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## Illiberal Citizenship

The Impact of the Hungarian Political  
Community's Extension on Claim-Making  
Strategies of Hungarian Organizations in  
Transylvania

– Doctoral Theses –

Eötvös Loránd University, Doctoral School of Sociology, Sociology PhD  
Programme

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# 1. Introduction

Citizenship studies suggest that the concept and content of citizenship change as a result of the emergence of populist leaders, and populist politics. The doctoral thesis investigates this phenomenon, not only analyzing if this transformation has occurred in Hungary, but also examining how and according to what mechanisms this change has happened in the context of Hungarian politics. In addition, the thesis investigates the consequences of this transformation for Transylvanian Hungarians, the minority community, where the highest number of people concerned live. The organizations analyzed participate in the process of changing the concept of citizenship, and consequently, their position in Romania has been radically transformed. The thesis argues that the claim-making strategies of the organizations of transborder Hungarian minorities have decreased due to the extension of citizenship and the influence of the Hungarian government. Four organizations are analyzed: the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania (EMNT) and its connected political party, the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania (EMNP), and the most influential ethnic Hungarian party, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) and its connected civil organization, the Eurotrans Foundation.

The thesis goes back as far as 2010, when the concept of the nation was changed in Hungary. As a first symbolic step, the newly established Hungarian government led by the right-wing party Fidesz amended the Act on Nationality and removed the residency requirement from its legislation for transborder Hungarians. By doing so, it introduced a simplified naturalization procedure, which made Hungarian citizenship available for ethnic Hungarians who can prove that they had a Hungarian citizen ascendant. This was followed by the introduction of the Testimony on National Cohesion and by the acceptance of the new constitution, the Fundamental Law. As a next step, the Hungarian government modified the Hungarian electoral system, extending voting rights to Hungarian citizens with no residency within the territory of the country.

The organizations analyzed are involved in the implementation of Hungarian citizenship policies in Transylvania. In 2010, the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania volunteered to help Hungarian authorities in Romania to support transborder Hungarians in applying for citizenship. In accordance with the agreement, so-called Democracy Centers were established, whose officers help transborder Hungarians in filling out the documents and assist them with the submission of these documents to the Hungarian consulate, the formal representative of the Hungarian state in Romania.

The Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania was created the very same day the National Council established the offices of Democracy Centers. The People's Party is in close contact with the Hungarian government: it explicitly supports and is being supported by Fidesz. As argued by leaders of the National Council, who established the party, it was necessary to create a new political actor in Transylvania, as the most influential ethnic Hungarian party in Romania, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), had not accomplished its duty.

RMDSZ was established at the time of the democratic transition. Since 2015, through an agreement with its partner organization the Eurotrans Foundation, the party has reconciled with the Hungarian government and has been active in the implementation of the Hungarian citizenship policy. This rapprochement is explained in the thesis, as the previously introduced People's Party was heavily supported by the Hungarian government so as to have a party as a counterpoint to RMDSZ.

The Eurotrans Foundation is a civil organization created in 2004 with the objective to support regional and international cooperation. According to the organization's website, their participation in the naturalization procedures fits into this objective. Little information is available about the Foundation's previous history, as with the agreement in 2015 it was fundamentally reconstructed. The strong relationship between Eurotrans and RMDSZ is even more salient than the one between EMNT and EMNP; practically the Foundation has no independent communication strategy or any further activity separate from RMDSZ.

Scholars of sociology and political science have thoroughly investigated the changes in the claim-making strategies of these organizations. The impact of the kin-state since the democratic transition of Hungary and Romania has also been discussed.<sup>1</sup> The latest development, the introduction of dual citizenship and its impact on micro and macro level

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<sup>1</sup> Kiss Tamás, Barna Gergő, and Székely István Gergő, "A társadalomépítéstől a klientúra-építésig. Az RMDSZ és a magyar választók közötti kapcsolódás átalakulása," *Magyar Kisebbség* 68, no. 2 (2013): 7–40; Tamás Kiss, "Increasing Marginality, Ethnic Parallelism and Asymmetric Accommodation. Social and Political Processes Concerning the Hungarian Community of Transylvania," *Minority Studies*, no. 18 (2015): 33–69; Tamás Kiss, "Marginalizáció, etnikai párhuzamosság és aszimmetrikus akkomodáció. Az erdélyi magyar közösséget érintő társadalmi és politikai folyamatok," *Magyar Kisebbség* 20, no. 1–2 (2015): 30–64; Tamás Kiss, "Beyond the Ethnic Vote: Shifting Determinants of the Electoral Behavior of Transylvanian Hungarians," *Problems of Post-Communism* 0, no. 0 (June 29, 2017): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1336422>; Nándor Bárdi, Csilla Fedinec, and László Szarka, eds., *Minority Hungarian Communities in the Twentieth Century* (East European Monographs, 2011); Nándor Bárdi, "Different Images of the Future of the Hungarian Communities in Neighbouring Countries, 1989–2012," *European Review* 21, no. 4 (October 2013): 530–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798713000525>; István Gergő Székely, "Az Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt és az erdélyi magyar pártrendszer jövője. Hozzászólás Toró T. Tibor és Toró Tibor vitaindítójához," *Magyar Kisebbség* 59–60, no. 1–2 (2011): 97–121.

sociological and political processes is also covered by scholarly investigations.<sup>2</sup> The consensus is apparent: RMDSZ, in accordance with the restructuring of the political scene in Romania, is pushed into the background of Romanian politics. This is confirmed by the fact that the party could not enroll as an executive coalition member either in 2009, or in 2012.

Salat argues that the decrease in the claim-making potential of RMDSZ has led to the Hungarian minority community seeking for alternative solutions.<sup>3</sup> This alternative seems to be the kin-state's support, which was institutionalized by the extension of citizenship and formalized in the activities of the organizations analyzed in the thesis. The fact that RMDSZ reconciled with the Hungarian government is strongly related to its position on the Romanian political palette.

Nevertheless, I do not discuss in depth how the claim-making strategies of the organizations are influenced by the political processes of Romania. Rather, I investigate how the kin-state has extended the Hungarian political community, and how the organizations are impacted by their participation within this political community. Thus, I argue that with the extension of citizenship and voting rights, members of the Hungarian minority community have become members of an extended Hungarian political community. The organizations play a determinant role in this process, as they represent the Hungarian political community, rather than the Hungarian minority community in Transylvania. This phenomenon results in the fact that their claim-making strategies, their ability to stand for the interests of members of the Hungarian minority community is transformed by the influence of the Hungarian government.

Previous contributions fail to conceptualize how these processes are influenced by the transformed concept of citizenship and by the extended concept of the Hungarian political community. This is, in fact, the main puzzle of this doctoral thesis. The extension of the Hungarian political community exported Hungarian illiberalism beyond borders. I argue that by being involved in this political community, these organizations are dependent on the Hungarian government. Thus, the thesis is also based on the literature of Hungary's illiberal shift so as to demonstrate the peculiarities of this politics.

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<sup>2</sup> Szabolcs Pogonyi, *Extra-Territorial Ethnic Politics, Discourses and Identities in Hungary*, Palgrave Studies in Citizenship Transitions (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Szabolcs Pogonyi, "Europeanization of Kin-Citizenship and the Dynamics of Kin-Minority Claim-Making: The Case of Hungary," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 242–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1329630>; Myra A. Waterbury, "National Minorities in an Era of Externalization," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 228–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2016.1251825>; Myra A. Waterbury, "Friends in High Places? The Externalisation of Hungarian Minority Rights Claims," in *The Noble Banner of Human Rights: Essays in Memory of Tom Lantos*, ed. Anna-Maria Biro and Katrina Lantos Swett (Brill, 2018), 150–82.

<sup>3</sup> Levente Salat, "Az RMDSZ 25 éve - a célok tükrében," *Magyar Kisebbség* 20, no. 1–2 (2015): 27.

I introduce the new concept of citizenship, whereby citizenship is no longer a legal connection between the state and its citizens, but where intermediate institutions are positioned to create and recreate the link between Hungary and transborder Hungarians. The Transylvanian case study demonstrates the illiberal vision of citizenship.

## 2. Research design and methodology

The research is based on three different but interacting methodological spheres. Relying on data triangulation, I collect relevant information from separate sources and analyze the data using a multi-method approach. The thesis argues that the claim-making strategies of the organizations have decreased because of the influence of the Hungarian government. To be able to analyze these claim-making strategies, I have checked the documents of the organizations where they state their purposes and objectives. This data is then examined using content analysis.

Second, communicative strategies were checked to identify how the organizations address their audiences. To be able to see the patterns in these strategies, first I analyzed how the Hungarian Prime Minister addresses the nation and looked for those patterns in the communicative strategies of the Transylvanian organizations. I concluded that in his communication, Viktor Orbán uses the concept of “the extended Hungarian political community”, which refers to all citizens of Hungary, regardless of residency. Despite the fact that in their documents they refer more to the concept of the Transylvanian political community, in their communicative strategies Transylvanian organizations tend to rely on the concept introduced by the Prime Minister.

Third, I analyzed the institutional embeddedness of the organizations in the Transylvanian scene to check if the influence of the Hungarian government can be perceived there. The institutional networks were investigated by a conceptual analysis relying on the analytical tools of diaspora studies. As others argue,<sup>4</sup> a diasporization of Hungarian communities is taking place in Transylvania, which is to be detected by this conceptual analysis. This analysis is a set of case studies within the Transylvanian case. With the help of three examples, I introduce the direct and indirect consequences of the influence of the Hungarian government. I have detected how through the activities of the organizations analyzed the Hungarian government’s influence is tangible in various aspects of the Transylvanian scene.

## 3. Findings

The thesis informs about one segment of the extended Hungarian political community: the institutional network of Transylvanian civil and political organizations. The systematic investigation of Transylvanian actors shows how illiberalism is exported by the extension of the Hungarian political community. It is a common characteristic of illiberal states that

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<sup>4</sup> Salat Levente, “A könnyített honosítás látható és várható következményeiről. Válaszok a Magyar Kisebbség kérdéseire,” *Magyar Kisebbség*, no. 69-70. sz. = 18. évf. (2013.) 3-4. sz. (2013): 226–40.

clientelistic ties are developed in a way that actors become dependent on the state. They assume a new function, which is to confirm the voting base and legitimize (at least in appearance) the illiberal political system. Illiberalism postulates that organizations are dependent on the Hungarian government and their activity is influenced by the kin-state. The scrutiny demonstrates the mechanism through which the Hungarian political community has been extended, and through which the organizations have acquired their new function. The phenomenon is rooted in the transformed concept of citizenship. The doctoral thesis builds an analytical framework within which the concept of illiberal citizenship is introduced and its consequences in Transylvania can be demonstrated.

As discussed in the thesis, since the extension of citizenship, several scholars have addressed its consequences. Nevertheless, these investigations<sup>5</sup> neglect the fact that the impact of this type of citizenship concept can no longer be analyzed in the terms of liberal democracy. Others, who discuss citizenship in relation to the political processes of Hungary<sup>6</sup>, neglect the decisive role of organizations controlled by the illiberal state. Diaspora studies which investigate the institutions cannot be fully made use of in the thesis (only Tarrow's and Koinova's works<sup>7</sup> are used in conceptualizing my methodological approach) as they discuss different and distinct diaspora communities, rather than minority communities.

My empirical investigations demonstrate that in their documents, the organizations stand for local, regional, Transylvanian political interests, clearly expressing the idea of a separate Transylvanian political community. Nevertheless, the communicative strategies of the organizations tend to reflect the influence of the Hungarian government. Relying on the discourse established by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the organizations address their audiences, members of the Hungarian minority community in Romania as members of the extended Hungarian political community. Hungarian-Romanian dual citizens are invoked as citizens of this community, rather than as members of a separate minority society or members of the Romanian political community.

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<sup>5</sup> Szabolcs Pogonyi, "Europeanization of Kin-Citizenship and the Dynamics of Kin-Minority Claim-Making: The Case of Hungary," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 242–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1329630>; Myra A. Waterbury, "National Minorities in an Era of Externalization," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 228–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2016.1251825>.

<sup>6</sup> Tamás Kiss et al., eds., *Unequal Accommodation of Minority Rights: Hungarians in Transylvania*, Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78893-7\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78893-7_11).

<sup>7</sup> Sidney G Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Maria Koinova, "Beyond Statist Paradigms: Socio-Spatial Positionality and Diaspora Mobilization in International Relations," *International Studies Review*, 19, no. 4 (2017): 597–621.

Furthermore, the analysis of the projects and institutional networks of these organizations sheds light on the influence of the Hungarian government on various spheres of the Transylvanian social and political scene. Via the relations of these organizations to other institutions of the Transylvanian minority community (i.e. religious organizations, civil associations), the impact of the Hungarian government appears to be widespread within Transylvania.

By studying these phenomena, I have demonstrated how the kin-state intervenes into another state's political sphere. Previously, the organizations scrutinized were perceived as actors in the Romanian political community within which they legitimately represented the Hungarian minority, however with the intervention of the Hungarian government, this position has been reshaped. The organizations now stand for the members of this community as citizens of Hungary, despite the fact that they are still part of Romania as members of a minority community. Standing for the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania postulates that members of this community need to be perceived as minorities, rather than full-fledged citizens of another state. The nature of the extension of the Hungarian community in this sense has resulted in the fact that their representation as minorities in Romania is weakened. In addition, transborder Hungarians are not equally integrated into the Hungarian political community either.

Successful ethnic claim-making as understood by Chandra<sup>8</sup> relies on the salience of ethnic identity. Accordingly, it is not a necessity that members of an ethnic minority community should cast their ballots on representatives of the same ethnic group. Claim-making is successful if the political party is able to invoke this ethnic identification. Thus, according to Chandra, a strong minority representation is achieved when it is less important what the politician says, while it is more important who says it. Relying on her case studies, Chandra discovered this phenomenon in what she calls "patronage democracies" characterized by information constraints. This applies to the social and political scene in Transylvania determined by the Hungarian government. Nevertheless, this is not a straightforward application of Chandra's concept. In this case, it is not the leaders of the Transylvanian political parties that invoke ethnic identity, but the Fidesz-led Hungarian government, fundamentally Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Ethnic mobilization occurs in Transylvania via Hungary-controlled organizations. Access to democratic institutions via Hungarian citizenship goes

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<sup>8</sup> Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

along with ethnic salience, which results in the fact that in the elections it is no longer important *what* the Hungarian government claims: what matters is only *who* says it.

The findings of the thesis transcend previous research, as it provides an elaborate understanding of the concept of illiberal citizenship. This citizenship concept is the result of the illiberal shift in Hungarian politics, which is extended to Transylvania. I argue that this new citizenship concept is not only illiberal as it does not comply any more with norms of liberal democracy due to the way it was implemented in Transylvania. The organizations acquire an intermediate position between the state and the citizens, meaning that citizenship is no longer a mere legal connection between the two. Illiberal citizenship is a concept which inherently contains the idea that citizens are overseen by dedicated organizations, influenced by the illiberal state. This contradicts the Brubakerian definition of citizenship, where Brubaker argues that citizenship creates and recreates the state.<sup>9</sup> The thesis shows that in the case analyzed, the kin-state authorized the intermediate organizations to create and recreate the state.

Further to this, I offer a more elaborate understanding of the concept of citizenship in non-democratic states. Others have already suggested investigating citizenship broken down to its component. Faist and Kivisto<sup>10</sup> identify three different dimensions of citizenship along which the concept could be applied in democratic states. The definition implies that citizens have the right to democratic self-governance, the composition of rights and duties are balanced and equal, and their membership in the political community is determinative for the citizens' identity. Incorporating my findings into this concept, it becomes evident that in non-democratic states a more elaborate definition is needed to understand the specific nature of citizenship. As shown by the case study, democratic institutions can only be accessed through the given organizations, which are dependent on Hungary and controlled by the kin-state. Accordingly, the first dimension of citizenship, which contains the right to self-governance, in case of the illiberal citizenship concept could be only understood within the framework of the organizations analyzed and within the social and political scene determined by the Hungarian government.

Correspondingly, the second dimension is also influenced by the unbalanced and unequal nature of the Hungarian political community's extension. As demonstrated in the thesis, transborder citizens do not have equal rights compared to citizens who have residency within the territory of the state. Furthermore, the fact that voting rights are practiced with the

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<sup>9</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 1992, xi.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Faist and Peter Kivisto, *Citizenship. Discourse, Theory, and Transnational Prospects* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

help of the organizations studied shows that citizenship can no longer be conceptualized in terms of liberal democracy.

The third dimension discusses how the political community shapes citizens' identity. The thesis illustrates that the extended political community impacts the discourses of the organizations, resulting in the fact that citizens' identity is shaped by dependent organizations controlled by the kin-state.

Furthermore, the thesis offers an analytical framework to provide a more elaborate understanding of the situation of transborder minorities. It calls for attention to the previously neglected political scene influenced by the Hungarian government. I argue that the extension of citizenship and voting rights has created the concept of the extended Hungarian political community, the presence of which in Transylvania affects the claim-making potential of the organizations. Both for the analysis of micro and macro sociological processes the thesis offers a more insightful framework. In case scholars want to analyze the micro sociological consequences of the extension of Hungarian citizenship, quite often its effect on citizens' identity or social integration is investigated.<sup>11</sup> These investigations exclude from their scope the impact of organizations. I argue however that the organizations play a crucial part in shaping these micro sociological consequences. They help in the implementation of the Hungarian citizenship policy and also take their part in all of the political activities practiced by Hungarian citizens (i.e. registrations to election, and casting the ballot itself). The social space within which these processes take place is shaped by these organizations, as they are the channel via which the extended Hungarian political community is realized. Thus, the impact of the latter needs to be elevated into the discussion.

The Transylvanian case study shows a phenomenon which is a consequence of the Hungarian nation building strategy whereby Hungary has expanded its political community beyond the border with the extension of citizenship and voting rights. The case study demonstrates that kin-state engagement and ethnic mobilization can not only take place along the lines of ethnic parties' and kin-state's classical political spectrum, it can transform the civil and political organizations of the kin-minority resulting in a decrease of their claim-making potential.

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<sup>11</sup> Z. Attila Papp, "Kisebbségi identitáskonstrukciók a kettős magyar állampolgárság által," *REGIO. Kisebbség Kultúra Politika Társadalom* 22, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 118–55, <https://doi.org/10.17355/rkkpt.v22i1.9>; Attila Z. Papp, "Trickster Logics in the Hungarian Dual-Citizenship Offer," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 23, no. 1 (2, 2017): 18–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2017.1273656>; Sherrill Stroschein, "Demography in Ethnic Party Fragmentation: Hungarian Local Voting in Romania," *Party Politics* 17, no. 2 (2011): 189–204.

I demonstrate in the thesis that illiberalism was exported to Transylvania with the extension of the Hungarian political community. This has resulted in the fact that the organizations have become dependent on the Fidesz-KDNP government and have started to act as a representative of the Hungarian state rather than being the representative of the kin-minority. This was established by the introduction of the institution of illiberal citizenship, which is no longer merely a legal connection between the state and its citizens, it is realized through a continuously controlled relationship facilitated by the analyzed organizations. These civil and political actors are the ones who help members of the Hungarian minority community become Hungarian citizens, and this citizenship status is practiced with the help of these organizations. The Transylvanian case study demonstrates the illiberal vision of citizenship.

#### 4. Author's publications

Egyenlőtlen nemzetépítés?, co-authored with Péter Kállai, *Fundamentum* 3–4 (2019):  
*forthcoming*

Parliamentary Representation of Nationalities and Kin-Minorities – Hungary's Biased Electoral System, co-authored with Péter Kállai, *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 17 (2019): *forthcoming*

Az illiberális állampolgárság intézményrendszere. *MTA Law Working Papers* 5 (2019): 21

»Only Fidesz« – Minority Electoral Law in Hungary, co-authored with Balázs Majtényi and Péter Kállai, *Verfassungsblog* (2018) <https://verfassungsblog.de/only-fidesz-electoral-law-in-hungary/>.

Kettős állampolgárság hatása Erdélyben. In Bíró Judit, Papp Richárd, Szabó Miklós, Gacs Katalin (eds.) *Kulcskérdések a társadalomkutatásban 2014-2015.*, Conference proceedings, Budapest, Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Social Sciences, 2016. 347–79

Hol a határ?: A külhoni etnikai állampolgárság és a diszkrimináció tilalma, co-authored with Kriszta Kovács and Zsolt Körtvélyesi, *Fundamentum*, 4 (2015): 39–57

Margins of Nationality. External Ethnic Citizenship and Non-Discrimination, co-authored with Kriszta Kovács and Zsolt Körtvélyesi, *Perspectives on Federalism* 7, Vol. 1 (2015): 85–116