RELACIÓN ENTRE LO LOCAL Y LO CENTRAL DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA ÉTNICA: UN ESTUDIO SOBRE LA COMUNIDAD HÚNGARA EN RUMANIA

NARCISA MEDIANU

RESUMEN

El artículo trata la cuestión de la autonomía étnica como parte de las negociaciones en curso entre las élites políticas mayoritarias y minoritarias en los países poscomunistas de la región, en particular en Rumania de donde procede la autora. El tema de la autonomía étnica es analizado en relación con los problemas planteados por la transformación del Estados socialista centralizado. Los dos principales actores del juego político son por un lado, la élite mayoritaria que representa los intereses del centro y por otro, los líderes de las minorías que pretenden incrementar el poder a nivel local. Las negociaciones entre las élites y el pulso que mantienen lleva a un creciente traspaso de competencias, lo cual resulta ser un esfuerzo laborioso en un entorno social plagado de nacionalismos mayoritarios y minoritarios.

LOCAL-CENTRE RELATION FROM AN ETHNIC PERSPECTIVE: A STUDY ON THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNITY IN ROMANIA

NARCISA MEDIANU[*]

narcisag@rdslink.ro

SUMMARY

The article discusses the issue of ethnic autonomy as part of the ongoing negotiations between majority and minority political elites in the post-socialist countries from the region, especially in Romania where the author comes from. The topic of ethnic autonomy is analysed in connection with the problems pose by the transformation of the highly centralised socialist state. The main two actors of the political game are the majority elites representing the interests of the centre and the minority leaders who aim to increase the power at the local level. The elite negotiations and modalities of keeping each other in check lead to an incremental devolution of political power, which proves to be a laborious endeavour in a social environment haunted by majority and minority nationalisms.

---

[*] PhD candidate, Central European University, Sociology Department. e-mail: narcisag@yahoo.com

Medianu, Narcisa. Relación entre lo local y lo central desde una perspectiva étnica: un estudio sobre la comunidad húngara en Rumanía.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of self-government rights in Eastern Europe can be approached from a multitude of perspectives. This paper employs a political view, which is not concerned with the cultural aspect of ethnicity, emphasised by multiculturalist studies. My focus is on the changes that democratisation has brought about in the relationship between centre and local actors, between the political elites representing ethno-territorial interests and the leaders of other political parties. The first part of the paper is an attempt to conceptualise these ongoing negotiations, which seem to constitute a trend in several Eastern European countries. Several scholars have proposed Lijphart concept of 'consociational democracy' to describe the dynamic of ethnic politics in the region. After discussing the applicability of this term to Eastern European countries I turn to the concept of political exchange. I believe that analysing political exchanges between political leaders captures a better picture of the direction in which ethnic politics is heading across the region. The second part deals exclusively with the mechanisms through which both the local and the centre actors try to keep each other in check, following democratic procedures.

2. TOWARDS A MODEL OF ELITE NEGOTIATION.

The consolidation of the democratic system was accompanied by a change in the relationship between the government and the political leaders of ethno-territorial communities. This change is based on the shift from the policy of control and domination towards one based on political exchanges between political elites[1]. The co-optation of ethnic political parties in the process of decision making took place in several countries in the region where minority parties have joined the ruling coalition. For instance, the Hungarian party (coalition) has joined the ruling coalition in both Romania (1996) and Slovakia (1998). Similarly, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), although seen with reluctance at the beginning, started to play a balancing role between the two opposed poles of the Bulgarian political stage. In this context, positions of ministers and the protection of minority rights are exchanged for domestic and international political support.

In order to explore the type of institutional arrangements taking shape, one needs new adequate conceptual tools. The question of how to describe these new trends of minority/majority inter-ethnic relations has become a priority for the political analysts. Can we speak about a so called 'Romanian model'? Do we witness an irreversible trend towards minority participation in the government and if yes what are its implications? These questions are recurrent in the debates of the Romanian publicists. Recently, Gusztav Molnar's articles published in *Provincia,* triggered off a lively discussion about the applicability of the term consociational democracy for the case of Transylvania and Voivodina. Molnar argues for the prospects of implementing a consociational system in Transylvania, where the population is divided along ethnic lines.

Consociational democracies are characteristic for plural societies, i.e., societies divided along cleavage lines. Segmental cleavages can be of religious,

---

[1] I refer here to ethnic political parties from various countries in the region. i.e., Romania (The Democratic Association of the Hungarians in Romania DAHR); Slovakia (Coexistence, Hungarian Democratic Party HCDM, the Hungarian Civic Party HCP), in Bulgaria (Movement for Rights and Freedoms MRF) and in Macedonia (Party for Democratic Prosperity PDP).

ideological, linguistic, regional cultural, racial or ethnic nature (Lijphart, 1977:4). In consociational democracies, political elites representing the "pillars" or "segments" of the society are engaged in negotiations at the top level. The three remaining features of the consociational model are (1) mutual veto regarding political decisions (2) proportionality in political representation, civil service appointments and allocation of public funds(3) a high degree of segmental autonomy (1977:25).

3. THE BALANCE OF POWER.

Is such an arrangement a realistic option for Eastern European democracies? As Andreescu (2000) rightly points out, in Romania the 'substance' of the consociational arrangement -participation of the minority leaders in the government- has not yet been accepted, but it is disputed and negotiated by minority leaders.

A second sensitive issue is the balance of power between minority and majority. Lijphart warns us that in plural societies "if one segment has a clear majority its leaders may attempt to dominate rather than cooperate with the rival minority" (1977:55). Consequently, he recommends the presence of at least three different segments among which there is an equilibrium of power.

On the contrary, the cleavage line in Eastern European countries divides the overwhelming majority –defined in ethnic terms, but not necessarily organized on ethnic basis- from one main national minority (representing at maximum 10% of the population) bordered by an external homeland.

This bipolar arrangement bears resemblance to the one described by Rothchild in his study on political ethnicity in middle Africa, (1986:73). "Hegemonic exchange", the term proposed by Rotchild takes place within single or no-party arrangements, when "central state leaders quite typically give some measures of status, autonomy, power, representation or economic resources in exchange for the regional unit's support of and compliance with the state's regulation" (Rothchild, 1986:70). At the center, informal negotiations bring together political elites for which "the conflict of interest is implicit" (Cyert and March in Rothchild, 1986: 72). On the one hand, democratic or weak authoritarian states need the political support of the ethnic groups but they are not willing to give away power. On the other hand, ethnic leaders seek autonomy and recognition and thus they see political support to the government as a compromise. Thus the two parties involved in negotiation have diverging interests. The relation is conceived as a zero-sum distribution of resources, i.e., what is gained by one party is lost by the other (neglecting thus the variability in the total amount of power resources to be distributed, see Parri, 1990:216)

Hegemonic exchange is a particular type of political exchange, which occurs in democratic societies. In authoritarian or unconsolidated democracies political exchange leads to a policy of "control through co-optation" rather than to a consociational model based on segmental autonomy. Negotiations take place in a context of colliding majority and minority nationalisms. At the same time, the majority leaders tend to control and imposed their will over minorities. In what follows I argue that the concept of political exchange enables us to analyse the dynamic of ethno-politics in Eastern European countries. By looking at political exchanges one can trace similarities across the countries from the region as well as the impact of democratisation and European integration on ethnic

politics. I employ here the definition given by Parri (1990:217) to describe the relationship between different levels of government:

"the territorial political exchange between two public actors occurs when one of the two public actors, normally at the higher level, allows the other to influence the content of the public decisional (…) and implementation processes (...), so that it can profit from part of the public policy outputs and outcomes, and when, in exchange for this, the latter gives its consensus to the former, i.e., it puts at the other's disposal its power resources in order to guarantee the efficacy and the effectiveness of the public policy question" (1990:217).

4. POLITICAL EXCHANGE INVOLVING THE MINORITY LEADERS.

In Eastern Europe political exchange involves the co-optation of minority leaders into the government. Given the absence of territorial claims, certain group-differentiated rights[2] are exchanged for political support, whether in domestic or international politics. However, the majority is not willing to accept a high degree of segmental autonomy and power is not equally distributed among ethnic groups and central state leaders. Minority leaders have the veto right in the sense that they can withdraw from the government (or threaten to do that as in the case of the Hungarian University) but their freedom of maneuver is severely constricted by the long-term social consequences of such a move. The last elections (Nov. 2000) marked the rapid rise of extreme nationalism, limiting the bargaining options of the minority leaders. Basically, the withdrawal from the government meant to give way to nationalist leaders, which could endanger the democratic gains of the post-communist period.

A second specificity of the minority status in Eastern Europe is that the homeland of the national minority feels responsible for the situation of the co-ethnics living in the neighbouring country. The bargaining power of the two actors involved in political exchanges is thus altered by a third force: the bordering homeland. This strengthens the bargaining power of the minority leaders by mobilising international support and putting pressure on authorities to implement minority rights measures. Minimally, the role of the external homeland is to make sure that democratic procedures and rules are observed and minority rights protected. Sometimes, the homeland is tempted to actively intervene in the nationalising project of the minority. It may attempt to define and control the criteria for belonging to the nation, and to establish a legal relation with its co-ethnic (as in the case of the Law on the Hungarian living in neighbouring countries, the so called Status Law).

The negotiations which take place at the centre rely on the mediation of interests at the local level.

In what follows I distinguish three types of interaction involving the local actors:

1) Hungarian local/centre elites

The political exchanges at the center are made possible through the co-operation between local and central leaders of the ethnic minorities. Interests are firstly negotiated at the local level, where ethnic political elites accommodate the diverging claims of the local factions. It is only in the second

---

[2] According to Kymlicka, differentiated rights cover "territorial autonomy, veto powers, guaranteed representation in central institutions, land claims and language rights" (1995:109).

Medianu, Narcisa. Relación entre lo local y lo central desde una perspectiva étnica: un estudio sobre la comunidad húngara en Rumanía.

phase that ethno-regional elites are involved in political exchanges with the central government.

2) Romanian local/centre elites

In several cities, where the display of ethnic symbols is acutely disputed, the Romanian local elites resisted the implementation of the provisions protecting the minority rights. The conflict over symbolic issues is often amplified by local authorities, which oppose the implementation of laws, are unwilling or unable to enforce them[3].

3) Hungarian-Romanian local negotiations are not very influential because of the difficulties to short-circuit the intervention of the center. The attempts to reinforce an overarching regional identity lack the political and economic support. However, along with the devolution processes which weaken the intervention of the center, the trend is towards the decentralisation of ethnic conflicts and accommodation of ethnic tensions at the local level.

5. NEGOTIATING AUTONOMY.

The discourse on minority rights is haunted by the specter of ethnic autonomy and federalisation.

For the Hungarian political leaders autonomy is the only legitimate politics. Support for the idea of a 'parallel' autonomous society distinguishes the loyal supporters of the Hungarian cause from those who endanger the community by favoring flexible, permeable boundaries between minority and majority. In this context, the way autonomy is envisioned is a potentially divisive topic within the Hungarian political community. Hungarian political leaders proved however able to forge (or to impose) a consensus, which strengthens their position in the negotiations at the center. In the name of unity, divergent voices are marginalised (see also Magyari-Vincze, 1997:207).

Secondly, territorial autonomy is a controversial aspect of the relations between minority and majority. Being an integral part of the nationalizing project of the minority, it cuts across the ideal endeared by the majority of a ethnically homogeneous and unitary nation-state. Minority claims for a separate, autonomous national existence collide with the centralized nation-state. In Eastern European countries nation-states were never a neutral arena of interest group conflict. Historically, the 'core nation' has been considered to legitimately own the polity (Brubaker, 1996). The state, in this ethnicised version, has *the obligation* to promote the language, economic welfare and political hegemony of the core nation as a remedial for previous discrimination.

Autonomy plays a key role in the negotiation process given the strength of majority and minority mirroring nationalisms. On the Romanian political stage the very absence of the claim for territorial autonomy is negotiated and

---

[3] Such an example is the issue of the bilingual signs for the locality names. In July 1997, the Government issued a decree (no. 22/97) stating that in localities where more than 20 percent of the population belongs to a minority ethnic group, street signs should be bilingual. This measure was very much contested and eventually it came out as urgency Ordinance. On 18th of July, in Targu Mures (Marasvasarhely-in Hungarian), supporters of extreme nationalist organisation (Vatra Mare) gathered and painted the bilingual signs in the colours of the Romanian flag. At the same time, while local authorities were trying to implement this measure, the District Roads Office (subordinated to the Ministry of Transport) removed the indicators because of a misunderstanding (Kovacs, 1999:203).
Another example is the agreement between the Hungarian and Romanian prime ministers to inaugurate a park of "Reconciliation Park" in Arad and to commemorate the statue of the 13 Hungarian generals who were executed in 1849. This attempt of reconciliation was unsuccessful, and again, local authorities, namely the Local Council, intervened by voting out the decision to give out the land for the construction of the park.

rewarded in the process of political exchange between elites. During DAHR's participation in the government (1996-2000), political leaders from the coalition agreed to give some measures of recognition and cultural autonomy in exchange for domestic and international political support. However, the imposed rule of the game was that DAHR (The Democratic Association of the Hungarians in Romania) will not formulate any claim for territorial autonomy while participating in the government.

Deviations from this rule endanger the democratic representation of the minorities, as it happened in 1995. At that time, the self-government initiative of the Hungarian politicians triggered off a violent reaction on behalf of the Romanian nationalist parties, which asked for outlawing DAHR. The issue at stake then was the fact that DAHR established the Council of Hungarian mayors and local councillors, seen by the Romanian politicians and mass media as an initiative to establish ethno-territorial autonomy. The conflict reached its peak at the beginning of 1995 when the government (the ruling left-wing party was in coalition with nationalist parties at that time) gave an ultimatum to DAHR and asked it to abolish these "antidemocratic and discriminatory practices". Such political crises in the relation between DAHR and other parties were avoided after 1996. The claim for territorial autonomy was pursued by Hungarian elites only in an attempt to boost its potential for negotiations.

6. MECHANISMS OF NEGOTIATIONS AND CONTROL.

Negotiations between leaders are characterised by the attempts of the political partners to keep each other in check, following democratic procedures. In what follows I will distinguish between the strategies of the central authorities to prevent the accumulation of local power and the strategies of local ethnic elites to maximise their bargaining power and access to resources.

Political control of the centre

The attempts of central authorities to dominate the local after 1989 bear some resemblance with the practices used during the socialist regime. Daniel Nelson (1988) distinguishes several ways in which the Communist party prevented the accretion of local power. Firstly, governments initiated territorial- administrative reforms which were not rooted in a concern for administrative efficiency. On the contrary, often such reforms aimed at making administrative units less independent and more vulnerable by multiplying their number[4]. Secondly, Nelson mentions the attempts to create an image of autonomy through the propaganda of "local initiatives", "community involvement". This propaganda was only a facade, meant to disguise the intention to control the sub-national units. Even when the reforms were aimed at local autonomy, their effect was nullified by the limitations imposed on local budgetary economy. Thirdly, local administration was controlled by the central party. The prefect as a supervisor of the local government exercised governmental control over local groups. Later on, (1975-) in both Poland and Romania local party secretaries simultaneous hold the position of people's council president. In Poland, the Prime Minister appointed "heads of administration" for wojewodztwa, who then appointed

---

[4] Such territorial administrative reforms took place in Poland between 1972-1975 (the number of wojewodztwa increased from 22 to 49), in Romania between 1968-1969 (39 judete replacing 16 regions), and in Slovakia in 1948 and 1960.

officials to act as mayors. Finally, socialist governments relied on the rotation of the local cadres and leaders to avoid power accretion.

7. THE REDEFINITION OF THE LOCAL.

The centralised socialist state dominated the local, regardless of whether it represented or not ethnic interests. Local/centre relations have been redefined after the collapse of socialism. After 1989 a series of reforms were initiated in order to promote local government and decentralise managerial responsibility. The implementation of these reforms was however temporised, the post-socialist governments revealing their lack of political will to give away power. Some of the strategies mentioned above survived the change of regimes being used to suppress the demands put forward by local leaders.

The practice of administrative reforms was used by Mečiar's regime in Slovakia. Starting with 1993, Hungarian parties asked for a new territorial division according to the "natural ethnic boundaries". Nevertheless, in 1996 the Slovak government passed the law on the new territorial division according to which Hungarians did not form a majority in any of the newly formed districts (in Viera Bacova, 1999: 154). After the 1998 elections, the issue is again on the political agenda.

Very often the theme of local autonomy is ethnicised in order to hinder the transfer of power to sub-national units. The boundary between local autonomy as a principle of efficient administration and ethnic local autonomy as a Hungarian threat to the 'state unity' are blurred by politicians trying to maintain the status quo.

Other limitation are imposed on local government through legislation and lack of financial devolution (for brief description of local government and local self-administration see the endnote[5i]). The centre continues to maintain the financial control and exercises its influence through informal and formal political hierarchies.

In Romania, the interviews conducted in Dec. 2000 with Hungarian representatives from Local Council (in Gheorgheni, a small town where the vast majority of inhabitants are Hungarians) show a deep dissatisfaction with the degree of financial autonomy granted to Local Councils.

"The local budget law is more than incomplete. It does not grant sufficient autonomy because even at this moment all the money goes first to Bucharest

---

[5] The two main administrative structures at the local level are the local government and the local state administration. Local government has a non-hierarchical two-tier structure, the lower tier consisting of localities (varying in size) and the upper tier of counties (judete). The lower tier is directly elected, that is all localities have a directly elected mayor and council. The local government structure for the upper tier is the county councils (and the county council chairman), elected indirectly by locality councils.

Local state administration is headed by the county prefect who is appointed by central government. The role of the prefect is to observe that things stay within the law. Formally, the relationship between the prefect and the county council chairman is not a hierarchical one, however in practice this depends on the informal networks of power relationships each of them has.

Most public services are run by autonomous authorities (regii autonome) whose financial accountability is somehow unclear. The range of public services provided by the autonomous authorities vary from heating and electricity supply, transportation, water, to communal services such as parks, street cleaning, waste disposal, markets, consumer protection. Some of them are funded by central government. While their ultimate accountability is towards the Ministry of public Work, some of them are under the control of locality (municipality) and some report to the county council. In his study on local government in Romania, Campbell points out that "views on the control and accountability vary: according to some they are accountable to no one, but in the opinion of others they are unable to manage on account of their subordination to mayor, county or prefect' (p. 86). However, as Campbell further stresses, local council have the right to decide how services under their control are delivered and by whom as well as to and hire directors (1995: 87-91).

and then a certain percent is returned. Abroad some of the local taxes stay in the locality right from the beginning. Here it happens that the money to be returned is negotiated and this I consider to be a form of political manipulation in economy."

The interviews pointed out that the redistribution of financial resources is perceived to be unjust, since it does not reflect the needs or the contribution to the total budget but the political influence of party leaders.

In this context, any increase in the responsibilities delegated to elected local representatives is perceived as a burden:

"The Local Council has more and more responsibilities (it is responsible for schools, health care, poverty, etc.) but it hasn't received a penny more from the state budget."

"The law stipulates that schools are to be paid from the local budget. We cannot afford to finance that from the local budget and, consequently, this responsibility is perceived as a burden, especially as long as our competence is limited to the financial aspect of school administration. The strategies for the development and functioning of the schools should also become the responsibility of the Local Council".

Thus, the delegation of responsibilities has no impact whatsoever in the absence of a long term strategy backed by the transfer of economic resources.

Mentalities

Besides the legislative limitations on local autonomy which allow for the interference of the central authorities in local affairs, all the respondents pointed out to the persistence of old mentalities which seem to change very slow. As they put it, "actually, there is no will to get things done". Even when the legislation allows, people behave according to old mentalities, avoiding responsibility.

"A lot has to be changed in the mentality of the people to make them value the existing possibilities. I think we should ask for more, only after we use what we have."

"In the last years certain progress has been made, but more with respect to the form (than to the content). Mentalities remain anchored in the past".

"All games are played in Bucharest and this is because both the interests and the mentalities of the people favor this state of affairs. For many the already established hierarchies of power are a routine."

The processes of devolution is thus constrained and temporised not only by the unwillingness of central leaders to give away power, but also through the persistence of informal hierarchies of power embedded in the old mentalities which stipulate the paternalistic role of the state.

Strategies to maximise local influence vis-à-vis the central authorities

The local is not as passive as it might appear from the picture above. Its capacity of reaction and putting pressure on the central authorities depends on several factors. Nelson (1988) draws a distinction between local power accretion (influenced by a strong ethno-regional identity and local economic resources) and horizontal integration. Horizontal integration represents the process through which "sub-national political institutions attempt to influence

decisions of prime concern to them at higher levels by mobilising and organising resources" (Nelson, 1988).

A key aspect of horizontal integration is the articulation of local interests. The degree of horizontal integration depends on the ability of ethnic political elites to forge and maintain consensus within the party. In Romania the Hungarian community is represented by a single political organisation- DAHR. DAHR, as an umbrella organisation, co-ordinates in a loose structure the local autonomous branches, which gather together political, cultural and professional groups. Over the last decade DAHR leaders have managed to maintain a monolithic discourse on minority rights marginalising the radical wing concerned with federalisation.

A similar trend towards the unity of the ethnic political movements can be noticed in Slovakia where the different Hungarian parties have eventually formed a unique coalition.

In the interviews conducted in Romania, people were asked about their views on the concept of autonomy put forward by DAHR. The opinions varied from a genuine endorsement of how autonomy is defined within DAHR to considering the definition the result of an imposed consensus.

"To maintain that half a million of people (i.e., the number of DAHR's members) think the same is stupid. Consensus assumes a mutual accommodation of opinions, but DAHR by itself is not a democratic but an authoritarian organisation. Thus, we cannot talk about consensus. Maybe about an 'imposed consensus', about orders.

"As in any political party, there is a divergence of opinions also within DAHR. However, the concepts of personal, administrative and territorial autonomy were elaborated on the basis of consensus."

Secondly, the process of horizontal integration is backed by the use of democratic policy tools in order to generate pressure on central authorities . The bargaining power of ethnic parties is also enhanced by their capacity to generate pressure on central authorities through democratic means. In 1995 for instance, the Hungarian community reacted promptly to the Law on Education (84/1995), which tries to restrain minority rights. DAHR territorial branches organised a series of protest manifestations including collection of signatures, meetings, seminars and so on.

Similarly, the referendum was used by local actors to put pressure on the central government. In Slovakia, the referendum in Šturovo has become a symbol of resistance against central government. The local self-government organised a local referendum on the direct election of the president and the joining of NATO, which replaced the national referendum cancelled by V. Mečiar (Buček, 2001:288).

Nevertheless, when the issue at stake was secession, referendums were used and misused by political elites to legitimise their claims. This was the case in the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, where the collapse of the socialist rule was followed by the break up of the country. Referendums became a genuine 'political weapon' of minorities demanding autonomy. As Brandy and Kaplan mention, in Yugoslavia there was an "anarchy of referendums" and "they have often seemed more like the battle cries of highly mobilised and desperate populations than instruments of deliberative democracy" (1994:206). Between

1990-1993, 17 referendums took place in the territory of former Yugoslavia[6].

Thirdly, leaders of ethno-regional parties use EU policies and institutions to assist their demands for autonomy. Ethnic parties tend to "Europeanize" their goals, to integrate their claims for autonomy into the broader vision of euroregions.

The interaction between self-government claims and the European integration process is twofold: not only that EU discourse shapes the goals of ethnic parties but, at the same time, ethnic parties use EU policies and institutions to assist their demands for autonomy (Peter Lynch, 1996 :10). Generally speaking, the positions of the ethnic parties vary from *negative linkage* (seeking independent statehood and full membership of EU) to a *positive linkage* (based on demands for regional autonomy and decentralization in a Europe of regions) (Peter Lynch, 1996).

In Romania, the positive linkage had an impact on the political discourse of DAHR. The program of the political party explicitly refers to forms of autonomy which are against the Romanian Constitution and are not backed up by European Union. Nevertheless, the public discourse of DAHR has increasingly moved in the direction of regionalisation and regional development, which is part of the EU integration strategy.

Regional development seems to represent the middle way between the DAHR's conception on autonomy and the central government adherence to centralisation. In 1997, the Green Card of regional development policies was adopted and that seemed to be a promising beginning. Nevertheless, the regional structures (Regional Development Councils) are still far away from playing an influential role in the management of local affairs.

As one of the respondents put it:

"I consider the development regions as forms without content. They are established, it's clear to whom they belong, there are directors, offices, secretaries, computers, cars, but nothing is done! For every problem, when we ask their help, they answer: 'but we don't know, we have to ask the people from Bucharest'".

Although the persistence of old mentalities hinders the functioning of these new decentralised administrative structures, regionalisation has the advantage of not being that much associated in the minds of people with the danger of dismembering and federalising the country.

---

[6] Referendums were held before the proclamation of independence in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Yugoslavia referendums were held in Kosovo were the result was overwhelmingly in favor of independence (99%) and in Montenegro where the population voted for staying in Yugoslavia (75%). As regards minorities demanding autonomy, referendums organised by Serbs from various parts of Croatia (Krajina, Slavonia, Baranjia, Srem), and from Bosnia and Herzegovia (twice).

Medianu, Narcisa. Relación entre lo local y lo central desde una perspectiva étnica: un estudio sobre la comunidad húngara en Rumanía.

8. CONCLUSION.

The incompleteness and temporisation of local government reform is mediated through the mechanisms of negotiation between local and central elites and between ethnic parties and leaders of the governmental coalition. Local political elites develop certain strategies of bargaining in order to maximise their access to resources. I focus here on three aspects. Firstly, they mediate and negotiate the unity of local factions, sometimes at the expense of representing the diversity of interests. In this light, one could understand the trend towards the formation of a single umbrella party representing the Hungarian minority in Romania (the Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania) and in Slovakia (the Hungarian Coalition Party). Secondly, local actors can organise protest activities (meetings, demonstrations) and use policy tools, such as referendums, in order to generate pressure on central authorities. Thirdly, the leaders of ethno-regional parties use EU policies and institutions to assist their demands for autonomy. Ethnic parties tend to "Europeanize" their goals, to integrate their claims for autonomy into the broader vision of euroregions.

The centre on the other hand tries to limit the accretion of local power by temporising the local government reform. In addition, one of the most efficient ways of discrediting the concept of local autonomy remains the 'ethnicisation' of the issue. That is, in the public discourse the theme of decentralisation is associated with the "ethnic danger" i.e., federalising the country.

Certain aspects of the legislation also place limitations on local autonomy and favour the domination of the centre. However, as data from interviews conducted with Hungarian representatives from local administration point out, a crucial impediment is the persistence of old mentalities, as well as informal hierarchies of power. In concluding, it is worth pointing out that the consolidation of the democratic system does lead towards the decentralisation and devolution of political and economic power, as well as granting of self-government rights. However, this is a long-term gradual process (different from post Franco's Spain for instance), a by-product of the negotiations between the central and local actors who try to keep each other in check.

Medianu, Narcisa. Relación entre lo local y lo central desde una perspectiva étnica: un estudio sobre la comunidad húngara en Rumanía.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Andreescu, Gabriel. "Continuarea participarii UDMR la guvernare: prima faza a democratiei consensualiste romanesti?". En: Provincia, año 1, nº. 7, nov. 2000.

Brady, Henry and Kaplan, Cynthia. "Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union". En: Referendums around the World: The Growing use of Direct Democracy, eds. David Butler and Austin Ranney, Washington D.C.: The AEI Press.1994

Brubaker, Rogers. Nationalism Reframed: nationhood and the national question in the New Europe. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Buček, Jan. "Responding to Diversity: Solutions at the Local level in Slovakia". En: Diversity in Action: Local Public management of Multi-Ethnic Communities, eds. Anna-Maria Biro and Petra Kovacs, CEU Press: Budapest, 2001.

Campbell, Adrian. "Local Government in Romania". En: Local Government in Eastern Europe: Establishing Democracy at the Grassroots, ed. by Andrew Coulson, Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Company, 1995.

Crawford, Young. "Cultural Pluralism in the Third World". En: Competitive Ethnic Relations, eds. S. Olzak and J. Nagel, London: Academic Press, 1986.

Lynch, Peter. Minority Nationalism and European Integration, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996.

Kovacs, Cziprian. " Public Administration as a Catalyst for Inter-ethnic Tension". En: Reflections on Differences: Focus on Romania, Irina Culic, Istvan Horvath, and Cristian Stan (eds.). Cluj: IPIS, 1999.

Kymlicka, Will. Multicultural Citizenship, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Lijphart, Aren. Democracy in Plural Societies, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

Magyari-Vincze. Antropologia politicii identitare nationaliste, Cluj Napoca: Ed. Fundatiei pt. Studii Europene,1997.

Molnar, Gustav. "Sansele democratiei consociative in Transilvania". En: Provincia , año 1, nº 6, oct. 2000.

Nelson, Daniel. Elite-Mass Relations in Communist Systems, Basingstoke: Macmillan,1988.

Medianu, Narcisa. Relación entre lo local y lo central desde una perspectiva étnica: un estudio sobre la comunidad húngara en Rumanía.

Parri, Leonardo. "Territorial Politics and Political Exchange: American Federalism and French Unitarianism Reconsidered". En: Governance and generalised exchange: self-organising policy networks in action, ed. by Bernd Marin, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990.

Rothchild, Donald. "Hegemonial Exchange: An Alternative Model for Managing Conflict in Middle Africa". En: Ethnicity, Politics and Development, ed. by Dennis Thompson and Dov Ronnen, Boulders, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1985.