leader Ion Iliescu—the incumbent at that time—miscalculated the consequences of nationalism.

Another prominent politician from the ruling coalition supported this view. Unfortunately, people from our own parties—for example, Senator George Pruteanu, a fierce opponent of education conducted in the Hungarian language—damaged the democratic record of the ruling coalition. Although such politicians were eventually marginalized, the consequences for the whole coalition were devastating. Nationalism is damaging not only to election campaigns, but also in daily politics, he continued. Following the provocations of nationalist leaders and of the media, the Romanian democratic parties lost sizable public support because they were involved in the coalition with the UDMR. And part of this loss may be attributed to their promotion of the ideals of the ethnic Hungarian minority. Sometimes, the price for democracy is high, he said.

A senior politician from the opposition expressed his reservations about whether all parties in Romania would respect an agreement made by the parties in attendance at this meeting, which are parties that have a reasonable approach to politics. Reasonable politicians should not accept hostile, extremist discourse, he said.

PER proposed that an agreement might be drawn up by the parties represented at this meeting concerning their conduct during the upcoming elections. The objective would be to avoid nationalist rhetoric in the campaigns. The participants agreed that the politicians themselves—the Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in power and in opposition—should issue a statement about the elimination of nationalist rhetoric. For the

For the first time, politicians in Romania signed a pact advocating the elimination of nationalism during an election campaign.

first time, politicians in Romania would sign a pact advocating the elimination of nationalism during the election campaign.

Despite the historical significance of such a document, one participant felt that the document would be beneficial only in the short run, but not in the long run. Still, another participant pointed out that it

would be important to sign such an agreement as a kind of reminder for when the elections begin. Otherwise, some participants at the Poiana Brasov meeting might forget what had been discussed. A written agreement that could be publicly announced would

strengthen their commitment to open-mindedness and tolerance, he said. Another participant felt it would be important to include only minimal rules in the statement. A brief and reasonable agreement would be easier to observe than a very complicated statement, he noted.

A senior politician drafted a statement, which was presented to the meeting. The participants asked for two or three days to study it and to seek their parties' endorsements before agreeing to publication.

The discussion then concluded.

* * *

Several days after the conclusion of the meeting, the participants unanimously agreed to sign and publish the statement. (See the Appendix for a full text of the agreement.)

APPENDIX

Text of the Poiana Brasov Agreement

The political leaders of the main democratic parties from Romania (PNTCD, PNL, PD, UDMR, PDSR, ApR), met in Poiana Brasov, on February 10-12, 2000, to discuss "The Impact of the Electoral Year 2000 on the Status of Minorities and the European Integration of Romania," in a seminar organized by Project on Ethnic Relations (PER). The participants put a special emphasis on maintaining and improving peaceful coexistence between majority and minority. There is a danger that certain extremist forces, which do not have adequate social programs, could aggravate the interethnic situation in order to profit in the elections. The participants agreed that their respective parties would continue to support interethnic collaboration, the integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and to condemn aggressive, nationalist discourse.

At the same time, the participants noted that in the upcoming electoral campaign, the democratic parties should respect a set of rules. For example, the focus of debate should be on concepts and programs, not on individuals. In addition, they emphasized that the tone of the electoral campaign should illustrate Romanian society's orientation toward integration into the European Union and NATO.

Signed,

PNTCD	PDSR
Ioan Avram Muresan	Adrian Nastase
Nicolae Ionescu-Galbeni	Ioan Mircea Pascu
Gabriel Tepelea	Liviu Maior
Mihai Gheorghiu	ApR
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Peter Eckstein-Kovacs	
Attila Verestoy	
Gyorgy Frunda	
Laszlo Borbely	
Lazar Madaras	

NOTES

¹ For most observers, the 1990 elections were free, but not necessarily fair. Former Communists, reorganized into the National Salvation Front (FSN), controlled state television and radio, while “historical parties” and the Hungarian party had almost no chance to explain their electoral platforms. Many incidents and abuses were reported during the electoral campaign and at the polls—all of them against parties not allied with FSN. Complaints about abuses received no response.

² The November 1996 coalition was a post-electoral alliance among three coalitions. The first was the CDR (Democratic Convention of Romania), an organization of political parties—including the main party, or, the PNTCD (Christian Democratic National Peasant Party); the PNL (National Liberal Party); PAR (Alternative for Romania Party); PER (Romanian Environmental Party), and civic organizations. The second group was the USD (Social Democratic Union), an electoral union of two social democratic parties: the larger party called the PD (Democratic Party), and a small, “historical” party, the PSD (Social Democratic Party of Romania). The third member was the UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania), a union of small Hungarian parties and civic organizations.

³ PDSR, Social Democratic Party of Romania, was spun off from the FSN. Its President is Ion Iliescu, the President of Romania from 1989 to 1996. Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the editor of an extreme nationalist and racist publication, *Greater Romania*, founded the PRM - the Greater Romania Party. The PUNR - Party of Romanian National Unity was founded in 1990.

⁴ PER organized roundtables between 1992-1995 in Romania, Switzerland and the United States.

⁵ The ApR (Alliance for Romania) was founded when a faction split from the PDSR. Teodor Melescanu, former minister of foreign affairs, leads the party.

⁶ In the early 1990s, the UDMR was a part of the CDR. The UDMR broke away from the CDR in order not to jeopardize the electoral chances of the CDR; public opinion was dominated by suspicion toward ethnic Hungarians and their organization.

⁷ Romanian Hearth Union, is an extreme nationalist movement, founded in 1990, with the explicit goal of rescuing Romanians in Transylvania from the “Hungarian national danger.” For many years, the President of the PUNR was Gheorghe Funar, the extreme nationalist mayor of Cluj.

⁸ “Securitate” was the Romanian Communist secret police officially dissolved in December 1989 when the Communist system collapsed. Some claim that it continued to work illegally, serving the new regime, until it was reorganized under new names.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

[PNTCD \(Christian Democratic National Peasant Party\)](#)

Nicolae Ionescu-Galbeni, Vice President, President of the House Committee for the Control of the Romanian Service of Information, MP

Mihai Gheorghiu, MP

Ioan Avram Muresan, First Vice President, Minister of Agriculture, MP

Gabriel Tepelea, President of the House Committee for Media and Culture, former First Vice President, MP

[PNL \(National Liberal Party\)](#)

Mona Musca, MP

Valeriu Stoica, First Vice President, Senator, Minister of Justice

[PD \(Democratic Party\)](#)

Mariana Stoica, MP

[UDMR \(Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania\)](#)

Laszlo Borbely, Secretary of State, Ministry for Public Works and Land Planning

Peter Eckstein-Kovacs, Minister for Minorities, Department of National Minorities

Gyorgy Frunda, Senator

Lazar Madaras, Vice President of the Executive Presidium of the UDMR

Bela Marko, President, Senator

Attila Verestoy, Senator, Leader of the UDMR group in the Senate

[PDSR \(Party of Social Democracy in Romania\)](#)

Liviu Maior, Senator, former Minister of Education

Adrian Nastase, First Vice President, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, former President of the House of Deputies, MP

Ioan Mircea Pascu, Vice President, President of the Defense Committee of the House, former State Secretary of Defense, MP

[ApR \(Alliance for Romania\)](#)

Teodor Melescanu, President, Senator, former Minister of Foreign Affairs

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