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***EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
AND ETHNIC MOBILIZATION
IN NEWLY ADMITTED COUNTRIES:
THE CASE OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY
IN ROMANIA***

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EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND ETHNIC MOBILIZATION IN NEWLY ADMITTED COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN ROMANIA ♦

Lavinia Bucsa ♦

Our goal is territorial autonomy, not just cultural autonomy. (...) From now on, the European Parliament will become an important arena for our efforts aimed at gaining Hungarians' rights.¹

Marko Bela, *President of the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania (UDMR)*

We do not want a revision of borders, we will be content with territorial autonomy and this minimal requirement should be unequivocally supported by our (Hungarian) motherland.²

Laszlo Tokes, *Chairman of the National Council of Hungarians from Transylvania*

I. Introduction

Recently, Romania held its first elections for the European Parliament (EP).³ Despite of what many public opinion researches have forecasted, Bishop Laszlo Tokes, the “hardliner” leader of the National Council of Ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania (CNMT), unexpectedly won a seat and became one of the three Hungarian minority’s representatives in the EP. During his electoral campaign, Tokes forcefully focused his discourse on the issue of territorial autonomy of the “Szeklers’ Region.”⁴ Coupled with the debate on the reorganization of Romania’s development regions in the context of European integration, Tokes’ rhetoric won him the support of 3.4 percent of the Hungarian electorate.

Similarly, Marko Bela, the moderate leader of the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania (UDMR) – the political organization that has been representing Hungarian minority’s interests since 1990 and from which CNMT split in 2003 – has radicalized his electoral discourse as well. Bela’s speeches at the launching the UDMR’s candidates for the EP elections underlined the determination of the UDMR politicians to “provide Hungarians from Transylvania the

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¹ UDMR’s President Marko Bela: “*Statement-Program for European Parliamentary Elections*,” March 3, 2007, available on-line (Romanian language) on UDMR’s web-site at: <http://www.udmr.ro>

² RFE/RL News, March 3, 2004. Tokes was also elected on June 16, 2006 as the first chairman-in-office of the newly formed Council for the Autonomy of Carpathian Region Magyars which include ethnic organizations from Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

³ Romania joined the EU on January 1, 2007; The EP elections were held on November 25, 2007

⁴ This is a region in the western part of Transylvania (central Romania) consisting of three counties – Harghita, Covasna, Mures - in which Hungarian population represents the majority (about 70 percent of the population).

autonomy of the “Szeklers’ Land.”⁵ He repeatedly declared that European Union (EU) must be build so that “Hungarian-Hungarian co-existence be perfect.” In addition, by using the EU’s “regionalization” theme, Bela proposed a new draft-law on Romania’s territorial reorganization which would re-establish the “Szecklers’ Region,” thereby de-centralizing the state’s power – a “viable and European-like project.”⁶ This was a winning strategy, as UDMR managed to send two representatives of its own to Brussels.

The territorial autonomy of Transylvania has been a recurrent issue in post-communist Romanian politics. The nationalist rhetoric was heard constantly since 1990s, as both minority and majority elites played the “ethnic card” for electoral gains. However, what might be now surprising for many observers are the persistence and the relevance of the “autonomist” message in the new context of Romania’s EU membership.

Furthermore, the way this message has been framed by the Hungarian political elites – by using “European” themes such as “regionalization,” “Europe of the Regions,” “Catalan autonomist model” - raises an important question: is there a link between European integration and the radicalization of ethnic discourse? Does European integration affect ethnic mobilization and if so, how? This paper aims to address these questions by examining the case of Hungarian minority in Romania, through exploring the behavior of its political organizations (UDMR and CNMT), in the period from 1990 to present.⁷

Some scholars have argued that political rhetoric is itself political behavior.⁸ Thus, as a methodological tool, and in order to illustrate the arguments that will be made, this research uses discourse analysis of interviews with major Hungarian leaders and other relevant actors, news, political platforms, etc. Data has been collected by accessing the news section of Lexis-Nexis Academic and News-Bank through FIU Library and also Romanian-language sources (major newspapers, official web-sites).

This represent exploratory research and, therefore, it has only a limited relevance. One limitation, among others, is that being a case-study approach, it does not allow generalizations. However, scholars⁹ have pointed out that case-studies have the capacity to yield important theoretical gains by testing previous hypotheses from the literature, and to generate new theoretical insights.

2. Theoretical Framework

The link between European integration and minority mobilization in the newly admitted EU countries has received relatively little scholarly attention.¹⁰ Although research on ethnic politics in Western Europe has led a number of scholars to argue that there is a growing link between European integration and minority mobilization, there is still little systematic research on whether

⁵ “Romanian Hungarians’ Party Seeks EU Autonomy for Szeklerland,” BBC Monitoring Europe, October 22, 2007. Bela declared: “(...) for a century and a half our country (n.n. Transylvania) did not belong to us anymore. For the last time this country was lost in 1918 and our duty is to regain this lost territory.”

⁶ Speech Marko Bela, October 12, Targu Mures, Romania, “Divers” newspaper, at: <http://www.divers.ro>

⁷ In 2003 CNMT split from UDMR; in addition, the kin-state Hungary joined the EU in 2004 and Romania joined the Union in January 2007; thus the period from 2003 to present is particularly important because both the actors and the context in which they act are radically different from the previous period (1990-2000)

⁸ V.P. Gagnon: “*Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia*,” 1995

⁹ G. King, R. Keohane, S. Verba: “*Designing Social Inquiry*,” 1994

¹⁰ An exception is S. Anagnostou, and A. Triandafyllidou: “*European Integration and Ethnic Minority Mobilization: A theoretical Introduction and Literature Review*,” 2006.

and how “Europe” as a set of institutional resource and framing device has affected the actions and repertoires of ethnic minority movements in Central Eastern Europe (CEE).¹¹

In the context of Western Europe, a burgeoning literature has emerged around what has been termed “sub-national mobilization.”¹² More recent studies have analyzed the impact of European integration on ethno-regionalist parties¹³ and whether the EU may actually encourage sub-national autonomy movements.¹⁴ By contrast, scholarship on post-Communist democratization pays a great deal of attention to the role of Western (especially European) institutions, norms, and actors in compelling governments and minority groups to reach agreements on divisive issues, or to the evolution of state policies toward ethnic minorities.¹⁵ Overall, this research has documented how (and to what degree) the EU, through its conditionality mechanisms, has offered frameworks for the regulation and management of ethnic relations in the post-communist Central and East European countries.

Recent literatures on Europeanization, regionalism and the “new nationalism,”¹⁶ however, have suggested that the EU, through its minority rights and regionalization policies, and the tendency toward “multi-level governance,”¹⁷ has created a transnational space for discourse and action in which minorities can now advance claims for self-determination and territorial autonomy. According to this line of reasoning, beside its beneficial impact on democratization process in CEE, the EU provides new political opportunities, for both “nations without states” and “national minorities,”¹⁸ to project their identities within a wider political space, to operate within multiple arenas (local, regional, transnational/international) and even to influence EU policies.

A relatively similar argument, coming from the literature on nationalism in CEE, posits that regional integrative processes significantly change domestic and international opportunity structures for nationalist pursuit of political-cultural coherence (although, irredentist tendencies became inconceivable within EU), but integration does not cause nationalism to lose its relevance. Rather, old and new forms of nationalism coexist and mutually challenge and reinforce

¹¹ For an exception see K. Harper and P. Vermeersch: “*Great Expectations? “Europe” in Romani Activism,*” 2002; P. Vermeersch: “*The Romani Movement: Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe,*” 2006

¹² See, for example, Hooghe, L.: “*Sub-national Mobilization in the European Union,*” 1995; Hooghe, L.: “*Building an Europe with the Regions: The Changing Role of European Commission,*” 1996; Jeffrey, C. (ed): “*The Regional Dimension of European Union,*” 1997; Keating, M.: “*The New Regionalism in Western Europe (...),*” 1998; Le Gales, P. and Lequesne, C. (eds.): “*Regions in Europe,*” 1998

¹³ De Winter: “*The Impact of European Integration on Ethno-regionalist Parties,*” 2001

¹⁴ S. Jolly. “*How the EU Fuels Sub-National Regionalism,*” 2007

¹⁵ J. Kelly: “*Ethnic Politics in Europe: The Power of Norms and Incentives,*” 2004; Hughes, J. and Sasse, G.: “*Monitoring the Monitors: EU Enlargement Conditionality and Minority Protection in CEE,*” 2003; Vermeersch, P.: “*EU Enlargement and Minority Rights Politics in Central Europe: Explaining Policy Shifts in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland,*” 2003; M.A. Vachudova.: “*Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration after Communism,*” 2005

¹⁶ P. Lynch: “*Minority Nationalism and European Integration,*” 1996; Keating and McGarry: “*Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order,*” 2001; Jones and Keating: “*The European Union and the Regions,*” 1995; Csergo and Goldgeier: “*Nationalist Strategies and European Integration,*” 2004; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (eds.): “*Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe,*” 2005; Lequesne and Le Gales (eds.): “*Regions in Europe,*” 1998

¹⁷ The term has become commonplace in EU studies in recent years and it is usually used to capture the peculiar qualities of the EU’s political system. The multi-level governance (MLG) proposes a picture of the EU policy process consisting of several tiers of authority (the European, national, and sub-national) and it also emphasizes the fluidity between these tiers, so that policy actors may move between different levels of action. Moreover, dispersion of authority is uneven across policy areas; at the same time, national governments remain important sites of authority. See Hooghe and Marks: “*Multilevel Governance and European Integration,*” 2001; Schmitter: “*Imagining the future of the Euro-polity with the help of new concepts,*” 1996; The MLG’s claim represents a direct challenge to theories such as Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism. See Moravcsik “*Preferences and power in the European community: a liberal intergovernmentalist approach,*” 1993; Rosamond: “*Theories of European integration,*” 2000.

¹⁸ M. Keating: “*European Integration and the Nationalities Question,*” 2003

one another in a complex and dynamic process that shapes the direction of integration¹⁹ (since the recent enlargement to the east significantly shifts the balance within the Union among states and groups pursuing different types of nationalism).

The behavior of the Hungarian minority in Romania, particularly in the last four years, seems to illustrate these insights relatively well. In order to appeal to their constituency, the leaders of the Hungarian minority, both moderates and hardliners, framed their demands in “European terms,” and also acted on multiple political arenas. At the domestic level, territorial autonomy became a powerful rhetorical device for ethnic mobilization by elites in their struggle for winning electoral contests (both minority-majority and, later, intra-organizational contests). Hungarian political elites have used the dual, and sometimes ambiguous, provisions of the EU minority rights and regionalization regimes as a vehicle for projecting their identities and group interests within a wider, “European,” political space.

At the supra-national level, through membership in European parliamentary party-groups (such as the European People’s Party-PPE, the first declared “transnational” party, and favoring a federalist view of the EU) and other trans-national organizations (e.g. Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization/UNPO, the ethnic Hungarian leaders have tried, and continue to try, to influence the European discourse and policies in the field of minority rights and regionalism, and therefore to make them more compatible with Hungarians’ “historical aspirations.”

Moreover, aided by the successive governments of the kin-state (Hungary), and recently by Viktor Orban, the chairman of the Hungarian opposition party FIDESZ, Hungarian leaders from Romania attempted (though only with limited success so far) to weaken the central state’s control over the region in which Hungarian minority represents the majority of the population. They have tried to exercise pressure on the state not only “from below,” through the mechanisms of electoral politics, but also “from above.”

In the light of the above discussion, this paper suggests that the “multi-level games” played by Hungarian leaders, despite being influenced by domestic circumstances and intra-organizational competition, were facilitated (or mediated) by the EU accession and integration processes. The complexity of EU and the existence of competing views for the future of Europe - that is, intergovernmental vs. federalist/“Europe of the Regions”- have enabled minority leaders to take a flexible approach to Europe. They have promoted a certain understanding of “Europe,” (one that “fits” their aspirations and goals) and so have found opportunities to use EU policies and institutional developments to assist their demands for autonomy and to mobilize their electorate. Paradoxically, by leveraging minorities through the EU conditionality mechanisms in the accession period, European integration became itself, unintentionally, a potential motive for group radicalization.

The leaders of Hungarian minority’s political organizations are increasingly seeking to exploit the process of European integration to assist their domestic political demands by adopting a range of “linkage strategies,” which are reactions to developments within the European Union that can be grafted on to the political discourse of nationalism. Thus, European integration is treated as a political resource to bolster demands for autonomy. Before I turn to the examination of the practice of this linkage, a brief discussion of the historical context of inter-ethnic relations in Transylvania will be presented next.

¹⁹ Csergo and Goldgeier: “*Nationalist Strategies and European Integration*,” 2004. The nationalist strategies that the authors delineate are: traditional (nation-state), sub-state (pertaining the ethnic groups, i.e. Hungarian minority), transsovereign, and protectionist. Of particularly importance is the transsovereign type, which has as main objective “the creation of institution to link nation across state borders.” According to the authors, the nation-building strategy of Hungary (“virtual nationalism”) after 1990 exemplifies this approach best.

2.1. Ethnic relations in context: history, democratization and European integration

Transylvania, the western part of Romania which comprises the Hungarian minority, has been historically regarded as a homeland by both Romanians and Hungarians (Magyars) groups. The beginning of the eighteenth century found Transylvania integrated into the Hapsburg Empire, as a self-governing unit, and from 1867 the province belonged to Hungary within the framework of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. After the First World War (with the provisions established by the Treaty of Trianon), Romania acquired Transylvania and, with it, a sizable Hungarian population which became “national minority.”

So, Transylvania entered the age of nation-building facing the consequences of competition between two “parallel discourses of legitimacy”²⁰ – the Hungarian and the Romanian ones – both of which have claimed state-building rights for their own nation. The long term result has been that “national territory” became an essential element of cultural identity; and a mutually exclusive perception of national interests has led to the polarization of society along ethnic lines. Unlike the Roma or other smaller ethnic minorities living in Transylvania, the Hungarian community *does* have a strongly developed and fully integrated sense of regional national identity. This includes the perception of its own historically constituted territorial basis, which for Hungarians *legitimizes* the claims for autonomy.

The breakdown of the Romanian communist regime in 1989 created a new environment for the different processes of national institutionalization, now in a democratic framework. However, the national projects of the titular nation (Romanian) and that of Hungarian minority found themselves into an antagonistic situation - and also generated the active engagement by the governments of the neighboring Hungary. The Romanian state defended the internationally recognized principle of *sovereignty* and defined Romania as a “unitary nation-state.” In a similar logic, Hungarian leaders used the discourse of minority rights and self-determination to assert their rights for cultural and territorial autonomy.

The transition from communism and the process of constructing democratic political systems saw a widespread mobilization of historical minorities in the entire CEE region. Ethnic parties were created and, as in the case of UDMR in Romania, they have participated, since the mid 90s, in governmental coalitions. In addition, minority claims and demands have been implicitly or explicitly defended (and promoted as a condition for membership) by European organizations such as the Council of Europe seeking to diffuse nationalist tensions and prevent conflict. It follows that Hungarian minority’s assertion and politicization after 1990 was not only made possible by democratization, but has also been encouraged by the emerging European human rights and minority protection regime.

Finally, in the more recent context of implementing the EU structural/cohesion policy – which requires devolution of power to regional and sub-national units, thereby challenging, indirectly, the national socio-political and cultural boundaries - regional administrative reforms required by the EU open up a greater space for and revitalized mobilization among local and regional actors, including ethnic parties.

These unresolved dilemmas (i.e. how to accommodate the principles of sovereignty in a multinational context, in a way that satisfies the requirements of equality and inclusions) that the new members of the EU bring with them are not unique to the post-communist societies, but the divisiveness of these questions is more apparent in the CEE context and this makes the Hungarian elites’ current discourse radicalization even more salient. Although Europe does give countries a new framework within which issues of nationality, self-government and self-determination can be negotiated, it does not provide a (definitive) answer to the “nationalities questions.” Europe lacks a clear normative basis, one that applies in similar ways to both the eastern and the western part of the continent, and some fear that it thus might become a merely arena for group competition.

²⁰ Flora: “*Competing Cultures, Conflicting Identities: The Case of Transylvania*,” 2001

2.2. Concepts: definitions & clarifications

Different strands of literature describe the phenomenon of minority mobilization under various and sometimes confusing terms (i.e. “minority radicalization,” “ethno-nationalism,” “sub-state nationalism”); it would be therefore useful to clarify the concepts I use.

First, *mobilization* has been defined as the process by which an ethnic community (group)²¹ becomes politicized on behalf of its collective interests and aspirations.²² This process requires awareness, usually promoted by “ethnic entrepreneurs,” that political action is necessary to promote the community’s vital interests. Mobilization is a dynamic process that varies in intensity at different times: it may rise and fall, but seldom disappears;²³ hence, the necessity to identify the conditions that trigger and maintain mobilizing efforts.

Secondly, in the CEE context, in which the implications of the presence or the absence of a kin-state are significant, scholars have made the distinction between “external,” “transnational” and “indigenous” minorities.²⁴ For the purpose of this analysis, “*external*” minorities are those minorities that, while living on the territory of one-state (“host-state”) are ethnically akin to the titular nation of another, often neighboring state (kin-state). A related observation refers to the fact that, confronting the threat to, or the opportunity for self-identification and uniqueness leads to ethnic identity being politicized, that is, to the ethnic group being a political actor by virtue of its shared ethnic identity. Consequently, ethnic groups, especially if they are in a perceived situation of disadvantage, make demands that reflect both the historic continuities as well as perceived opportunities.²⁵

Thirdly, as I have explained earlier, in the CEE, the link between ethnicity and territory have a particular resonance and are linked to the notion of power. In the literature of nationalism as a form of politics, the concept of *nationalism* expresses the desire of an ethnic group to gain political power.²⁶ Brubaker understands nationalism as “a form of remedial action.”²⁷ Other scholars prefer the term “*ethno-politics*,” as a more inclusive concept, encompassing aspirations for self-determination and the congruence of culture with polity but short of the creation of a nation-state. It also includes politics that are non-conflictual.²⁸

Lastly, a group *demand* or *claim* is defined as “a bid by minority representatives against the center for a degree of control over state institutions.”²⁹ It follows that *minority radicalization* denotes the collective expression of, or support for more extreme demands by the minority constituents. Minority radicalization is operationalized as the extremity of collective demands that minority representatives advance against the center.³⁰ Furthermore, a group can be said to “make” a particular demand if it is put forward by the party of political leaders who enjoy broad support

²¹ Following Horowitz, an ethnic group can be defined as a community whose membership is based on the possession of a trait that is taken to be ascriptive and thus largely inherited. Horowitz: “*Ethnic Groups in Conflict*,” 1985.

²² Esman: “*Ethnic Politics*,” 1994

²³ Kantor: *The Status Law Syndrome and Regional/National Identity: Hungary, Hungarians in Romania, and Romania*, 2006

²⁴ Wolff: “*Beyond Ethnic Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*,” 2002. Also, Keating, makes another distinction between “stales nations,” groups who see themselves as a distinct nationality but have no state of their own, being contained within a state dominated by another nationality (i.e. Basque and Catalans in Spain) and “national minorities,”—groups within a state who identify with a titular nation of another state (e.g. Hungarians from Romania and Slovakia, or Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland).

²⁵ M. Keating: “*European Integration and the Nationalities Question*,” 2003

²⁶ Smith, A.: *National Identity*, 1991

²⁷ Brubaker: “*Nationalism Reframed*,” 1996

²⁸ Rotschild: “*Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual framework*,” 1981

²⁹ Erin Jenne: “*Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment*,” 2007

³⁰ Ibid. Jenne measures the extremity of group’s demands along a continuum, with secession and irredentism as the more extreme and minor claims such as affirmative action as the least extreme. Demands for territorial autonomy constitute, obviously, a greater challenge than those for cultural autonomy.

within minority rank and file. Group demands are tied to minority radicalization because ethnic demands enjoy legitimacy in the international discourse and therefore help mobilize international support for minority's cause.

2.3. Theoretical insights on ethnic mobilization and on the EU's impact on sub-state actors' Behavior

There are many factors that have a direct impact on ethnic mobilization, and they are generally classified in two broad categories: internal and external/environmental. For example, structural factors such as group size, location, and territorial compactness are determinant of the nature of claims a group can advance.³¹ However, scholars have shown "that movements develop in response to an ongoing process of interaction between movement groups and the larger sociopolitical environment they seek to change."³²

Insights from the social movement literature shows that the prospects of ethnic mobilization are dependent on the changes in the institutional political system, the availability of organizational structures around ethnic identity, and the presence of powerful schemes of interpretation conducive to ethnic mobilization. This strand of literature regards as important the activities of those who present themselves as leaders of ethnic minorities, their resources, and their ability *to make public claims* in the name of the minority. Two elements are relevant: "political opportunity structure" and "framing" (defined as "the conscious strategic effort by groups of people to fashion a shared understanding of reality, and intentionally choose a frame for mobilization").³³

Peter Eisinger defines political opportunity structure as "elements in the environment that impose certain constraints on political activity or opens avenues for it."³⁴ According to Sidney Tarrow, collective action is enabled by the expansion of the political opportunity structure, defined as "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics."³⁵ Moreover, political opportunity structure may occur when a government liberalize or when its rulers become preoccupied with foreign engagements.³⁶

Political opportunities theorists draw our attention to such matters as leadership, networks,³⁷ allies, and political and institutional opportunities as central elements for ethnic mobilization. Another area of influence that has not attracted much attention in the study of ethnic movements is the international environment. In general, much of the literature takes domestic states as the principal referents. However, in the CEE context, ethnic mobilization cannot be understood without taking the international context into account.

In this respect, Erin Jenne³⁸ has proposed an "ethnic bargaining model," which posits that group radicalization is driven by shifting *perceptions* of relative power against the center. These perceptions are informed both by changes in the institutional opportunity structure and by the actions of the group's external *lobby actor*, defined as "a kin-state, or any powerful state, organization (e.g. EU) interest group, etc. that intervenes or threatens to intervene of behalf of the minority against its host government."³⁹ For instance, a diplomatic intervention by a homeland

³¹ Mikesell and Murphy: "A Framework for Comparative Study of Minority Group Aspirations," 1991

³² Mc Adam: "*Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*," 1982. In a similar vein, Milton Esman has argued that ethnic mobilization is a consequence of mixed motives and incentives. See "*Ethnic Politics*," 1994

³³ McAdam et al.: "*Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framing*," 1996

³⁴ P. Eisinger: "*The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities*," 1973

³⁵ S.Tarrow: "*Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*," 1998

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ T. Risse, K.Sikkink: "*The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices*," 1999

³⁸ E. Jenne: "*Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment*," 2007

³⁹ Ibid.

state may lead minority representative to believe that they enjoy leverage against the center and therefore to escalate their demands for territorial autonomy. Thus, according to Jenne's theory, by leveraging the minority, the opportunity structure is *itself* a potent motive for group radicalization. Jenne argues that the EU only *indirectly* can influence minority behavior by altering the preferences of the group's host and lobby states.

Two types of opportunity structures are most important, according to Jenne. The first is the *institutional opportunity* structure—defined as the transient political environment that emerges, often unexpectedly, to alter the balance of power between the minority and the center.⁴⁰ The second type refers to the *discursive* opportunity structures, which are generally more malleable, and adaptable to a range of settings. They inform not only the legitimate forms of political organization, but also the means by which the actors can pursue their goals.

Other illuminating arguments come from the literatures on regionalism and Europeanization, which is vast and, in general, signal the role of regions and other sub-national actors in European politics.⁴¹ Jones and Keating, for example conclude that power relations within member states can change under European impact. They argue that the combination of European opportunities and regional activism results in a differentiated pattern of shifts in central-local relations. Other articles show that EU cohesion policy “has not left relations between central and sub-national actors undisturbed.”⁴² Finally, the literature on Europeanization⁴³ shows that, as the overall direction of EU is toward the devolution of competencies both up to the EU-level, and down to regions (“multi-level governance”), domestic actors use Europeanization as an opportunity to further their goals.

Lastly, one recent study suggests the importance of political opportunities at the transnational level. Peter Vermeersch⁴⁴ shows that the European integration process and the emergence of transnational organizations working on issues such as human rights provided Romani (Gypsy) activists with ideological and material resources that helped sustain their ethnic mobilization attempts. In other words, Romani mobilization was influenced by both domestic policies and institutions and by an international political opportunity structure.

Overall, these studies conclude that, although we should not take the supranational European level as the *predominant* realm of influence on minority mobilization, it is important to notice that domestic ethnic mobilization in the CEE was, at particular times, *determined* by the attention devoted to it in the realm of European politics.

3. EU Opportunity Structure

This section examines the more concrete opportunity structures that Europe offers for satisfying nationality claims by means short of independence. As I have mentioned, there is a general consensus that the emerging European order is complex and multilayered, with a range of continental bodies not all of which have the same territorial coverage. There is the Council of Europe, European Parliament, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as a range of inter-state and inter-regional bodies. Although there is no place for what Keating has called “stateless nations” and national minorities, there may be opportunities to play various roles.⁴⁵ By gaining representation in the national Parliaments, as happened with most ethnic

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ B. Jones and M. Keating: “*The European Union and the Regions*,” 1995

⁴² L. Hooghe (ed): “*Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi-Level Governance*,” 1996

⁴³ Conceptually, “Europeanization” is defined as “the emergence and the development at the European level of distinct structures of governance.” See: Cowles, Caporaso, Risse (eds.): “*Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*,” 2001

⁴⁴ Vermeersch: “*The Romani Movement Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization In Contemporary Central Europe*,” 2006

⁴⁵ Keating: “*European Integration and the Nationalities Questions*,” 2003

parties after 1990 in CEE, minorities gain direct access to the supranational level through their delegates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The European opportunities and instruments that could be used by minorities are mostly of two types: (1) opportunities for regions in Europe and (2) minority rights regimes.

In the early 90s, there was a lot of interest in the concept of a “*Europe of the Regions*.” This was never clearly specified, but, according to Keating, it seemed to refer to “an order in which regions were recognized as a third level of government alongside with states and the European Union itself.”⁴⁶ Although regions and minorities were too heterogeneous ever to fit into such a scheme, in practice, the Europe of Regions evolved into a series of opportunities to intervene in EU policy making, either by direct links to Brussels or via the member states.

A clause in the 1992 Treaty on European Union allows regional ministers to represent member states in the Council of Ministers where domestic law provides for this.⁴⁷ This is applied in Germany, Austria, Belgium, and the UK in various ways. Thus, while European “high policymaking” remains largely intergovernmental, the treaties do provide mechanisms whereby regions can become actors, obviously, provided that they succeed in enforcing their demands in domestic constitution-building.

Another mechanism established by the Treaty of EU is the *Committee of the Regions*. For regionalists and minority nationalist, this has proved a disappointment because of its weak powers and lack of resources and because it represents all levels of sub-member state governments on a basis of equality.⁴⁸ Dissatisfaction with this latter feature, which puts municipalities and strong regions on the same footing, led federated units and “stateless nations” to seek recognition of their place in the European constitution by advancing the initiative Regions with Legislative Powers.⁴⁹ A parallel initiative is the alliance of Constitutional Regions, which involves the same players but originates in the Council of Ministers.⁵⁰ Although neither initiative corresponds to cultural or national minorities, there is enough of an overlap to make common cause in asserting the need for a regionalized level within the European architecture. German Landers, Italian regions, Scotland, Wales, Flanders, and Catalonia have been involved in these initiatives.

Structural Funds have been also given a lot of attention, as a means of giving regions direct access to Brussels, a partnership with the Commission, and a source of funding independent of the member states. In practice, however, the management of the funds is largely dominated by the states. As Keating has suggested,⁵¹ the funds should be perhaps best seen as an arena for symbolic politics, in which regional and local politicians can claim to have established a funding link to Brussels.

Beyond the formal bodies of the EU and the Council of Ministers, there is a range of inter-regional bodies and networks, which further reinforce the concept of a European political space for regions, and encourage minorities to enter the European game. For example, one important opportunity lies in cross-border cooperation, which is encouraged both by the EU and by the Council of Europe. However, while in the new Europe borders have much lost their functional rationale, they still have symbolic importance as expressions of state sovereignty—as I have discussed previously.

The EU in conjunction with the Council of Europe (CoE) has emphasized a variety of methods for protecting *minority cultural and political rights* in the process of integrating CEE states. The CoE Recommendation no. 1201 of 1993 advocated that regionally concentrated minorities have the right to special status of local autonomy -- which had become a point of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Keating: “*European Integration and the Nationalities Questions*,” 2003

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Keating: “*European Integration and the Nationalities Questions*,” 2003

friction between Hungary and Romania (and Slovakia). Through the 1990, EU economic assistance, co-operation, trade preferences vis-à-vis CEE has regularly been linked, directly or indirectly, to respect for human rights and minorities.

With the signing of association agreements between the EU and CEE candidate states in 1997-98, the European Commission has given considerable attention to minority rights in its assessment and opinion of the latter.⁵² In the Regular Reports on Progress toward Accession, the Commission has devoted sections to issues such as minority language and education, political and social discrimination, etc. in reference to minorities in Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. The EU has even tied its aid through the PHARE program to the Copenhagen political conditions of respect for human rights and the protection of minorities. Nonetheless, as I have suggested, the lack of a firm foundation in EU law and concise benchmarks for minority protection means that what constitute minority and minority rights remains unclear and there are different interpretations of what implementation and protection of minorities may mean.⁵³

4. The EU's Impact on the Behavior of the Hungarian Minority

4.1. Democratization and EU accession: 1990-2003

In analyzing ethnic movements, scholars often focus on concrete organizations that are the main protagonists of an activated ethnic minority. The organizational expression of ethno-politics and a factor that usually plays a crucial role in the evolution of inter-ethnic relations is the ethnic party, in my analysis, the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR).⁵⁴ However, at least two other actors became visible after 2003, as it will be shown later: the Civic Alliance of Hungarians (UCM),⁵⁵ and the National Council of Hungarians from Transylvania (CNMT).

Founded immediately after the fall of the communist regime, UDMR is the interest protection "alliance" of the various territorial and political organizations of Hungarian minority in Romania. Ethnic Hungarians represent its only electoral base and, for that matter Hungarian group is renowned for its disciplined electoral behavior. Unlike the Hungarians in Slovakia, the Hungarians in Romania, from the beginning of post-Communist transformation, overwhelmingly supported a single Hungarian political organization.

In part due to the political abilities of its leader Marko Bela (which include a moderate, flexible, gradual approach to the "ethnic issue" and territorial autonomy), and in part due to the Romanian's regime adversarial nationalism before 1996, UDMR was remarkably successful in commanding the majority of Hungarian minority votes in every parliamentary elections since 1990 and so it remained the only Hungarian political organization until 2003.

A center-right party, linked to the Christian Democratic Movement and European People's Party, UDMR articulated the view of "Europe of the Regions." UDMR has also emphasized its "European mission," which allowed President Marko Bela to claim that Hungarians are both constituent element of the Romanian state and "an organic part of a wider Hungarian nation."⁵⁶ As such, UDMR leaders have always claimed the right to cultivate relations with the "mother country" across the border, and this affirmation led Romanian nationalists to call into question Hungarians' loyalty to the Romanian state.

⁵² See EU- "Agenda 2000", Vol.1, at: <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement>

⁵³ D. Anagnostou and A.Triandafyllidou: "European Integration and Ethnic Minority Mobilization: A Theoretical Introduction and Literature Review," 2005

⁵⁴ Throughout the paper I use the Romanian acronyms.

Hungarian minority from Romania represents one of the biggest ethnic minorities in Europe. According to Romanian National Institute for Statistics (<http://www.recensamant.ro>), the latest 2002 census indicates that 6.7 percent of the Romanian population (approximately 1.447.5444) represent ethnic Hungarians.

⁵⁵ Meanwhile, it became a political party

⁵⁶ UDMR web-site, Party Platform, (Romanian Language) 1998, <http://www.udmr.ro>

From the beginning of the 1990s, UDMR constantly challenged the unitary nation-state model by defining Romanian state as *multinational* and Hungarian minority as a “national community,” thus entitled to an equal partnership with titular nation. Based on this concept, the UDMR, from 1993 on, asked for constitutional guarantees of *collective political rights*, which centered on the right to unrestricted use of the Hungarian language in the institutions of self-government and those of cultural reproduction. The aim was to establish the institutions in which Hungarians could live their social and public life in Hungarian.⁵⁷

To conclude, UDMR demands collective rights for Hungarians as a national minority, and it demands autonomy, including territorial autonomy, not only cultural and linguistic rights. However, the demand for territorial autonomy was not voiced with the same intensity over time. Throughout the 1990s, UDMR mostly engaged in heated language contestations (and education) with Romanian elites. At that point in time, territorial autonomy did not enjoy the backing of Hungarian government. In addition, Romanian elites, until 1996 (when the Iliescu regime was removed from power) were not on a firm path toward EU membership, despite their declared intentions to seek NATO and EU-membership.

Regarding the meaning of “autonomous communities” and the forms of “internal-self determination,” the UDMR draft-bill provided the following explanation: “*National identity is a fundamental human right and both individuals and communities are equally entitled to it;*” “(...) *The national minorities and autonomous communities together with Romanian nation are political subjects and state-forming communities;*” “(...) *National minorities that define themselves as autonomous communities shall have the right to personal autonomy (...) as well as to self-government and regional autonomy.*”⁵⁸ According to President Marko Bela, “autonomy is not an end but a means of maintaining a separate (Hungarian) language, culture, and national identity.”⁵⁹

As the Romania and Hungary were negotiating the bilateral treaty, and as talks threatened to stall over minority issues once again (it took more than five years of negotiation for the treaty to be signed in 1996), Marko Bela escalated the demands for territorial autonomy where “compact Hungarian population lives.”⁶⁰ He called on Hungary to insist that provisions for such arrangements be included in the Treaty, and he received assurance from the Hungarian prime minister that Budapest would continue to support autonomy for ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Laszlo Tokes went even further, proposing that Romania devolve power to Hungarian regions “along the lines of South Tyrol.”⁶¹

Although this is a very rough description, the period from 1990 to 2000 centered mostly on issue of multilingualism and education in native tongue. International (EU, OSCE) influences were sifted through domestic lenses, and elite domestic calculations changed according to international opportunity structures. European norms themselves evolved in the process and European officials that took part in debates over language use represented the EU as an evolving institutional framework with its own dilemmas regarding multilingualism

The dominant political elites in Romania, Hungary, as well as the Hungarian minority sought membership in the EU, yet they have different visions about and expectations from this institution. Hungarian minority wanted to weaken the control of the state over minority cultural reproduction and aimed at internationalizing/“Europeanizing” minority policy. Partly through the Hungarian government as a mediator and partly by taking advantage of the absence of clear EU-

⁵⁷ UDMR: “*Law on National Minorities and Autonomous Communities*” (Draft), *Documents*, Cluj: Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, 1994, UDMR web-site

⁵⁸ *Law on National Minorities and Autonomous Communities*” (Draft),

⁵⁹ Interview with Marko Bela, June 26, 1996, <http://www.ziare.ro>

⁶⁰ Michael Shafir: “*Hungarian Minority Claims Stir Angry Romanian Reaction*,” August 1994. Cited in Jenne: “*Ethnic Bargaining*,” 2007

⁶¹ Michael Shafir: “*Transylvania Bishop Makes Alternative Reconciliation Proposals*,” November, 1995, cited in Jenne: “*Ethnic Bargaining*,” 2007”

level policies,⁶² they pressed for a comprehensive European legal regime that would recognize minority rights and enforce them throughout a unified Europe.

The primacy of stability and security concerns limited the EU opportunities for the Hungarian minority's institutional autonomy. On the one hand, the EU officials called on post-communist governments to weaken centralized control over their societies and allow regional and local self-government. At the same time, they were hesitant about empowering national minorities to make institutional claims against the state. EU and CE officials avoided advocating federalism and other sub-state versions of territorial autonomy available to national minorities in several Western states.⁶³

When in 1993 the Council of Europe issued Recommendation no.1201,⁶⁴ which included an article encouraging states to allow the formation of self-governments, Hungarian minority elites regarded it as a legitimization of their demands for collective rights, while majority elites vehemently rejected it. The flexibility of Western norms allowed minority (and majority) political actors to choose from different institutional designs and policy alternatives, and thus to frame and promote them (discursively) as they saw fit. For example, while Romanian elites were interested in examples of a "minimalist" interpretation of "European norm," on minority accommodation, promoting the French model, Hungarian minority elites looked to examples of minority institutional autonomy, such as in the case of Catalans in Spain or German-speakers in South Tyrol. My research shows that Hungarian leaders, especially the "radical wing" lead by Tokes, embraced these models and always used them in political debates over minority rights that took place in both domestic and international arenas.

4. 2. Almost there: Hopes for Territorial Autonomy renewed: 2003-Present

In 1996, UDMR became part of the governmental coalition. From this time until 2000, although he never renounced the autonomy desiderate, Marko Bela's discourse was mostly moderate. In contrast, Bishop Laszlo Tokes, the Catholic priest who sparked the Romanian Revolution of 1989 and who represented the radical voice in UDMR from its inception, completely disagreed with this approach to the "minority issue." As part of the non-parliamentary group of the Union, Tokes stated his demands clearly: a separate Hungarian University in the City of Cluj (Transylvania), new property law, and territorial autonomy for Szekler's Region (the three counties with Hungarian population in majority).

Following the continuation of the moderate line maintained by UDMR (as a result of the adoption, in 2001 of the Law on Local Administration which granted minorities the right to use their tongue in relationship with authorities), the radical faction constituted its own organization, the so-called Reformist Bloc. It proposed changing the constitution (the abolition of article 1 which defines Romania as "national unitary state," arguing that the term "absolute sovereignty" of the state be replaced by the term "limited sovereignty,"⁶⁵ and thus the recognition of the multinational character of the Romanian state.

By adopting an "EU-like" language the president of the Reformist Bloc declared at a Hungarian forum that territorial autonomy for regions inhabited by ethnic Hungarians is "the only solution" for setting the problem of this minority. In his view, the autonomy could be achieved through the establishments of "*Euro-regions*" on the territory of the three counties that compose

⁶² The duality in the approach that promotes minority protection while upholding state rights is evident in the landmark Framework Convention. These ambiguities of EU norms are well documented in the European integration literature. See for example De Witte: "*Politics Versus Law in the EU's Approach to Ethnic Minorities*," 2002 and J. Kelly: "*Ethnic Politics in Europe: The Power of Norms and Incentives*," 2004

⁶³ E. Jenne: "*Ethnic Bargaining*," 2007

⁶⁴ The text of Report on CEE Recommendation No.1201 available at:<http://www.venice.coe.int>

⁶⁵ "*UDMR Reformist Bloc head details proposals to amend Romanian Constitution*," BBC Monitoring Europe/Political, September 25, 2001

the “Szekler” region.” The reformist movement culminated in 2003, when Tokes constituted a separate Hungarian organization – the National Council of Ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania.

The evolution of minority behavior in the period from 2004 to present could be understood as a continuation, by similar means, of the “multilevel-games” played in the past. However, our major actors found themselves in a new context, which posed both new opportunities and constraints. Firstly, Hungary joined the EU in 2004. Secondly, as the prospects for the 2007 accession became favorable Romanian elites continued to be under EU pressure to fulfill the pre-accession requirements, which included better minority rights. In these circumstances, Tokes was determined to continue promoting the goal of territorial autonomy. He made numerous visits to Hungary, met and lobbied with representatives of different European parties, and declared at every occasion (domestic and international arenas) that “the autonomy of Szeklers’ Region is the key to safeguard Hungarians.”⁶⁶

In addition, Tokes stressed that this would be in accordance with prevalent views within the EU regarding the future shape of the Union, in which diversity and the principles of multilingualism and *collective minority rights* should be encouraged and supported. This was not really an accurate description of the EU norms and policies; however, it is another instance that illustrates how Hungarian politicians used “linkage strategies” and adapted European themes either to press for autonomy, or to gain electoral contests.

On June 16, 2004, Tokes created another Hungarian political organization – the Hungarian Autonomy Council in Carpathian Basin, a sort of transnational body including ethnic organizations from six neighboring countries – with the purpose of promoting the idea of autonomy “from below.” The Council does not have a single conception of autonomy but instead, it represents at European forums all the Hungarian communities’ autonomy concepts as they are. The Bloc intention is to obtain “Euro-region” status and, according to Tokes, the same competencies and institutions as possessed by those “autonomous communities in the EU that enjoy territorial autonomy, Catalonia in Spain, for example.”⁶⁷ For this purpose, in 2004 the representatives of the Council requested from the European Parliament to make the creation of an autonomous Szeklers’ region a precondition for Romania’s accession to EU.⁶⁸

For Romanian elites territorial autonomy on ethnic basis is out of question as it contradicts the Constitution and “is no longer on the European agenda.” There is an indirect pressure from EU, however, to reform the old administrative divisions of the country in order to better benefit from the structural funds. In fact, in 1992, eight such regions were created, not on ethnic basis and the Hungarian politicians contest them. Recently, the representatives of the Council of the Szeklers Region referred to the Recommendation 1811 of European Council Parliamentary Assembly of which they said: “it gives us hope that we can count on Europe in our struggle for autonomy (of Szeklers Region).”⁶⁹

Months before the EP elections, Marko Bela radicalized his discourse as well, as I have already shown at the beginning of this paper. Bela declared that the Hungarian minority needs to use the EU’s minority rights regime and regionalization policy as vehicles for promoting their aspirations.⁷⁰ UDMR proposed in October 2007 a new draft-law on Romania’s regionalization and Bela wanted to stir a national debate on the country’s territorial division into economic development regions. He mentioned that the reorganization of the economic development regions

⁶⁶ BBC Global News, January 24, 2004, citing Tokes’ declaration on a Hungarian-language newspaper

⁶⁷ “Further bodies join Hungarian Autonomy Council in Carpathian Basin,” BBC from Duna TV, GlobalNews Bank, July 7, 2004

⁶⁸ “Szeklers’ Council wants autonomy to become precondition for Romania’s EU entry,” BBC, Global BewBank, September 7, 2004

⁶⁹ “Altfel despre minoritati,” DIVERS, November 8, 2007, at <http://www.divers.ro>

⁷⁰ Marko Bela: “Minoritatile in Uniunea Europeana,” Targu-Mures Conference, June 23, 2007

(on an ethnic basis) might even set up a network of regional parliaments following examples and (Western) European patterns.⁷¹

After his victory in the EP elections, Tokes declared that the claim for territorial autonomy of the Szeklers Region is now even more *legitimate* at both domestic and EU levels.⁷² In addition, Tokes' well-known friendship with the former Hungarian prime-minister Victor Orban, a populist-nationalist leader, and the vice-president of the European People's Party (PPE-ED),⁷³ not only raised suspicions among Romanian nationalists but, in the context of the recent "Kosovo crisis," it also raised interesting questions about the future developments/direction of the EU.

A final comment should be made on the politics of kin-state Hungary. The limited space of this paper does not allow a detailed discussion. However, it would be worth noting a couple of things. First, my research indicated that all Hungarian parties that took turn in government after 1990 considered "care for Hungarians abroad," as articulated in the article 6 of Hungarian Constitution, an important goal. Particularly the governments of Prime-ministers Antall from, 1990 to 1993, and Viktor Orban, from 1998 to 2002, considered Hungarian minorities first and foremost to be part of the Hungarian cultural nation, and as such were much involved in promoting their demands and supporting their aspirations.

Second, one indirect, but consistent mode of Hungarian influence on neighboring governments' minority policies was the attempt to "Europeanize" Hungarian minority issues. Arguing that minority rights constitute a common European value, consecutive Hungarian governments lobbied European institutions on behalf of Hungarian minority parties and pressed for the inclusion of minority rights article in the EU's Constitution.⁷⁴ Later, they used the general European trend toward devolution and regionalism to argue for the right to local and regional self-government for Hungarian minorities.

Third, institutions that provide channels for relations between Hungarians across the borders such as Governmental Office for Hungarians Abroad were created immediately after 1989 and these institutions continued their activities despite frequent shifts in government. At the same time, the activities of Hungarian officials frequently included visits, meetings, conferences, focusing on ways of strengthening ethnic Hungarian's institutions.

5. Conclusions

After the fall of communism in CEE, many Western theorists and policymakers expected that the desire for democratization and European integration would help weaken the traditional appeal of nationalism and that, in an integrated "Europe without borders," minorities' demands for territorial autonomy will become superfluous. Yet, as the case of the Hungarian minority in Romania shows, reality confronts us with a more nuanced picture: while the EU's conditionality mechanism has contributed to undermining *violent* nationalism, claims for self-determination and territorial autonomy are still being voiced.

The ambiguities and the "dual standards" of EU minority rights regimes and the accent on regionalization policies have enabled the Hungarian ethnic minority in Romania to use "Europe" and "integration" as framing devices or vehicles for advancing their domestic demands. By

⁷¹ "UDMR doreste reînfiintarea Tinutului Secuiesc," ZIUA Newspaper, October 29, 2007

⁷² Tokes had a similar message for the kin-state Hungary

⁷³ According to its web-site, European People's Party (EPP) is the largest European-level party, "the first-ever transnational political party," and the largest group in the European Parliament. Since 2004 (and now as a result of the last EP elections in Romania), the EPP is the leading political force in Europe. It is committed to a federal Europe, based on the principle of subsidiarity. The EPP party supported Tokes' candidacy to EP, as did Victor Orban, who had campaigned for Tokes in Romania. Orban made the following statement: "We support Transylvanian autonomy, which we consider a national cause that can be sincerely espoused. The autonomy enjoyed by Catalans in Spain, Germans in Belgium, and Swedes in Finland shows that there is room in the EU for communities of national minorities." See Interview with Viktor Orban in "Nepszabadsag," RFE/RL, December 17, 2003, at <http://www.rferl.org>.

⁷⁴ "EU Constitution a Success," BBC Monitoring Europe, June 21, 2004

moving the focus of analysis from the state to the ethnic group's politics, this paper has attempted to illustrate how, in order to appeal to their constituency, the leaders of the Hungarian minority – both the moderates and the hardliners – have used “Europe” and “European themes” as framing devices thereby projecting their identities and group interests within a wider, “European,” political space.

In the period from 1990 to 2003, the Hungarian minority was able to use the opportunities of EU accession process to press for institutionalized language rights. The kin-state, Hungary, was always eager to help by “Europeanizing” Hungarian minority's issues. Since 2003 both the moderate and radical factions of the Hungarian minority have framed their domestic discourse in terms of EU regionalization policy to press for decentralization and territorial autonomy, respectively. While the EU enlargement has offered useful frameworks for the accommodation of ethnic groups' demands after 1990, the EU does not offer definitive solutions to the “nationalities question” in the CEE context.

At the same time, the final destination of the European integration process is still a matter of contention among those who favor a federal European state and those who would prefer a more “communitarian type of polity.”⁷⁵ Therefore, in an enlarged “Europe of 27,” it remains to be seen how successful the strategies of sub-national actors (i.e. minority groups) will prove and how the current developments will affect the future shape of the Union.

⁷⁵ Zielonka: “*Plurilateral governance in the enlarged European Union*,” 2007

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