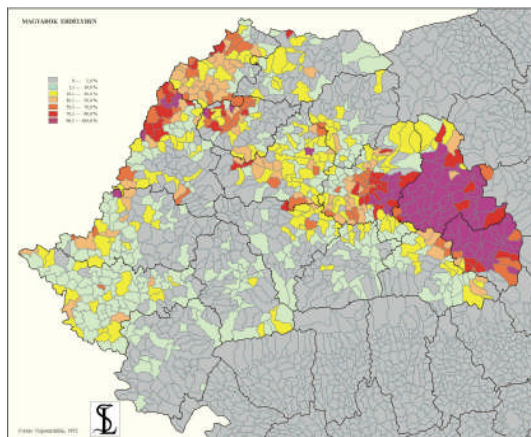


Transylvanian Hungarians for autonomy

According to the last national census in 2002, there are 1,434,377 ethnic Hungarian citizens in Romania (i.e. 6.6% of the total population). Out of this 98.29% – i.e. 1,409,894 – of ethnic Hungarians live in Transylvania. Transylvanian Hungarians were detached to Romanian rule as a result of the Trianon Peace Treaty (4 June 1920) as one of the several treaties concluding World War One. According to the aforementioned census, Transylvania (103,093 km²), detached from Hungary, has a total population of 6,888,515, and 20,46% of this number represents ethnic Hungarians.

Transylvania, however only exists in terms of historical, geographical and cultural regions. In the meantime, it has neither administrative organizations, nor institutions of its own. Romania, up to this moment, is heavily centralized, thus quintessential resolutions are brought in Bucharest, where Hungarians are represented in the legislation in accordance with the Hungarian population of the country, namely in 6,6%.

The map below of Transylvania's actual ethnic dispersion reflects that Transylvanian Hungarians are divided into three main demographical regions.



1. 42,66% of the Hungarians in Romania live in a greater region, the centre part of Romania, i.e. the South-East corner of Transylvania, representing the Szekler Land (Székelyland).
2. Hungarians also dwell in smaller regions, representing various parts of Romania (considerably large geographical regions like Kalotaszeg or Érmellék), as well as in isolated settlements, still of Hungarian majority.
3. In scattered places, meaning at such locations inhabited by the Romanian majority that are apart from the Hungarian chunk.

The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) which was founded after 1989 to safeguard the interests of Romania's Hungarian community set the three-level-autonomy plan as its objective by analyzing the three Transylvanian regions as described above. Bearing in mind this fact, for Hungarians, (1) dwelling in majority in the Szekler Land region, territorial autonomy would mean the institutional assurance for actual equality of rights. For those ethnic Hungarians (2) residing apart from locations of Hungarian majority warranting the adequate rights would imply the autonomy of their local councils of special legal status. For the third category, i.e. for Hungarians living in scattered locations their rights would be satisfactory by guaranteeing (3) autonomy based upon the principal of "personal autonomy" – self-government at the individual level.

These demands were drafted, when the Romanian Hungarians had but one organization and agency in charge of safeguarding their interests. Nowadays, as well, this policy is demanded by Hungarians of Romania jointly, independently of their political convictions.

The Szekler National Council

The Council was formed to respond to the endeavours of the territorial autonomy of the Szekler Land (Székely-land) on 13 October, 2003, as a result of the general civic assembly announced based upon direct democratic principles and the Szeklers' free will. The objective of its formation was to win the autonomy of the Szekler Land with the means of law and democracy, initiating dialogue with the majority, utilizing the means of international law and the experience of convivial coexistence between the minority and majority.

The Szekler Land (9,977.07 km²) is mostly inhabited by the Székely, the collective name for people who affirm themselves as Hungarians, speak the Hungarian language and safeguard special traditions. There are 809,000 people altogether living in the region of which 75,64% – i.e. 612,043 citizens – are of Székely origins.

Throughout their history, the Székely performed duties of defence within the Hungarian Kingdom. In return for their duty they received various rights of freedom, for instance the right to autonomy. Subsequently, they had institutions of self-administration throughout centuries. The tradition of self-administration vividly lingers on in the collective memory of the community.

The settling down of the Romanians in the Szekler Land began in the 19th century. Nevertheless, it assumed more significant proportions during the years of communism, especially during the reign of dictator Ceausescu, when, in the name of explicitly announced "homogenization", communists settled inhabitants of Romanian origin in large numbers to the Szekler Land.



Roman Catholic Székelys attend the Pentecost pilgrimage at Csíksomlyó every year since 1567. Nearly 500,000 people gathered this year.

The Szekler National Council brought a bill to the Romanian Parliament, which would have served as a foundation for the organization of Szekler Land into an autonomous administrative region outlining extra sphere of authority safeguarding the identity of the inhabitants.

The Romanian Parliament rejected the draft without ever debating it. Furthermore, they disregarded the fact that, when Romania became member of the Council of Europe, she assumed unilateral responsibility concerning the fulfilment of the CE's recommendations; Article 11 of this declares the following:

"In the regions where they are in a majority the persons belonging to a national minority shall have the right to have at their disposal appropriate local or autonomous authorities or to have a special status, matching the specific historical and territorial situation and in accordance with the domestic legislation of the state."

In Resolution No. 508 (i.e. the Columberg Resolution) the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly emphasized that those countries, which became members to the EC as the result of the approval of the Resolution No. 917 – i.e. after May 1989 – are expected to carry out the unilateral responsibilities they undertook. Article 7 of the Resolution particularly underlines the compulsory character set by Recommendation No. 1201 for these countries. The Council of Europe Report No. 176/1993 (Article 5) evaluating Romania's acceptance analyzes the statement made by the Romanian official authorities, in which they undertake the protection of minority rights in Romania, in conformity with the principles outlined in Resolution No.1201.

The Szekler National Council initiated dialogues with the competent Romanian authorities about how would Romania like to fulfil the Recommendation No. 1201, with a special emphasis to Romania's assumed obligations on Article 11.

Romanian authorities did not even listened to the proposals of the Szekler National Council, its leaders and activists were threatened and persecuted instead.

Referendum on autonomy in the Szekler Land

Afterwards, the Szekler National Council initiated a referendum, referring to the regulations on referendums in effect in Romania, in which it is prescribed that it is required to confer, in the form of referendum, with the population of the concerned territories preceding the actual submittal of bills and drafts aiming at altering the borders of administrative regions. On several locations belonging to the Szekler Land, the local authorities decided to organize the referendum.



The government agents (prefects) however contested these decisions at the administrative court, where these were nullified. In Romania the courts are not independent. They justified their decision, which confirmed the expectations of the central government, with the fact that in the affair of the establishing of the administratively autonomous Szekler Land, which, at present, is disjointed in three different counties, only a national referendum may decide upon.



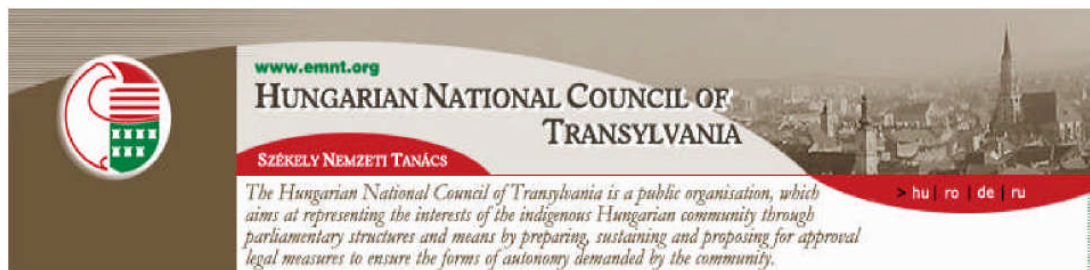
March 15, holiday of all Hungarians, festive assembly of Szeklers in Székelyudvarhely/Odorheiu Secuiesc

Hence, the Romanian authorities clearly harmed the principle of subsidiarity, and deprived the population of the Szekler settlements of the possibility to freely express their opinion about their destiny and future.

Subsequently, the Szekler National Council initiated an unofficial referendum. The Council asked the citizens of the Szekler Land whether they wish that their region would receive the legal ground for autonomy and their settlement would be part of this. They interviewed approximately 170,000 Székely citizens in the presence of unbiased observers and the media. 98% of the interviewee said "Yes" to the territorial autonomy of the Szekler Land.

Previous Transylvanian Monitor issues are available at:

www.emnt.org



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