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NATION-BUILDING DISCOURSES IN SZEKLERLAND AFTER 1989

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Main Hypotheses

In my doctoral dissertation I have analyzed the latest Romanian and Hungarian nationalization trends in Szeklerland - a region in Romania with a majority of ethnic Hungarians. The starting point of my research was constituted by the idea, that even in the time of escalating globalization, nationalization processes started at the turn of the 18-19th century in Western Europe – and which started to be influential a bit later in Central and Eastern Europe – are still active and influential today. My hypothesis was confirmed after identifying the historical origins and development structure of those nationalization discourses that are still being influential today. By such identification, I could show that there are consistent and recurrent patterns in the process of the nationalization.

Various texts and events – discourses – have had a central role in the process of forming nationality-based communities (‘nation building’) from the very beginning. The existence of similar discourses today points out, that their producers – mainly the social elites, but increasingly the larger population as well – still believe in the importance and in the community forming power of such texts and discourses. There are several similarities, parallels, and even total overlaps between speeches (and their reception) in the Parliament of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867–1918) and in today’s Romanian Parliament; between the way a national Holiday celebration was organized in Transylvania in the 20th century on the one hand, and at the beginning of the 21st century, on the other hand; and between pamphlets from the turn of the century and from the turn of the millennium. The direct and indirect impact of such discourses in their original social contexts constitutes another interesting question. Even before nationalism became popular, the impact of national discourses was limited, and even today, when a nation-centered approach is highly accepted, our relation to our community and to the ‘other’ communities is often defined by actual situations and not just the discourses.

I have collected almost a dozen of national discourses addressing Szeklerland, which were all dated to after 1989 and originated from the wide Romanian and Hungarian public sphere. I have analyzed these discourses and described their historical development structure: from socio-political emancipation and legal rights discourses to ones related to minority issues and historical discourses.

In this phase, I have concentrated on ascertaining the occurrence and the general similarities between these discourses instead of conducting discourse analysis in each case or analyzing and defining the exact context and time they were produced at. Additionally, I have created a detailed presentation of four chosen cases as well.

In this paper I aimed at finding answers to the following questions: how the different nationalization discourses are present in Szeklerland in the Hungarian and Romanian public spheres; which similarities can be discovered between national discourses from the past and today; and how such discourses influence the nationalization process of local Hungarian and Romanian communities in the Szeklerland region. The first two chapters contain the description of the central method I used in this paper and especially the review of relevant studies in the field. The third chapter concentrates on presenting the rivalry of Romanian and Hungarian nationalization processes in Transylvania (and Szeklerland) in the 19th and 20th centuries. As today's events and processes cannot be interpreted and understood without the historical context of our recent past, I included a chapter - Chapter 4 -, where I analyze the time period of 1989-2015 from a political history perspective. In Chapter 5, I present two very complex, but two of the most important national discourses: the Hungarian 'autonomy' discourse and the Romanian 'Har-Kov' discourse. While here I focus on the similarities and interlaced character of these two phenomena, in the following chapter, I include two subchapters (two case studies), where I present nation-building discourses through the activities of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Szeklerland and through other symbolic practices from the region. The dissertation ends with listing my sources and bibliographies.

During my research I was reassured repeatedly, that despite all social, political and economic change along the years, the political rivalry between Hungary and Romania manifests itself even today in their attempts to 'nationalize' Szeklerland. Due to the changed context, both nationalization processes, the intensity and impact of the nationalizing activities and the used tools and techniques, etc. have changed. However, the political elites keep on using the same discourses that were used centuries ago. Moreover, sometimes it looks as if some political actors today 're-performed' old scenarios and roles. Besides the attempts to create a local (regional) identity (or identities) – which I haven't discussed here - in Szeklerland, the attempts to build a unified Hungarian identity is dominant along with the rival attempts of the Romanian nation state to build a unified Romanian identity and a strong Romanian community in this region. The political elites of today's Romania are adepts - almost without exception - of the idea of the nation state, however, they have different theories about how and to what degree should these ideas be implemented.

Addressing my first question, I can state, that Hungarian and Romanian nation-building processes from today occur in the public sphere in the exact same manner as they used to appear in the past: they continue the century long rivalry between the attempt to preserve and reproduce Hungarian national identity from the Hungarian side (and sometimes to preserve and reproduce Romanian national identity in the local Romanian community from the Romanian side) on the one hand, and the attempt to maintain the unified national Romanian identity and to integrate national minorities, on the other hand. The emancipatory and legal rights discourses are reflected mainly by the autonomy discourses on the Hungarian side, and by the discourses addressing the situation of the Romanian community living in Szeklerland, on the Romanian side. Furthermore, there is another phenomenon, which is getting increasingly popular among the nation-building practices in Szeklerland, i.e. the trans-sovereign nationalization (national re-integration) processes originating from Budapest, which are complemented by symbolic practices, and which use the dual citizenship as their basic tool. It seems that Romanian nation-building strategies and discourses are more consistent than the Hungarian ones, as in the latter case, ideological and political differences have a greater impact on these discourses. Furthermore, the discourses about the Romanian community living in Szeklerland and about the Hungarian minority are not in the focus of the Romanian public sphere any longer, while the autonomy and minority discourses are highly central to the Hungarian public. There can be several reasons for this. On the one hand, it seems that the ‘Hungarian-question’ has become less central to the main political discourses in Romania in the last couple of years, and on the other hand, the case of the Hungarian minority living in Romania is still a highly important issue for the Hungarian political discourses – this issue is still a central driving force of political mobilization in this community.

Regarding my second hypothesis, my research has confirmed that nation-building discourses do recur. All political discourses from today have already been present in the 19th and 20th centuries. It can be observed – and it is not surprising – that some of the discourses have become more complex and advanced along the years. The emancipatory and legal rights discourses together with the symbolic discourses provide good examples for such repetition and progress: today’s autonomy attempts are not so much different from the ones in the 19th century, however, the elites have created new symbols and practices that are partly based on old symbols and practices, or they employ the old ones as models (e.g. the Szekler flag, the National Flag Day in Romanian, etc.). Similarly, the nation-building role of the different churches seems to be persistent as well. It can be claimed, that both the Hungarian and Romanian elites consider it a legitimate defense mechanism to ‘build’ their own nations, nation states and their national communities. They corroborate this view through

various iterative topoi, motives and identical argumentations. Another general statement can be made as well: selectivity, bias and double standards are characteristic for all these discourses.

In conclusion, the producers of discourses aiming at the nationalization of Szeklerland follow the classic models – regardless of which actor we take a look at, the discourses do not really differ from each other, or from the ones from the past either. However, the impact of these discourses is not necessarily the same as it used to be. Traditional discourses are often old-fashioned, and it can occur, that by relying on such ideas, political leaders are not capable of offering realistic perspectives for their audiences any longer. One of the most interesting questions is, how long can we still rely on the classic, well-established discourses – e.g. the discourses of territorial autonomy, of staying in our home-countries or the protection of the unified nation state – in today’s rapidly changing contexts. The mobilization value of these discourses is varied today, however, it can decrease in the future in line with the decrease in support for traditional nation-building political formations and due to transformations in the structure of the media leading to the overall fragmentation of discourses.

Relevant publications:

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- Románia magyar szíve. A Székelyföld képei a magyar és a román közbeszédben 1989 után. *Pro Minoritate* 2013/tavaszi
- Az egyház visszatér. A Román Ortodox Egyház a székelyföldi magyar és román nemzetépítés diskurzusában 1989 után. *Múltunk* 2012/4.
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- Nagy-Románia és regionalizmus. Sextil Pușcariu cikksorozata az erdélyi kérdéstről. *Kommentár*, 2011/3.
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- Egy kis Magyarország Nagy-Romániában. Alternatívák a Székelyföldre a két világháború közötti magyar tervezetekben. *Magyar Kisebbség*, 2009/1–2. Románul: O mică Ungarie în România Mare. Alternative pentru Secuime în proiectele maghiare dintre cele două războaie mondiale. *140 de ani de legislație minoritară în Europa Centrală și de Est*. Ed.: Gidó Attila, Horváth István, Pál Judit. Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale–Kriterion. Cluj-Napoca, 2010.

- Románüldözés a Székelyföldön? Egy állítólagos etnikai tisztogatás története. In: Juhász József–Krausz Tamás (szerk.): *Az új nemzetállamok és az etnikai tisztogatások Kelet-Európában 1989 után*. L'Harmattan Kiadó–ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, Budapest, 2009.

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