

**COOPERATING REGIONALIST AND AUTONOMY  
MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE**  
**THE INCENTIVES AND EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS**  
**WHERE DO MOVEMENTS IN TRANSYLVANIA STAND?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis analyses the cooperation of regionalist and autonomy movements in Europe by focusing on the incentives and effects of the transnational networks, which these movements have established. Specifically, I look at two movements in Transylvania, a Hungarian autonomist and a Romanian regionalist movement, in order to show that the type of cooperation particular movements choose depends on the size of the movement, the (ethnic) domestic support it enjoys and the external lobbying actors, which might increase the movement's bargaining power at the supranational level and towards its own government.

The result of the inquiry is that (ethnic) hegemonic parties with large domestic and external support choose to forge big alliances with mainstream political parties, while small parties with little domestic and external support prefer small alliances such as the European Free Alliance, which is a conglomeration of mainly small regionalist parties in Europe.

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***1.1 Transnationalization and its 'Glocal' Consequences***

Kosovo, the small province in the South of Serbia with a population of approximately two million people, is – after almost eight years of UN supervision – shaking up the international community anew. The UN Security Council will soon have to put paid to the 'never-ending' debate on the status of the province; it has to take a decision on the status that will have local or regional consequences, but might also have global repercussions. Since the UN Special Envoy, Martin Ahtisaari, in his report to the Security Council, stated that independence is the only viable and constructive solution for the province, not only Serbia but also other states have become nervous: Kosovo's partition from Serbia might set a precedent for (potentially) secessionist movements in their own country. The Romanian president, Traian Basescu, for instance, rejects Kosovo's independence point-blank, because he fears "secessionist" claims by Hungarians in Transylvania. The Russian 'Federation' fears for its break-away provinces, China for Tibet, Turkey for the Kurdish region, and so on. Ethnic Serbs, too, threaten the international community with the break-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina, saying that the Republika Srpska should have the right to secede from the Bosnian state if Kosovo becomes independent. Moreover, Serbian Premier Vojislav Kostunica 'frightened' the members of the UN Security Council by saying that in case of Kosovo independence, the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia would also have the right to independence.

The example of Kosovo shows how local political issues enjoy international significance these days, and might have indirect effects on elsewhere located conflicts. Local conflicts can thus have 'glocal' consequences due to the intensive exchange of knowledge and information worldwide. Indeed, it is the essence and purpose of transnational cooperation (cooperation across national borders) to influence and change domestic matters. In the case of Kosovo, claims for secession were not transnationalized, but simply internationalized. That is to say,

the Kosovars did not seek support from secessionist movements in other countries, but immediately directed a request to the international community, i.e. to the United Nations; they lobbied for their cause at the state and not the sub-state level. But why did this strategy succeed? First of all, there was a war fought in Kosovo, in which – among many other external actors – the USA and EU member states were involved. These 'externals' considered the Kosovo conflict to be destabilizing for the whole region, which gave the issue importance at the international level and the 'externals' a reason for intervention.<sup>1</sup> Second, the internationals remained after the war; Kosovo became an internationally, UN-administered territory for almost eight years. Third, the UN made the Kosovo conflict its issue to solve – by a decision of the UN Security Council.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of (territorial) autonomy claims in 'Europe', the international community interfered only twice: the Åland Islands and South Tyrol<sup>3</sup>. The Åland Islands became autonomous following the Autonomy Act of 1920 and a decision by the League of Nations in 1921<sup>4</sup>. On the issue of South Tyrol, the United Nations passed a resolution in 1960, which called upon Austria and Italy to settle their differences<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, the UN General Assembly signed the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Peoples and Countries, and attached much greater importance to full self-determination of peoples than to autonomy or internal self-determination.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the issue of territorial autonomy was basically declared a domestic affair and not an object of international

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1 This interpretation was not least a consequence of the Yugoslav wars in the early 1990s, in which the 'West' unmistakably cut a sorry figure.

2 Magyar Nemzet Online (2007): Kostunica: Joguk van a magyaroknak is önrendelkezésre, ha... 27 April 2007.

3 After the First World War externals decided on the autonomy-like status of the cities of Memel (convention signed by Lithuania and France, Italy and Japan) and Danzig (League of Nations), lasting until the GERman invasion of Poland in 1939. However, these two examples cannot be compared to the territorially and with regard to the level of self-government significant (ethnic) autonomies of South Tyrol and the Åland Islands. Non-European examples include the regional autonomy of the Kurds in Iraq, imposed by the UN, or the Palestinian autonomy.

4 Nordquist, Kjell-Ake (1998): Autonomy as a Conflict-Solving Mechanism – An Overview. In: Suksi, Makku (ed.): Autonomy: Applications and Implications. Kluwer Law International, The Hague.

5 Südtiroler Volkspartei (2003): Zurück in die Zukunft. Südtirols Erfolgsgeschichte. In: Zukunft in Südtirol.

6 Hannikainen, Lauri (1998): Self-Determination and Autonomy in International Law. In: Suksi, Makku (Ed): Autonomy: Applications and Implications. Kluwer Law International, The Hague.

involvement and support. The growing importance of the European Union and its (internal) promotion of regionalism and subsidiarity have not brought a change yet. The European Union – as an alternative to the UN – does not bind its member states to grant territorial autonomy to certain regions or minorities within their borders. The Basque issue, for instance, has remained an internal affair of Spain, as in the case of Corsica in France.

So, even though the representatives of the individual movements have lobbied for international involvement, autonomy claims were not heard at the international and supranational level. To internationalize their issues, regionalist and autonomy movements of different, mainly European countries have therefore forged transnational networks. These networks have, first of all, served as platforms for the exchange of experience, knowledge and information; platforms enabling the development, improvement and acquirement of strategies for any regionalist or autonomy movement's fight against the central government. In addition, regionalist and autonomy movements, groups and parties, have formed alliances on a Europe-wide level in order to achieve their political goals.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

There is a large literature on the issues of autonomy and regionalism. Especially in the West European context, scholars have published a lot on regionalist and autonomy movements. Hurst Hannum's "Autonomy, Sovereignty and Self-Determination" (1990)<sup>7</sup>, for instance, considers the politics of different autonomies around the world. Hannum examines the ways in which international law and domestic constitutional arrangements might contribute to resolving disputes between minority and majority groups. "Autonomy: Applications and Implications"<sup>8</sup> (2003) is a compilation of different authors investigating the autonomy issue. They examine the international (and supranational) aspects of autonomy and its implications. The au-

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7 Hannum, Hurst (1990): *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination. The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

8 Suksi, Makku (ed.) (2003): *Autonomy: Applications and Implications*. Kluwer Law International, The Hague.

thors also give examples of different types of autonomy and applications of autonomy and regionalism in Europe. A third publication is a collection of articles and legal paragraphs, “Autonómiák és Autonómiatörekvések”<sup>9</sup> by József I. Csapó (2003), who in addition to the West European examples includes Central and East European autonomies and autonomy attempts.

Other books present case study analysis, some undertaken on a comparative basis (Keating 1996<sup>10</sup>; van Houten & Fearon 2002<sup>11</sup>, Warasin 2002<sup>12</sup>). An interesting study for my analysis due to its focus on strategies is Daniele Conversi’s “The Basques, the Catalans and Spain, Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilization” (1997)<sup>13</sup>. The author compares Basque and Catalan nationalism and points out common features as well as the main differences in the development of autonomies. He argues for the importance of values and culture, the role of the state and the sources of political violence in explaining why the Basques have taken the path of violence, while Catalans have chosen a more accommodating and peaceful strategy.

However, while there is a significant literature on the characteristics of autonomies and regionalisms in Europe, little has been written on the cooperation between autonomies and regions, and the movements of and within these. Lieven de Winter and Huri Türsan have edited a book on “Regionalist Parties in Western Europe” (1998)<sup>14</sup>, which looks in detail at twelve regionalist parties in the Basque country, Catalonia, Corsica, Flanders, French-

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9 Csapó I. József (2001): *Autonómiák és Autonómiatörekvések (Autonomies and Autonomy Attempts)*. Pro-Print, Csíkszereda.

10 Keating, Michael (1996): *Nations against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland*. Macmillan Press, London. This is a collection of cases, in which he compares different factors influencing and characteristics of nationalism, as for instance language and culture, economy, civil society, external relations or the support base of nationalism.

11 Van Houten, Pieter and James Fearon (2002): *The Politicization of Cultural and Economic Difference: A Return to the Theory of Regional Autonomy Movements*. Paper presented at Stanford University. They present a formal model of the economic and cultural conditions under which support for regional autonomy movements can be expected.

12 Warasin, Markus (ed.) (2002): *Unsere Sache ist gerecht. (Our cause is just)*. Verlagsanstalt Athesia, Bozen. This is a history of the autonomy claims in South Tyrol, one of the prime examples of autonomy in Europe.

13 Conversi, Daniele (1997): *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain. Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilization*. Hurst & Company, London. See also: Conversi Daniele (2000): *Autonomous Communities and the Ethnic Settlement in Spain*. In: Ghai, Yash (ed.): *Autonomy and Ethnicity. Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-Ethnic States*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

14 De Winter, Lieven & Huri Türsan (ed.) (1998): *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. Routledge, London & New York.

speaking Belgium, North Italy, Scotland, South Tyrol and Wales. But only one author in the volume, Peter Lynch, looks at their cooperation at the European, supranational level. His article “Co-operation between Regionalist Parties at the Level of the European Union: The European Free Alliance”<sup>15</sup> can actually be regarded as the completion of a book of Geoffrey and Pippa Pridham “Transnational Party-Cooperation and European Integration” (1981)<sup>16</sup> that mainly looks at the historical development of the European political parties and federations, but not the EFA. Lynch's work is important for my analysis, since he makes assumptions about transnational strategies of regionalist parties in Europe, which I am going to test in the case of two movements in Transylvania.

Lynch's article, which focuses on the European Free Alliance and its West European membership, attempts to explain the transnational cooperation of regionalist parties. However, he does not deal with the Central and East European regionalist movements and ethnic parties. Furthermore, he examines only political parties and excludes other autonomy and regionalist movements, as for instance civic society initiatives. As Keck and Sikkink (1998)<sup>17</sup> show, the transnational networks of civil action have grown in importance these days due to globalization and the exchange of experience, knowledge and information. The civil action groups on the domestic level have realized that it is possible to bring pressure on their states from outside by bypassing the state and seeking international allies. With regard to autonomy and regionalism, civil society is a relevant part of the movement, if these attempts are not simply seen as a political project but also as a cultural, religious, ethnic or social one.

In my thesis, I would like to fill the gap concerning Central and East European as well as the civil society by examining the Transylvanian case, where both Hungarians and Romanians

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15 Lynch, Peter (1998): Co-operation between Regionalist Parties at the Level of the European Union. The European Free Alliance. In: De Winter, Lieven and Huri Türsan (ed.): Regionalist Parties in Western Europe. Routledge, London & New York.

16 Pridham, Geoffrey and Pippa (1981): Transnational Party-Cooperation and European Integration. George Allen & Unwin, London.

17 Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1998): Activists beyond borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.



have made claims for autonomy or regionalization. Both have also sought supra- and transnational support, which makes their cases interesting for the study of transnational linkages of autonomy and regionalist movements in Europe. Béla Filep's "Zur diskursiven Konstruktion des ungarisch-rumänischen Miteinander, Nebeneinander und Gegeneinander in Siebenbürgen" (2006a)<sup>18</sup> includes an analytical and empirical part on the autonomy and regionalist claims in Transylvania and contains detailed information for my analysis. Erin K. Jenne's "Ethnic Bargaining. The Paradox of Minority Empowerment" (2007)<sup>19</sup> also provides arguments for autonomy claims in Central and Eastern Europe. Jenne compares strategies of ethnic minority parties and representatives from different post-communist countries. Her analysis also looks at autonomy claims, which might change over time, depending on the relations with the host government and the support of external lobbying actors, mostly kin states. However, she does not look at the transnational linkages of autonomy and regionalist movements, which might also serve as sources of leverage for individual movements.

If we assume that other movements might support or influence others, we must look at the interconnections and interdependence of regionalist movements. While there is no work specifically on the topic of regionalist movements, Mark Beissinger's "Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State" (2002)<sup>20</sup> examines the interdependence of secessionist movements in the Soviet Union. He points out how some ethnic movements encourage and influence other movements to strive for independence. In a transnational network, one expects mutual influence and it is not excluded that some autonomy and regionalist movements have influenced others and encouraged to strive for autonomy. Therefore Beissinger's work is conceptually very relevant for my thesis.

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18 Filep, Béla (2006a): *Zur diskursiven Konstruktion des ungarisch-rumänischen Miteinander, Nebeneinander und Gegeneinander (On the Discursive Construction of the Hungarian-Romanian Living Together in Transylvania)*. Geographisches Institut der Universität Bern, Bern.

19 Jenne, Erin K. (2007): *Ethnic Bargaining. The Paradox of Minority Empowerment*. Cornell University Press, London.

20 Beissinger, Mark R. (2002): *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge University Press.

### **1.3 Research Questions, Purpose and Structure of the Thesis**

The purpose of this thesis is to show how and why transnational autonomy and regionalist networks emerged and what the effects of transnational cooperation on individual movements have been. Due to the limited length of the thesis, I am not able to answer the questions below with respect to all regionalist and autonomy movements<sup>21</sup> in Europe. However, taking the case of Transylvania as an example, I will try to infer patterns that apply to other movements.

In Transylvania, there exist two different movements, a Hungarian autonomist movement and a Romanian regionalist movement. They have similar goals, namely the autonomization or regionalization of Romania; and both movements have sought external support. However, due to several reasons (which I will show), they have chosen different ways of transnational cooperation. This makes the case of Transylvania peculiar and interesting for my analysis. Furthermore, the fact that these movements are located in Central and Eastern Europe, a region apparently being 'Europeanized', might provide information about the diffusion of ideas promoted by the 'West' and the movements located there. But first of all, I am interested in how the transnational regionalist and autonomy networks cooperate.

- *Are the networks simply platforms for meetings and exchange of information or is there mutual support amongst the regionalists or autonomists in Europe? That is to say, do the movements lobby for each other?*

In the Transylvanian case I will examine what kind of networks ethnic and regionalist parties and groups are likely to forge and why, who they expect support from, what kind of support they expect and to what extent they expect support from other movements. This first question leads to two further and more specific questions:

- *First, why do these movements cooperate? What can each of them profit from? Only from the exchange of information or do they see other opportunities in a transnational*

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21 Regionalist movements claim more (territorial) autonomy for a specific region, while claims of autonomy movements are not necessarily related to a specific territory, but can be limited to one ethnic or national community (often minority) within a particular state.

*network? On the other hand, why do some movements not search for cooperation?*

Here, I am asking why the Transylvanian movements seek transnational cooperation. If they earned significant resources seeking to cooperate, they must perceive this as profitable. The puzzle here is why they cooperate in some transnational networks, but not cooperate in others as for instance the European Free Alliance.

- *Second, if there is mutual support, what are the effects of it on their ability to lobby their governments? How are the regionalist and autonomy attempts interconnected and to what extent do they influence each other? Who encourages whom? Can we differentiate between leading and learning movements?*

These questions ask whether the Transylvanian autonomy and regionalist movements have been influenced by other movements, parties or groups in Europe. Models in Western Europe, for instance, might have influenced and encouraged the autonomy and regionalist attempts in Central and Eastern Europe and vice versa. The question here is to what extent movements can influence others outside their immediate vicinity.

As for the structure of the thesis, I next present the theoretical framework. Second, I will give a historical background of the European transnational regionalist and autonomy cooperation. Third, I will analyze the Transylvanian case, looking at both the Hungarian autonomy and the Romanian regionalist claims. Finally, I draw some conclusions – through the analysis of this particular case – for the actions of the regionalist movements and their cooperation in Europe as a whole.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

As I have indicated in the literature review, there is no single concept or theory that frames my analysis. I have chosen different concepts and strands of argumentation, which I try to apply to the analytical part of the thesis. The first is a concept of transnational advocacy networks elaborated by Margaret Keck and Kathrin Sikkink (1998)<sup>22</sup>, the second a work of Peter Lynch (1998)<sup>23</sup> on the co-operation between regionalist parties at the level of the European Union; and the third is Mark Beissinger's (2002)<sup>24</sup> theory of nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### **2.1 Transnational (Advocacy) Networks**

According to Keck and Sikkink, we can place transnational networks into three different categories based on their motivations. First, those with essentially instrumental goals, especially transnational corporations and banks; second, those motivated primarily by shared causal ideas, such as scientific groups or epistemic communities; and third, those motivated primarily by shared principled ideas or values, called transnational advocacy networks, which are, moreover, "bound together by (...) a common discourse and dense exchanges of information and services"<sup>25</sup> I would put transnational networks of regionalist and autonomy movements in the third category. As Keck and Sikkink argue, for these networks, not only the information itself, but the interpretation and strategic use of information is very important, since their strategies aim to use information and beliefs to motivate political action and to use

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22 Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1998): *Activists beyond borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London. See also Bob, Clifford (2005): *The Marketing of Rebellion. Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

23 Lynch, Peter (1998): *Co-operation between Regionalist Parties at the Level of the European Union. The European Free Alliance*. In: De Winter, Lieven and Huri Türsan (ed.): *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. Routledge, London and New York.

24 Beissinger, Mark R. (2002): *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

25 Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). p. 2.

leverage to gain the support of more powerful institutions.<sup>26</sup> Clifford Bob (2005) specifically looks at these “risky and difficult strategies [movements] deploy to galvanize external help in the face of domestic despotism and international indifference.”<sup>27</sup>

An important feature of transnational advocacy networks, as described by Keck and Sikkink, is that they develop around issues where channels between domestic groups and their governments are blocked or hampered or where such channels are ineffective for resolving a conflict, setting into motion the 'boomerang pattern of influence'<sup>28</sup>. That is to say, domestic groups bypass the state and search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from the outside.<sup>29</sup> This logic might be perfectly applied to the case of regionalist and autonomy movements. If nationalizing states are not willing to negotiate with the leaders of these movements, the latter are likely to search for transnational, supranational (e.g. European Union) or international support for their cause. This external involvement can, according to Bob, “deter state violence and force policy change (...) and it can strengthen challengers, not only materially, though infusions of money, equipment, and knowledge, but also psychologically, by demonstrating that a movement is not alone, that the world cares and that an arduous conflict may not be fruitless.”<sup>30</sup>

## ***2.2 The Incentives of European Party-Cooperation***

While Keck and Sikkink as well as Bob mainly deal with social activist networks and NGOs, transnational party-cooperation has some specific characteristics and incentives, which they do not look at. Peter Lynch<sup>31</sup>, however, has elaborated arguments for transnational regionalism, which aim at explaining party-cooperation of regionalists in the European Union.

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26 Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). p.30.

27 Bob, Clifford (2005).

28 If State A blocks redress to organizations within it, they activate their transnational network, whose members pressure their own States B and (if relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressure State A.

29 Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). p. 12.

30 Bob, Clifford (2005). p. 4.

31 Lynch, Peter (1998).

The first three propositions<sup>32</sup> say that transnational party-cooperation in the EU is closely related to the incentives of the European Parliament (EP):

- 1) The EP operates funding procedures to encourage co-operation between parties in European elections and within the parliament itself, and such factors have created a financial logic for co-operation between regionalist parties that fitted nicely with the political logic of seeking transnational links.
- 2) The participation in European elections can be seen as a simple extension of domestic electoral goals.
- 3) The second-order nature of European elections has offered opportunities to small parties, which have often been able to achieve greater levels of electoral success in European than in national elections.

While the latter three propositions are EU-related, the following two<sup>33</sup> explain regionalist party cooperation in general – by giving the European Free Alliance (EFA) as an example:

- 4) The development of a transnational federation such as the EFA is useful for small regionalist parties with few organisational resources at their disposal. Membership of the EFA allows them to share resources and learn from the larger, more electorally successful parties within the organisation.
- 5) The parties view co-operation and membership of transnational groups as part of a strategy to publicise the case of autonomy and self-government through forming a collective voice.

Lynch's arguments might partly give an answer to the question as to why regionalist parties in Europe cooperate. However, he does not say what the effects of these networks have been, what individual movements have achieved in their home countries thanks to the cooperation with regionalists and autonomists outside state borders, nor what they failed to achieve despite their participation in a transnational network. Furthermore, Lynch does not examine whether autonomy and regionalist movements or their networks have influenced and encouraged other movements to strive for autonomy or regionalization.

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32 Lynch, Peter (1998).

33 Ibid.

### **2.3 Nationalist/Ethnic Mobilization and the Interconnection of Movements**

Mark Beissinger much more looks at the aspects of influence and encouragement. The basic argument of his book is that the “disintegration of the Soviet state could not have taken place without the effects of tidal influences of one nationalism on another.”<sup>34</sup> On the basis of secessionist movements in the Soviet Union he shows how contentious acts in the glasnost’ period expanded tentatively at first, “subsequently growing into a transnational tide of nationalist mobilization, as successful action by one group evoked subsequent efforts by others.”<sup>35</sup> He regards nationalism as a “tide” that ran across the Soviet Union, where some ethnic movements encouraged and influenced other movements to strive for independence. However, “whether events build into waves of nationalism and waves into tides depends on those factors which allow challengers to forge connections between prior cases of successful contention and current attempts to disrupt.”<sup>36</sup> As Beissinger points out, pre-existing structural conditions and institutional constraints played a critical role here. In the Soviet case, the interconnectedness produced by common institutional characteristics and ideologies offered opportunities for spreading nationalist contention transnationally. Furthermore, Beissinger shows that “some agents consciously [sought] to foster tidal influences so as to spread or contain contention spatially and temporally, whereas other agents attempt[ed] to ride the tide generated from the actions of others for similarly strategic reasons.”<sup>37</sup> In brief, he provides a theory of nationalist/ethnic mobilization explaining the “tidal” influence of one or more particular movement(s) on others, “the effects emanating from the actions of others”<sup>38</sup>. Beissinger’s analysis is important for mine since I want to know how the individual European autonomy and regionalist movements are interconnected and how they affect each other.

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34 Beissinger, Mark (2002): *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York. p. 36.

35 Ibid. p. 37.

36 Ibid. p. 32.

37 Ibid. p. 29.

38 Ibid. p. 33.

## 2.4 My Argument

As I have mentioned above, I will compare two movements, the Hungarian autonomy movement and the Romanian regionalist movement in Transylvania. In both cases, the presence of a *reluctant central government with regard to autonomy or regionalization*, and the *existence of autonomy and regionalist movements elsewhere*<sup>39</sup>, resulted in the search for transnational support. That is to say, they have both bypassed their state and search out international allies to try to bring pressure on the states from the outside.<sup>40</sup>

However, Hungarian autonomists and Romanian regionalists have chosen different ways of transnational cooperation. I argue that the presence of a *large (ethnic) domestic support and external lobbying actors* in the Hungarian case has resulted in the search for *alternative ways of cooperation than the European Free Alliance (EFA)*. The EFA is assumingly more attractive to small parties than to hegemonic parties or movements such as the Hungarian autonomy movement in Transylvania. The latter argument explains why the marginalised Romanian regionalists, lacking *large (ethnic) domestic support and external lobbying actors*, have sought *cooperation in the EFA* and not in other transnational networks.

Finally, I argue that the existence of regionalist and autonomy movements in Western Europe has influenced and encouraged the Transylvanian movements. Through the exchange of experience, knowledge and information, they have acquired strategies to galvanize external help and to fight their government. The networks also strengthen the movements psychologically, manifesting that they are not alone. Furthermore, the EU's promotion of regionalism and subsidiarity, as a potential pre-existing structural condition or an institutional constraint for a "tide" of regionalism, has encouraged both movements in their attempts.

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39 Here, one has to consider the possibility that other autonomy and regionalist movements have influenced or encouraged the Transylvanian movements, as well as other external factors did, for instance the principle of subsidiarity of the European Union as an incentive or argument.

40 See the boomerang pattern of influence by Keck and Sikkink (1998).



## **2.5 Methodology**

My work is a comparative analysis of two regionalist/autonomy movements with similar goals, located in one and the same country, facing the same reluctant government, but having different strategies at the transnational level. Therefore I am going to use the method of difference, which says that if one set of circumstances leads to a given phenomenon, and another set of circumstances does not, and the sets differ only in a single factor that is present in the first set but not in the second, then the phenomenon can be attributed to that factor. Consequently, I will examine if I have identified the key factors (*large (ethnic) domestic support and external lobbying actors*) responsible for the different ways of transnational cooperation of the Hungarian autonomists and Romanian regionalists.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO TRANSNATIONAL REGIONALIST & AUTONOMY COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The development of transnational political networks and parties has been a consistent feature of West European politics in the post war period. Already by the 1970s, most of Europe's main political 'families' had established transnational federations and political groups<sup>41</sup>: the European People's Party, the Party of European Socialists or the Federation of Liberal and Democrat Parties in Europe, to name but a few. Since then, these party groups have strengthened their cooperation and mutual support, representing political blocs in the European Parliament. The establishment of cooperative networks between regionalist parties of Europe, however, took more time. In 1977, the Welsh, Bretons, Basques and Catalans joined the Bureau of Unrepresented Nations<sup>42</sup>, set up in Brussels<sup>43</sup>; but this was a lobbying office rather than a political organization. Two years later, nine regionalist parties agreed to examine the prospects for political cooperation forming a loose alliance for the first direct elections in the European Parliament in 1979. However, only the *Volksunie* and the *Rassemblement Wallon* made it into the EP.

Finally, in 1981, the European Free Alliance (EFA) was founded at a conference in Brussels, reflecting a deeper level of political cooperation between European regionalists. Amongst the goals of this cooperation were the increased number of regionalist parties within the EP to facilitate the establishment of a regionalist political group and the development of some common policy positions as a manifesto for European elections. "The EFA encouraged its affiliates to contest the European elections and to form electoral alliances to increase the

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41 Lynch, Peter (1998): Co-operation between Regionalist Parties at the Level of the European Union. The European Free Alliance. In: De Winter, Lieven and Huri Türsan (ed.): Regionalist Parties in Western Europe. Routledge, London and New York.

42 Not to confuse with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), founded in 1991. The latter is an international organization created by nations and peoples around the world, who are not represented as such in the world's principal international organizations, such as the United Nations.

43 Leonardi, R. and C. Paraskevopoulos (1996): Social Capital and Learning Institutional Networks: Making Sense of Subsidiarity in European Regional Policy. The European Institute, London School of Economics, London.

regionalist component in the EP.”<sup>44</sup> That is to say, the established network was to strengthen individual regionalist and autonomy movements’ voices at the European level. Interestingly enough, the EFA perceives itself as a platform for small parties: The “EFA ensures the role in European politics to parties which, by virtue of the electoral system, their own size or the size of the geographical area they represent, would inevitably be excluded from that arena.”<sup>45</sup>

The basic common position and common identity of the European Free Alliance is the belief in either full political independence (statehood), or some form of devolution or self-government for their country or region. However, since ideologically the EFA member parties are very disparate, it has always been difficult to establish a common position on the various issues taken up by the European Parliament, except, for instance, European integration, European regional policy or minority languages.<sup>46</sup> A disappointment to EFA was also when the large Basque and Catalan regionalist parties, *Convergència I Unió* (CiU) and the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), decided – when Spain entered the EC – to associate with mainstream ideological groups within the EP instead of joining the EFA – since they regarded themselves as hegemonic parties in their regions (see also below). Furthermore, the EFA sought electoral alliances with the Greens in the EP as well as at the domestic level, e.g. in France. As a final strategy, since it had exhausted the supply of potential members within the EU, the EFA sought new member parties outside the EU.<sup>47</sup>

One source of new members was post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, regionalist and autonomy movements reemerged in CEE. Some

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44 Lynch, Peter (1998): Co-operation between Regionalist Parties at the Level of the European Union. The European Free Alliance. In: De Winter, Lieven and Huri Türsan (ed.): Regionalist Parties in Western Europe. Routledge, London and New York.

45 European Free Alliance (2007), [www.e-f-a.org](http://www.e-f-a.org).

46 Lynch, Peter (1998). The related objectives of the EFA are the following: “Securing the participation of the regions which have constitutional powers in meetings of the Council of Ministers which relate to matters that fall within their competence, in order to enhance the recognition of historical nations an regions; a direct access of historical nations an regions to the Court of Justice; democratic reforms of the European Institutions and the strengthening of the role of the Committee of the Regions; defending and safeguarding the linguistic and cultural diversity of the EU.” ([www.e-f-a.org](http://www.e-f-a.org))

47 Lynch, Peter (1998).

regionalist movements or parties have indeed joined EFA. The Lithuanian Polish People's Party or the Ruch Autonomii Slaska (Silesians in Poland). Moreover, the Moravian Democratic Party (Czech Republic), the Liga Transilvania Banat (Romania) and the Hungarian Federalist Party (Slovakia) have gained at least observer status in EFA. But these are all small, insignificant parties. The big ethnic parties in CEE, although striving for different forms of autonomy, did not apply for membership in the European Free Alliance. Lynch argues in the case of West European regionalist parties that did not join EFA that these parties "saw themselves as hegemonic parties within their regions and sought to associate with mainstream ideological groups within the European Parliament."<sup>48</sup> Mainstreaming helps them more if they succeed in gaining their fellow party members to support them in their attempts, since these groups are more powerful in the EP than the EFA.

However, this does not mean that the big regionalist and ethnic parties in CEE and SEE did not put forward their claims on an international platform. Similar to the CiU and PNV, they simply decided to join one of the big party-groups in Europe. The Party of Hungarian Coalition in Slovakia and the RMDSZ in Romania, for instance, joined the European People's Party; as did the *Christian Democratic and Flemish* or *New Flemish Alliance* in Belgium, the *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* in Spain and the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* in South Tyrol/Italy. Kinga Gál, a Hungarian MEP with Transylvania origins in the EPP faction, has shown that lobbying for autonomy does not inevitably require a regionalist faction in the EP. Crucial is, as Luis Durnwalder, head of government in South Tyrol, stresses: "An intensified cooperation of minority autonomies is necessary, (...) because the future united Europe also involves threats to smaller regional communities. Only together we will succeed to ensure our identity, our diverse characteristics; our cultural, political and economic independence."<sup>49</sup>

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48 Lynch, Peter (1998).

49 Interview with Luis Durnwalder, April 2007.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE HUNGARIAN AUTONOMY MOVEMENT IN TRANSYLVANIA**

In this chapter I present the first case study, which is the Hungarian autonomy movement in Transylvania. First, I introduce the reader to the background and development of the movement after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. The analytical part, which deals with the incentives and effects of transnational cooperation, is divided into three sub-chapters: First, I look at the movement's participation in transnational networks in general and try to identify the reasons for seeking specific kinds of cooperation. Second, I examine the aspects of European party-cooperation in the Transylvanian context. Finally, I aim at showing how the regionalist and autonomy movements in Europe have influenced and encouraged each other and which other external actors have played an influential role in the movement's development.

### ***3.1 Introduction***

#### **3.1.1 The Hungarian Autonomy Movement in the 1990s**

After decades of oppression and discrimination of Hungarians and other minorities in Romania, the revolution in 1989 and the fall of the nationalist-communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, enabled, among other things, the establishment of organizations, which were now free to represent the political, cultural and other interest of these communities. As for the Hungarians, the RMDSZ (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) became the most significant organization within a short period of time. It was founded on 25 December 1989 as an interest group and parent organization of all Hungarian political and social organizations. The RMDSZ wanted to represent all the Hungarians of Romania, not least in order to manifest Hungarian unity against Romanian nationalism at that time. Internal pluralism was guaranteed by the different professional origins of the RMDSZ members – politicians, intellectuals, artists and clericals – which were all represented in the Alliance, but also different political views had a place. Pluralism also meant a wide range of ideas with respect to the

autonomy issue, which was on the RMDSZ agenda from the very beginning of the 1990s.

At that time, platforms promoting cultural or personal and territorial autonomy were both represented in the RMDSZ. The Hungarian elite regarded autonomy as the most appropriate solution for the more than 1.5 million Hungarians in Romania (who mainly lived in Transylvania), in order to remain a community within a nationalizing Romanian state. However, despite being united in one big political party and organization, the Hungarians basically did not achieve anything in the beginning of the 1990s with regard to minority rights. The political climate was very anti-Hungarian. According to Csaba Takács, the managing president of the RMDSZ, especially in election campaigns the 'ethnic issue' and the Hungarian-Romanian relations served as a basis for Romanian politics. In such a political environment the RMDSZ could not be presented as a political partner.<sup>50</sup> This appeared to change after the 1996 parliamentary elections, when the *Democratic Convention of Romania* invited the RMDSZ into the government coalition. The fact that the RMDSZ entered the coalition obviously had consequences on the strategy of the alliance. "The RMDSZ did not only deal with the issue of autonomy any more, (...) or other ethnicity-specific rights, but we had serious legislative influence and means, on both the local and the governmental level. We used these means in order to create a path for the country, in which, we [the Hungarians] too, can realize our rights."<sup>51</sup> This affected the autonomy issue negatively, since especially the RMDSZ leadership seemed to (have been forced to) step back from its autonomy claims – in order to stay in power.

This concession provoked internal fights in the RMDSZ, which led to an internal split: On the one hand, the autonomists<sup>52</sup> around bishop László Tőkés and on the other hand, the

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50 Interview with Csaba Takács, April 2005.

51 Ibid.

52 I will use the term 'autonomists' only for this group of Hungarians (MPSZ, EMNT and SZNT, to be described and discussed below), even though there have also recently been autonomy claims by the RMDSZ. However, the autonomy issue does not seem to be the most important in current RMDSZ policy.

current RMDSZ leadership around Béla Markó and Attila Verestóí – bringing up the autonomy issue only at the time of elections and therefore misusing the ethnically based autonomy as a means to get the support of the ethnic Hungarian electorate in Romania<sup>53</sup>. Csaba Takács's opinion on the criticism: “Everything has its place and time (...), but this does not mean that the RMDSZ for some reason wants to give up any of its objectives, which it passed once as a political decision and formulated in its documents.”<sup>54</sup> The fact is that with regard to autonomy the RMDSZ has not achieved anything within 17 years. The latest attempt, an RMDSZ proposal for cultural autonomy, is an issue in the Romanian parliament since spring 2005 – the decision has been postponed for some time.

### 3.1.2 Internal Hungarian Division Concerning Autonomy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The internal division in the RMDSZ has survived the turn of the century, with the slight difference that many of the autonomists have left RMDSZ and founded the Hungarian Civic Alliance (MPSZ), a party-political alternative to the RMDSZ that in turn has become much more assertive in claiming for autonomy (see below). However, although the popular support for autonomy is large, it turned out that the 'Hungarian monopoly' of the RMDSZ had its disadvantages for the new inner-Hungarian opposition group. The Hungarian electorate<sup>55</sup> is convinced that if it does not vote for the RMDSZ, the latter will not receive the required 5% of votes in Romania, and so there would be no Hungarian representation in the Romanian parliament.<sup>56</sup>

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53 There are sharp divisions over the autonomy issue, or at least over the way how and what to claim and at what moment, within the RMDSZ. The leadership in Bucharest has lost the support of many local RMDSZ politicians, especially in the Szeklerland.

54 Interview with Csaba Takács, April 2005.

55 The Hungarian population in Romania is according to the 2002 national census 6.6%.

56 Interviews with László Tőkés (president EMNT), Zsolt Árus (SZNT), András Tőkés (Vice-President MPSZ), April 2005.

The Hungarian Civic Alliance (MPSZ) has not been eligible for elections, not even at the local level. The opposition politicians had to run for the election as independents so far. According to Romanian law, the registration of a political party requires 25 000 signatures from 25 counties and Bucharest municipality. The MPSZ has been collecting signatures since 2005; however, it is still missing around 800 signatures each in five counties that are mainly inhabited by Romanians ([www.figyelo.ro](http://www.figyelo.ro), 14 May 2007).

Disagreeing with the RMDSZ leadership's policy and strategy, the Hungarian autonomists decided to search for other channels and means of autonomy promotion within Romania, especially among Hungarians, but also abroad. In 2003, three Hungarian political organizations were established, which proclaimed the pursuit of Hungarian autonomy as their main platform<sup>57</sup>. While the MPSZ has been the party-political branch of the movement, the EMNT (Hungarian National Council of Transylvania) and the SZNT (Szekler National Council) were founded, in order to promote the autonomy issue on a societal basis and irrespective the party-political preference.<sup>58</sup> The EMNT stands for cultural and personal autonomy claims for all Hungarians in Romania, while the SZNT is mainly concerned with the territorial claims for the Szeklerland.

The main issues for the EMNT to solve have been, first of all, a legal basis for cultural and personal autonomy rights for Hungarians; second, to achieve a more independent higher education in the Hungarian language and third, the restitution of property, which principally affects the Hungarian churches<sup>59</sup>. The SZNT, in its attempts to achieve territorial autonomy for the Szeklerland, submitted an autonomy statute to the Romanian parliament in 2003, based on the model of the South Tyrolean autonomy. However, the reference to the South Tyrolean model as a proof for the 'Europeanness' for their claims did obviously not help: the Hungarian autonomy statute was rejected by the constitutional court, which argued that territorial autonomy contradicts the Romanian constitution. In 2006, the SZNT tried to demonstrate popular support in an internal and unofficial referendum on the territorial

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57 According to Hungarian oppositional politicians, there are three main reasons for the establishment of the MPSZ, EMNT and SZNT and their intensified demands for autonomy: First, the decrease of the Hungarian population in Romania by 250 000 persons between 1990 and 2005 – due to the increased emigration from Transylvania and the assimilation of Hungarians in Transylvania. Second, the unsuccessful politics of the RMDSZ in the last couple of years, particularly with respect to the autonomy issue. And third, the continuously nationalist politics of Romanians and its consequences.

58 The members of the EMNT and the SZNT have not only been politicians but also members of the civil society.

59 EMNT has published a book including a list of properties that have not been given back to the Hungarian churches since the fall of communism. The list, updated in 2002, consists of more than 2 091 properties. See: Szilágyi, Zsolt and János Antal (eds.) (2004): Transylvanian Monitor No 1, background documents to the periodical minority and human rights watch of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania. Hungarian National Council of Transylvania, Oradea.



autonomy of the Szeklerland, in which 90 percent of the Hungarian population in the Szeklerland supported the territorial autonomy claims – in a historical region, where Hungarians make up more than 80 percent of the population and where the Szeklers lived with a high level of autonomy for centuries – until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup> For this – so far rather symbolic – referendum the SZNT also invited international observers in order to prove its validity. But this was rather a symbolic gesture than an action aiming at provoking policy change from the part of the Romanian political elite.

### **3.2 Transylvanian Hungarian Autonomists and Transnational Networks**

So far, we can identify two main problems of the Hungarian autonomy claims in Transylvania. First, there is a strong reluctance on the side of Romanian politicians and Romanian society to grant Hungarians autonomy. Second, the Hungarian political elite are divided into two camps, which consider different paths as appropriate to achieve autonomy. The RMDSZ leadership practices the so-called 'politics of small steps' and avoids pushing the territorial autonomy issue in the Romanian parliament and government out of its self-interest, while the autonomists ask for more radical changes. In the next paragraphs I will focus on the latter group, the 'autonomists', since they are more relevant for my topic – due to their strong and specific commitment to the (ethnic) Hungarian autonomy, while the autonomy issue seems to represent only a small and not strongly pushed part in the RMDSZ policy.

In order to understand the strategic logic of the Hungarian autonomists in Transylvania, Zsolt Szilágyi, vice-president of the EMNT, gives some 'introductory' arguments:

We think that in order to realize the autonomy there is, essentially, the need of at least three things: First, that the community wants it, that is to say, the wish is enunciated. Second, that there evolves an intensive dialog with the Romanian political elite and the Romanian society, in which we make clear

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<sup>60</sup> The origins of the Szeklers is a contested issue: Some scholars identify them as the rest of the Huns, who withdraw to Transylvania after King Attila's death, others see them as a Turk people that came into the Carpathian Basin around 670 (Köpeczi 1990). These days, Szeklers perceive themselves & are perceived as part of the Hungarian nation, though their regional identity is quite strong, much stronger than in other parts of Transylvania where Hungarians live (Filep 2006b).

what our interest is and that this is not against the Romanian state's integrity. Third, in principle the international consent, because the autonomies might affect the restructuring of the country to an extent, which raises the question of stability. From this point of view, obviously also the great powers care about what happens in this region and in this connection of three we hope that Europe's national communities that are rather ahead of us, help us – according to their own possibilities – to promote this issue. That is why we invited them in such a big number to Transylvania; we are trying hard to keep them up to date with the things going on here.”<sup>61</sup>

As I have mentioned above, there is widespread support within the Hungarian population in Transylvania for the autonomy claims. However, the strategy and political power of the RMDSZ has limited the autonomists' leeway on the domestic level (among Hungarians). Second, although the dialog with the Romanian political elite and society has been quite intensive concerning the Hungarian autonomy, the attitudes on both sides are hardened: the autonomists do not back down (that is what the RMDSZ did) from their attempts, while the Romanian political elite persistently rejects even the slightest autonomy claims. Therefore, as Zsolt Szilágyi explains, the autonomists “tried to keep aloof from the whole autonomy struggle, which has anyway provoked debates in Romania from the very beginning, from senseless debates, because the Romanian perception is that this [the autonomy] is dangerous for the Romanian integrity.” Consequently, as domestic support from Romanian as well as Hungarian politicians in power has been lacking, the autonomists have sought support from external actors: First, from Hungary, which they perceive as their motherland, second, from the European Union and third, from other regionalist and autonomy movements, primarily in Western Europe.

The first transnational (or rather trans-border) networks established were basically the relations to the kin state Hungary and to the other Hungarians who live as minorities in the neighboring states of Hungary as a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon signed in 1920.

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61 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

These Hungarian-Hungarian ties have not dissolve since then, but they have seen better and worse times. The Magyar Állandó Értekezlet (MAÉRT), established in 1996, could be regarded as one of these 'networks'. The MAÉRT is a session at which the Hungarian government, the parliamentary parties in Hungary and the Hungarian representatives abroad participated – the first time in 1996, then from 1999 to 2004 once a year. Issues of discussion and negotiation have been mainly the Hungarian national interest and the interests of the Hungarians abroad in particular as well as how the Hungarian state could support the latter effectively – even though, first of all the Hungarian government decides what kind of and how much (financial) support it can or wants to provide for the Hungarians abroad. The communists and post-communists, the latter are in power since 2002, have not been famous for the support of the Hungarians in the neighboring states<sup>62</sup>; and also their lobbying on behalf of their ethnic kin is also rather weak. So, it is not the actor the Hungarian autonomists prefer to have as a transnational partner for their issue. Recently, visits of socialist and liberal politicians to Transylvania have been greeted by hails of catcalls and boo, while conservatives and the president of Hungary, László Sólyom<sup>63</sup> seem to be welcome any time.

The second external actor involved (and a potential lobbyist) is the European Union, in which the autonomists put some hope especially as long as Romania was not a member of the EU – even though they were skeptical at the same time. According to László Tőkés, president of the EMNT, the Hungarians in Transylvania have curiously faced a situation, in which “the European Parliament seems to be more generous than the RMDSZ concerning our autonomy issue. (...) That is to say, our highest political supporter and most important ally is Europe, even though Europe cannot be proud of having been too sensitive with regard to minority

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62 The MAÉRT did not take place in 2005 and 2006; many Hungarian foundations abroad or dealing with the situation of Hungarians in the neighbouring states have been closed.

63 Sólyom openly promotes the autonomy issue of Hungarians abroad, but the promotion of minority rights in Europe as a whole. He also won sympathies among Hungarians in the neighboring states, when he visited Transylvania on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2007. It was the first time that the president of Hungary did not participate at the official ceremony in Hungary in memory of the 1848 revolution.

issues.<sup>64</sup> That was in 2005, and Tőkés was obviously right in being skeptical about the EU's support for the Hungarian autonomy: The EU admitted Romania in 2007 without making use of the conditionality tool in the case of autonomy as a minority right – even though the respect for and protection of minority rights is one of the Copenhagen Criteria.<sup>65</sup> The hopes of the autonomists already diminished when European Commissioner Olli Rehn stated in 2006 that (territorial) autonomy is an internal issue of Romania. The attempts of Hungarian autonomist leaders, trying to convince the European Union of their right to self-determination and justifying their democratic claims by referring to the autonomies of Catalonia, South Tyrol, the Åland Islands, Switzerland or Belgium, did not change the European Union's stance.

It is not so that the Hungarian autonomists have just recently begun to seek the support of Western regionalist and autonomist parties and movements – their transnational alliances date back to the 1990s<sup>66</sup>. However, the lack of support for autonomy from the part of the RMDSZ, the current socialist-liberal government in Hungary and the European Union has provoked an intensified search for transnational regionalist and autonomist cooperation. According to Szilágyi, the transnational contacts of the Hungarian autonomists were built at conferences, international fora, for instance in Brussels, where he himself got in touch with Catalans, Basques, Welsh, Belgian Germans, Albanians and others. By visiting each other, these contacts have been strengthened.

In 2004, for instance, the autonomists organized an autonomy conference in Szováta/Sovata where they invited representatives of other regionalist and autonomy movements; as

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64 Interview with László Tőkés, April 2005.

65 It is true that respect for minority rights does not necessarily mean granting autonomy. However, if one talks about the protection of minorities one has to consider autonomy as a protective tool against assimilation, first of all. With that I mean autonomy in (higher) education, in culture-related issues, or even in public administration. In this connection Romania still has very nationalizing policies towards the minorities that live in Romania.

66 Zsolt Szilágyi reports that he first visited the Åland Islands in 1995 and since then has had regular contact with the Åland politicians, who visit Transylvania on a regular basis and vice versa, above all for the exchange of experience, knowledge and information.

well as members of the EP<sup>67</sup>, the Council of Europe etc., who traveled around Transylvania to learn about the autonomy claims there. A second level of networking was initiated by scholars coming from the same regions. In November 2006, the second European Conference on Higher Education of National Minorities was held in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, initiated by the Bolyai Initiative Committee. The Conference was an opportunity to learn from each other's experience and a platform for discussion on the specific minority issue of higher education. It was also the aim of the conference to arrive at an agreement concerning the interests of European minorities in the field of education.<sup>68</sup>

Zsolt Szilágyi concludes that so far the different kinds of transnational contacts and meetings have helped the Hungarian autonomists in Transylvania insofar as they have learnt from the other autonomy models. "We should not forget that the political culture and the development of community interests were frozen during communism. So, we cannot talk about an organic development of the society here, because the dictatorship basically froze, stopped the kind of societal thinking, which is about power-sharing and the different modern models of administrative institutions."<sup>69</sup>

However, to learn from each other does not simply mean to get to know the positive features of other movements, but it is also about to find transnational allies that "help to identify the traps in which other communities fell into."<sup>70</sup> From my interviews with Hungarian politicians in Transylvania it would seem that they have very good knowledge about the state of the existing autonomies and the activities of autonomy movements in

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67 E.g. Ignasi Guardans, Catalan politician for the European Liberals, Michel Ebner, South Tyrolean politician in the EPP.

68 Participants of the conference included Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Tartu University Narva College (Estonia), Cardiff University (Wales), Free University of Bozen (South Tyrol), University of Tetova (Macedonia), Sami University College (Norway), State University of Comrat (Moldova), Selye János University (Slovakia), University of Újvidék/Novi Sad (Serbia), Babes-Bolyai University, Sapientia University, Partium Christian University, Protestant Theological Seminary, Hungarian Technical-Scientific Society of Transylvania, Medical & Pharmacy University of Marosvásárhely/Targu Mures (Romania).

69 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

70 Ibid.

Europe, especially in South Tyrol and the Åland Islands. Hungarians in Transylvania have established close transnational relations with South Tyrol – with politicians as well as with experts<sup>71</sup>. As it turned out from a visit of the SZNT president József Csapó to South Tyrol in April 2006, he also tried to get lobbying support from South Tyrol. Csapó asked the South Tyrolean EP members to persistently support the Szekler autonomy in the EP and in the European Commission. At the same time he asked the South Tyrolean vice-premier to support the Szekler autonomy in front of the UN Security Council.<sup>72</sup> As I have mentioned above, South Tyrol has also served as a model for the autonomy proposal that the Hungarian autonomists drafted and submitted to the Romanian parliament.

However, the cooperation between Hungarians in Transylvania and South Tyroleans has all in all not yet exceeded the level of exchange of information and the organization of common meetings and conferences, mainly due to the fact that there are only loose and non-institutionalized networks between the two movements. But Szilágyi hopes that thanks to the solidarity of the regionalists and autonomists in general – or as Luis Durnwalder says: “unity is strength”<sup>73</sup> – and as a consequence of their permanent lobbying, the European Union will have to improve the institutional and legal basis for minority issues. As Szilágyi points out, the problem of the EU is currently the fact that it has no institution that is supervising and monitoring human rights issues (including minority rights) in the EU countries. This not yet existing institution, which is supposed to be established in Vienna, would control whether the member states comply with the political standards. It would give the minorities the opportunity to lobby and influence the actions of this agency, established to suggest sanctions against any country, in case of non-compliance. Until the agency’s establishment, Hungarian autonomists try to use most possible channels of lobbying, mainly at the supranational level.

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71 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

72 [www.erdely.ma](http://www.erdely.ma), 17 April 2006.

73 Interview with Luis Durnwalder, April 2007.

### **3.3 Transylvanian Hungarian Autonomists and European Party-Cooperation**

While the Hungarian autonomists have sought support from and cooperation in different transnational regionalist/autonomy networks, they are not yet members of a European party. One reason for this is simply that the MPSZ is still struggling with being officially registered as a political party in Romania<sup>74</sup>; while the EMNT and the SZNT are ethnic political organizations lobbying for autonomy irrespective of party-political preferences and it is not their intention to join a European party. Second, despite their sympathy for the EFA, the autonomists would prefer to apply for membership in the European People's Party and not in the European Free Alliance, which many regionalist and autonomy parties belong to. EMNT president László Tóké, the protagonist of the autonomists, who is going to run as an independent candidate for the EP elections of Romania in autumn 2007, already announced that he would most likely join the European People's Party faction in the EP.<sup>75</sup> However, this is not in itself a rejection of the EFA's aims. As Zsolt Szilágyi explains:

“If there is an ally, even if it is small, one may not reject it. However, it is a fact that [only] the bigger parliamentary and political groups can essentially have a say in decisions. Well, it would be the best to have both in the EPP and in the EFA one or the other person who supports the Hungarian cause. Because I am not sure if it is necessary to (...) bind the representation of the national community's interests along political ideology. It is just good, if it can attach.”<sup>76</sup>

Szilágyi mentions the Catalans, who have representatives in the EPP, among the European Liberals and the EFA. “That is not a bad construction, if they want to influence bigger

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74 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

75 The RMDSZ has joined the EPP in 1993 and the EP elections in autumn 2007 will not change this position. However, in case of great support for László Tóké, the RMDSZ might not be represented in the European Parliament. In order to avoid this situation, the autonomists suggested presenting a common program and a common list of all Hungarians for the EP elections, but the RMDSZ rejected. The elections in autumn will show if this stance of the RMDSZ was clever or not. While the RMDSZ could have been sure of the entire Hungarian votes at national elections so far, this time its plans might not work out, since Tóké is a highly respected personality among Hungarians in Romania, and who is known for his intransigence, not least with regard to the important autonomy issue. He would undoubtedly be a strong minority representation in the EP.

76 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

decisions.”<sup>77</sup> However, due to fact that Hungarians in Transylvania are comparatively few in number (1.5 million compared to 7 million Catalans) their situation is not as comfortable as the Catalans’, and the chances of pluralistic representation in the EP are rather low.

What makes the Hungarian autonomists distinct from most of the regionalist and autonomy parties in the EFA, is first their – potential but electorally not yet proven – large (ethnic) domestic support, in order words a potentially hegemonic status among ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Second, it is the existence of a kin state, which is supposed to support them in their attempts. And third, the presence of Hungarians in other neighboring states of Hungary who also seek to improve their situation as a minority in the state they live. Consequently, by joining a bigger alliance in the European Parliament, such as the European People’s Party, Hungarians from Hungary, Slovakia and Romania could cooperate much more effectively at the European level and would be more influential than in the EFA, which is a comparatively small alliance that is, according to Lynch, rather attractive for small (non-hegemonic) regionalist and minority parties which have no support from politicians in other states.

Another reason for non-membership in the European Free Alliance (EFA) might be that the claims of the Hungarians autonomists<sup>78</sup> are located on several levels. First of all, they claim cultural and personal autonomy for all Hungarians in Romania, but especially in Transylvania, where the vast majority of Hungarians in Romania live. Second, they claim territorial autonomy for the ethnically homogeneous Szeklerland (a relatively small part of Transylvania), and a special status for municipalities where the minority is majority, as it is the case in the Hungarian minority law; but they do not claim territorial autonomy for Transylvania as a whole.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, if an autonomist party for the Szeklerland, which

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77 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

78 As I have mentioned above: By autonomists I mean the members of the inner-Hungarian opposition to the RMDSZ, i.e. the members of EMNT, SZNT and MPSZ. These organisations cannot be taken separately, even though they have different roles in the whole autonomy movement.

79 It is not excluded that Hungarian autonomists would agree with territorial autonomy for Transylvania, where they make



does not exist at present, would apply for membership in the EFA, the Transylvania-wide claims for cultural and personal autonomy would be underrepresented in the Alliance. The EMNT, for instance, as a possible representation of all Hungarians in Transylvania, however, would not be suitable as a regionalist party, since its claims are non-territorial. As one can see, the claims of the Hungarian autonomists are complex – but they see no alternative to that, as Zsolt Szilágyi mentions: “The issue of Hungarians in Romania would not be solved only with the Szekler autonomy. The personal and cultural autonomy are just as important for the existence of the Hungarians in Transylvania. (...) Therefore we think that it is necessary to introduce the system of autonomy in Romania.”<sup>80</sup>

### ***3.4 Transylvanian Hungarian Autonomists and Ethnic Mobilization***

So far we have learned what transnational alliances the Hungarian autonomists have formed, what strategies they have chosen and what purpose and chances they see in different transnational networks. It was rather about the incentives such networks represent for the Hungarian autonomists. In this sub-chapter I will show what effects external actors in general, but especially other autonomies and their movements have had on the Hungarian autonomists in Transylvania. The questions I will try to answer here, is how and to what extent external actors, especially other regionalists and autonomists have influenced and encouraged the Hungarians in their claims and how their stance has influenced changes in strategy and level of demands. While Jenne (2007), for instance, looks at the stance of the Hungarian government, when analyzing the changes in demand of the Hungarians in Transylvania, I focus on the transnational and supranational actors and how their changing stance has affected the autonomy claims in Transylvania.

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up approximately 20% of the population. However, they are still a minority, while they would be the (large) majority in an autonomous Szeklerland. So, it is about ethnic self-government. One may not neglect the significance of the historical Szekler autonomy in the autonomists' mind (the Szeklerland used to be autonomous for centuries). The SZNT's organizational structure, for instance, even restores the historical administrative division in Chairs (Szék) and ignores the current administrative borders.

80 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

The first answer of most autonomists to the question “what has influenced your autonomy movement’s claims?” is assumingly similar to the following: “The South Tyrolean autonomy has not been influenced by other autonomies but was a historical development and an achievement of those who consequently fought for this cause.”<sup>81</sup> The Hungarian autonomists often refer to a historical necessity of autonomy in Transylvania. According to Zsolt Szilágyi, autonomy has been a need for Hungarians since the Treaty of Trianon. “We should not forget that in connection with the peace negotiations in Versailles, the Romanian authorities took the Wilson Principles, too. As well as in the declaration of Gyulafehérvár [Alba Iulia], in which the Romanians proclaim of their own motion the accession of Transylvania to Romania, they guarantee territorial autonomy for the Banat. That is to say, the idea of territorial autonomy is absolutely not a new phenomenon.”<sup>82</sup> Not to talk about the Szekler autonomy that lasted until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the same time, the EMNT’s vice-president Zsolt Szilágyi does not deny the influence of other movements and other external actors on the Hungarian autonomy movement. Referring to the South Tyrolean autonomy, he admits that it “helped us a lot [in conceptual terms] before submitting the autonomy statute to the Romanian parliament.”<sup>83</sup> Anyway, it seems as the South Tyrolean autonomy is considered to be the perfect model for Transylvania, because it actually represents an “autonomy tissue”, as Szilágyi says: While South Tyrol is an autonomous territorial unit with its autonomous administration, the cultural autonomy of the German speaking population (as well as the Ladins and Italians) concerns the whole Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige. In the Hungarian case the Szeklerland replaces South Tyrol and Transylvania replaces Trentino-Alto Adige. Szilágyi then mentions the economic growth in South Tyrol that occurred thanks to the autonomous status of the region

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81 Interview with Luis Durnwalder, April 2007.

82 Interview with Zsolt Szilágyi, April 2007.

83 Ibid.

and he expects a similar development in the Szeklerland (and in Transylvania), as soon as the autonomy is implemented. From this paragraph we can conclude that the Hungarian autonomists very much oriented themselves towards successful autonomies in Western Europe that encouraged them – simply with their existence – to follow their example. Furthermore, we can just assume that the transnational relations they enter into supported them psychologically, i.e. the effect the transnational cooperation has had is at least a feeling of increased bargaining power in front of the Romanian government.

Another point of reference has been the European Union and its promotion of regionalism, the principle of subsidiarity and minority rights standards. Especially from the beginning of Romania's negotiations with the European Union, the (ethnic) autonomy claims have been (re)emphasized. Even though several circumstances were responsible for the establishment of the Hungarian autonomist organizations (MPSZ, EMNT and SZNT) in 2003, one can assume that the prospect of EU accession was one of them. Hereto refers László Tőkés' criticism of the RMDSZ: "We let pass such favorable circumstances like Romania's accession to the Council of Europe, its NATO accession and such favorable political circumstances as now apropos of the European integration, when anew optimal conditions have been created to enforce the Hungarian autonomy claims."<sup>84</sup> So, even though experience shows that the EU has been quite inconsistent on the issue of minority rights and autonomy, the EU has led autonomists in Central and East European countries believe that the democratic 'Europe' will support them.

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84 Interview with László Tőkés, April 2005.

## CHAPTER 4: THE ROMANIAN REGIONALIST MOVEMENT IN TRANSYLVANIA

### 4.1 Introduction

Compared to the Hungarian autonomy claims, which reemerged after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu's nationalist-communist dictatorship in 1989, the attempts of Romanian regionalists in Transylvania arose at the end of the 1990s. There are three groups that have played a role in this movements: The Liga Transilvania Banat – a regionalist party, the Liga Pro Europa – a Romanian-Hungarian NGO, and the *Provincia* group – a group of intellectuals promoting the Europeanization (and thus also the regionalization) of Romania.

#### 4.1.1 The Liga Transilvania Banat – a Romanian regionalist party in Transylvania

*M-am săturat de România!* – I am fed up with Romania! This is the title of a political manifesto by Sabin Gherman published in 1998 that caused a stir in Romania. Gherman, who was a journalist for the public television TVR (Televiziunea Română) before the publication of the manifesto, criticized the centralism of Bucharest and called for more autonomy of Transylvania within Romania. It was the beginning of a Romanian initiative for a decentralized Romania, an attempt that has been pursued mainly by Hungarians in Transylvania. Gherman was immediately accused of treason mainly by Romanian politicians and lost his job at the TVR. Gherman, who sees himself as a Transylvanian and promotes multiculturalism, was the founder of the Liga Transilvania Banat (LTB) in 2002 and fights as the LTB's president for “his Transylvania”.

However, the party was denied registration as a political party and so also at the last parliamentary elections in 2004 it was not eligible. The program of the party included the regionalization of Romania and the restoration of the historical regions. The 1968 law creating counties should have been revised. However, the court considered this initiative as unconstitutional. “The Romanian constitution does not forbid the regions, but the court said

that in the constitution it is written: county (judet), municipalities and cities, no regions, we do not want that”<sup>85</sup>. Gherman also suspects that the court considered his party to be separatist. Especially in the case of Transylvania, the majority of Romanians do not favor autonomy, federalism or decentralization:

“In Romania it is a question of... a blocked mentality. In Moldavia, if you would like to talk about Moldavia, there is no problem. In Dobrogea, if you would like to talk about Dobrogea, no problem. But if you would like to talk about Transylvania, there is irrevocably a sign: Transylvania? Transylvania does not exist, not exist; not exist, only Romania.”

“This is a mental problem of the officials. When we want to talk about Transylvania, this is an alarm bell for the officials. Why? Because in their mindset Transylvania still is a contested territory. But for me, Transylvania is a common space with the Hungarians and Germans. For Bucharest there is no mutual praxis with the minorities. (...) All the multicultural, complementary values, the values of the minorities are... are hostile [to the majority], per definition.”

So, the Liga Transilvania Banat has basically two main messages: First, Romania should be divided into regions, which would have large competences in most of the policy areas. Second, Gherman promotes the Transylvanian multiculturalism and emphasizes a specific Transylvanian identity, which is actually based on the former.

#### **4.1.2 Liga Pro Europa & *Provincia* – for a regionalized, multicultural, 'European' Romania**

Similar to Sabin Gherman and his Liga Transilvania Banat, the Liga Pro Europa considers regionalization a contribution to a multicultural Transylvania. However, the Liga Pro Europa<sup>86</sup> was already established in 1989 as one of the first NGOs in Romania by a group of intellectuals committed to the Pan-European idea and the values of democracy and pluralism, while the promotion of regionalism was introduced later in the second half of the 1990s. To-

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85 Interview with Sabin Gherman, April 2005.

86 “The central programmes of the Pro Europa League, implemented predominantly in Transylvania, are based on the promotion of interculturalism, human rights and minority rights, on civic education and on preventing conflicts.”

gether with the *Provincia* group, a circle of Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals, the Liga Pro Europa elaborated a proposal, which divides Romania up in seven regions. Regions that “do not have to be ‘invented’”<sup>87</sup>, as the Liga Pro Europa’s co-president Smaranda Enache says, since they have already existed as historical provinces. These are besides Transylvania – with the sub-region Szeklerland – Banat, Bukovina, Dobrogea, Moldova, Muntenia and Oltenia. According to Enache, Romania in its territorial-administrative structure is stuck in 1968, when Ceausescu decided to create 42 small counties, at the top of which he put “a small Ceausescu as the president of the local communist party. This one governed the territory like a local despot”<sup>88</sup>. The problem with the current system is the enormous centralism, which is expensive, bureaucratic and improper, and the management of public means is not transparent.

Moreover, Smaranda Enache criticizes the newly-created statistical regions (NUTS 2) that were created after the European Union already in 1998 pushed Romania to reforms in this area. Enache notes that “the regions have no power. They dispose neither of the development plans nor of the funds. From that point of view they just exist on paper”<sup>89</sup>. Also the division has its problems: Although the statistical regions do not overstep the borders of the historical regions, they are artificial; for instance the Centrum region (Alba Iulia), to which also the Szeklerland belongs. “In reality there has never in the course of history existed such a region; it was invented, just that the Szeklerland cannot be a region for itself.”<sup>90</sup> In view of a regionalization of Romania, Enache is not pessimistic but cautiously optimistic. The ideas of the Liga Pro Europa enjoy only little support from the Romanian society; besides the Hungarians, only some Liberals would be in favor of the LPE’s regionalization plan, while others are reluctant. However, she hopes that the EU membership of Romania will change the

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87 Interview with Smaranda Enache, April 2005.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

majority's stance, even if it takes some time: "the European way of thinking, the European respect for local autonomy, for pluralism will also have its effect in Romania; if not on the initiative of the government, then on the initiative of Brussels."<sup>91</sup>

#### **4.2 Transylvanian Romanian Regionalists and Transnational Networks**

To start with, one has to point out that the Romanian regionalists in Transylvania are marginalized in the Romanian society, in contrast to the Hungarian autonomists, whose ideas enjoy large support within the Hungarian community in Romania. So, as for the Romanians, the debate on Romania's regionalization has rather been an intellectual discourse and not a political or economic debate, by which the Transylvanian population could be persuaded of the necessity of the suggested reforms. However, as for the Hungarians, the main obstacle of the Romanian regionalists has been the *reluctance of the Romanian political elite* including the *government* in opening a discussion on the regionalization issue – even though the regionalization ideas come from Romanians and not from Hungarians. I have mentioned several reasons for this in the introduction of this chapter.

Consequently, due to the *lack of domestic support* (the Hungarians support the idea but not the movement itself) we would expect the Romanian regionalists to seek external support. Since – in contrast to the Hungarians – they have no ethnic kin state abroad, there remain only two kinds of potential partners: other regionalists and autonomy movements or supranational actors such as the European Union. However, irrespective to this aspect the transnational activities of Romanian regionalists have been very limited – at least compared to the Hungarians. The main reason for this is, according to my observation, the small amount of people involved in the movement. While the political movement represented by the *Liga Transilvania Banat* can show a certain degree of transnational cooperation with the regionalist parties of

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91 Interview with Smaranda Enache, April 2005.

the EFA (see below), the societal movement represented by the *Liga Pro Europa* and *Provincia* have been rather inactive and so also much less active than the Hungarians at the transnational level. “When we elaborated our proposal for the regionalization of Romania we had studied the functioning of other regions in Europe, but we had little transnational contacts.”<sup>92</sup> Smaranda Enache might be the exception among the representatives of the societal movement: Whenever there is a forum or a conference, whether it is national or international, Enache is present. She participated, for instance, also at the second European Conference on Higher Education of National Minorities, held in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg in November 2006. But in general, the *Liga Pro Europa* is rather preoccupied with domestic projects, while the intensive exchange of knowledge and information with regionalist movements abroad is absent.

#### **4.3 Transylvanian Romanian Regionalists and European Party-Cooperation**

While the Hungarians in Transylvania have not participated in the European Free Alliance, the *Liga Transilvania Banat* (LTB) applied for and obtained observer status in the EFA. As an 'observer' and not a full member of the EFA, the LTB cannot take part in EFA decisions. However, it can try to influence the decisions and give advice to full members as well as to EFA representatives in the European Parliament. The *Liga Transilvania Banat* on the other hand could profit from the EFA's support in terms of promotion and conceptual assistance. The heart of the LTB is *The Decentralization Process Project* for Romania, elaborated in cooperation with the European Free Alliance. According to Sabin Gherman, president of the *Liga Transilvania Banat*, the plan is a combination of the pre-existing ideas of Romanian regionalists and the inputs of other regionalist movements with membership in the EFA. However, since the LTB has not yet been registered as a political party in Romania, the political profit it could make with EFA cooperation has been limited.

As I have already mentioned, the *Liga Transilvania Banat* is a very small party and its

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92 Interview with Ștef Traian, member of the *Provincia* group, April 2007.



support among Romanians is very little – and it sought transnational cooperation in the EFA. So, Lynch's argument that the EFA is more attractive to small and non-hegemonic parties holds perfectly true here. The LTB would probably get lost in the big European parties such as the EPP, while in the EFA it is at least one of 34 mostly small members with a specific interest: the promotion of regionalism and autonomy in Europe.

#### **4.4 Transylvanian Romanian Regionalists and Ethnic Mobilization**

Compared to the claims of the Hungarians in Transylvania, the attempts of the Romanian regionalists are not ethnically based; however, one could argue that the attempts of the Liga Transilvania Banat and the Liga Pro Europa are multiethnic. The multiethnic and multicultural character of Transylvania encouraged them to claim for a special status of Transylvania as a distinct historical region of Romania. The difference in their claims compared to other examples in the 'West' such as Spain or Italy, for example, is that they want to see a regionalization of Romania as a whole, in which Transylvania is one of the regions and not a region holding a special status with more competences than other regions of the country.

As in the Hungarian case, the influence of the European Union is very much noticeable in the words of the Romanian regionalist representatives. The regionalization of Romania is to them almost tantamount to the 'Europeanization' of Romania, as well as multiculturalism and the respect of the 'Other' represent for them 'European' values, which conflict sharply with the nationalism still dominating Romanian society. Actually, simply the name of the Liga Pro Europa indicates the direction in which the Romanian regionalists want their country to go. Finally, an interesting point with respect to the Romanian regionalists is the moment of their appearance. Sabin Gherman published his manifesto in 1998, the *Provincia* was founded in 1999 – this strongly points to the fact that their emergence is connected to the prospect of Romania's EU accession, since negotiations between the EU and Romania started in 1999.

## CONCLUSIONS

In my analysis of the Transylvanian case as a European region where regionalist and autonomy movements have (re)emerged after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, I have examined how and why Hungarian autonomists and Romanian regionalists in Transylvania have sought different kinds of transnational cooperation and support in order to achieve similar goals. Furthermore, I have shown how other movements in Europe have influenced and encouraged the Transylvanian movements. In the following sub-chapters, I will compare the two movements with regard to the different aspects of my analysis and try to infer patterns to European regionalist and autonomy movements in general.

### **5.1 Transylvanian Autonomy Movements and Transnational Networks**

Both the Hungarian autonomy and the Romanian regionalist movement show that a *reluctant central government* is more likely to provoke search for external support. Since the mainstream Romanian parties are not willing to discuss the issues of autonomy and/or regionalization, Hungarian autonomists and Romanian regionalists have been seeking international allies to bring pressure on the Romanian government. The potentially most powerful ally both movements see in the European Union, which has the power to force the Romanian state to grant autonomy to Hungarians on the one hand and the region of Transylvania on the other hand. However, the EU proved to be not as consistent with respect to its promoted principle of subsidiarity as the regionalist and autonomy movements expected it. Consequently, regionalists and autonomists have intensified transnational cooperation and consolidated transnational contacts with the purpose to lobby for their common cause at the supranational level.

While both the Hungarian and the Romanian movement have faced a reluctant central government, only the Hungarians have had a permanent *external lobbying actor* – their kin state Hungary. Even though the degree of support has always depended on the stance of the

government in Hungary, the presence of this additional actor – compared to the Romanian movement – has influenced the development of the Hungarian's strategy. That is to say, in contrast to the Romanian movement, the Hungarian autonomists have had a – more or less – reliable partner that could be activated at several levels: at the trans-national level (Hungarian-Hungarian relations), at the inter-national level (Hungarian-Romanian relations) and at the supranational level (Hungary as a member of the EU). The Romanians, however, have depended on the transnational relations with regionalists and autonomists who share common values and ideas but are not bound together as a nation that expects mutual support.

Furthermore, I have shown that both movements have profited from the exchange of experience, knowledge and information with other movements. First of all, they have learned about autonomy and regionalism in conceptual terms, second, and more important has been to learn about and to acquire strategies of other movements; strategies that might be or have been applied in the individual domestic context. Third, by joining these networks and alliances, every regionalist or autonomy movement increases the bargaining power of the regionalists as a political interest group in Europe and with that it might improve the situation of any regional or ethnic community in Europe. As Luis Durnwalder, head of government in the autonomous South Tyrol says:

„The cooperation of friendly autonomies and countries provides more security and better opportunities in order to represent the own interests through a much larger population in front of the big institution [the EU]. As if to say “unity is strength”, in many important areas of life the cooperating countries have developed common strategies and solutions could be found with the EU. (...) An intensified cooperation of minority autonomies is necessary, (...) because the future united Europe also involves threats to smaller regional communities. Only together we will succeed to ensure our identity, our diverse characteristics; our cultural, political and economic independence.”<sup>93</sup>

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93 Interview with Luis Durnwalder, April 2007.

There is no doubt that the power of the regions within Europe has been increased through cooperation, however, at the same time the European Union must force its member states to change their administrative division if it is contradictory to the principle of subsidiarity. The example of Romania shows that the EU's enforcement has not happened yet. At 1<sup>st</sup> of January a highly centralist Romania joined the European Union – and decentralization, regionalization or autonomization is not to be expected in the near future.

An interesting aspect in the comparison of the Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania is that the Hungarians seem to have been much more active in galvanizing external support than the Romanians. Hungarians are present at different levels and in different networks (e.g. politics, church, education), while the Romanians can show only the observer status of the Liga Transilvania Banat in the EFA. This might be connected to the movements' strength. While the Hungarian autonomists enjoy *large support* from the Hungarian population of Transylvania, the few Romanian regionalists are marginalized in the Romanian society and have big difficulties to get support for their ideas among Romanians; and they are basically excluded from the political discourse.

By strength I also mean the movements' ability to survive. Hungarians regard autonomy as to be necessary for the survival of the Hungarian community (a minority) in Romania, consequently, their efforts are much stronger. The Romanian regionalists, however, are a small group of intellectuals with a democratic idea for Romania and having a penchant to multiculturalism. But they do not have to fear the loss of the Romanian community in Transylvania, i.e. not their identity but the idea of a multicultural society is at stake if things in Romania do not change as they want it. Moreover, the Romanians seem to be more patient concerning administrative change than Hungarians, who fear increased emigration and assimilation without the enforcement of autonomy.

**Regionalist and autonomy movements cooperate in transnational networks, because they face *reluctant central governments* with their claims and because they see in these networks an instrument to increase the bargaining power at the supranational level, namely the EU, which might force their government from outside. Ethnic minority movements have often the advantage of having a *kin state* that serves as an additional *lobby actor* for their cause, characterized by a strong commitment to the nation and its survival; while movements without kin state have to rely simply on the transnational networks as a lobbying group.**

## **5.2 Transylvanian Autonomy Movements and European Party-Cooperation**

In the second frame, I have pointed out that the Hungarian and Romanian movements have chosen different ways of transnational (European) party-cooperation. While the Hungarians sympathize with the European People's Party (EPP)<sup>94</sup>, the biggest European Party with a big faction in the European Parliament, the Romanian Liga Transilvania Banat has obtained observer status in the European Free Alliance (EFA), a comparatively small alliance. They have chosen different paths, even though both movements have regionalist or autonomy attempts, which are particularly represented in the EFA – the alliance of regionalist and nationalist parties in Europe.

The Hungarians – perceiving themselves as an ethnic 'hegemonic' and not only as an autonomy movement –, however, see greater opportunities in the EPP, since it is more influential than the EFA. But the influence within the EPP they can only get, first, with *large (ethnic) domestic support* – because the electorate gets them into the European Parliament; second, with the support of other Hungarian EPP members from Hungary and Slovakia and third, with the help of other 'hegemonic' regionalist and autonomy parties in the EPP such as the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* or the *Convergència i Unió* that have chosen the same path of

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94 Which the RMDSZ is already member of, but the autonomists not (yet).

transnational party-cooperation. However, this path does not exclude cooperation with and the support of the EFA, since it is always possible to forge alliances with respect to specific issues, as well as it does not exclude the exchange of experience, knowledge and information. As for the Liga Tansilvania Banat, a small party with *little domestic support* and *no lobbying external actors* such as a kin state, membership in the EFA is more attractive. Although the EPP is definitely more influential, as a small party it would get lost in the EPP, where it – by the way – faces mainstream Romanian parties with an opposite position. Furthermore, as a party with a specific interest – the regionalization of Romania – it fits better in the EFA, which particularly emphasizes the Liga Transilvania Banat’s interest.

**The decision of regionalist or autonomy movements which way of cooperation to choose depends on the *size of the movement*, the *domestic support* it enjoys and the *external lobby actors* it has such as a kin state or ethnic kin abroad. However, both try to achieve the greatest bargaining power possible corresponding to their individual strength. My analysis supports Lynch’s argument that regionalist alliances such as the European Free Alliance are more attractive for small parties, but less attractive for hegemonic parties representing large minorities with claims that are not territorially limited and that enjoy external support from parties in their kin state and ethnic kin abroad.**

### **5.3 Transylvanian Autonomy Movements and Ethnic Mobilization**

In the third frame, I have shown that the Hungarian and Romanian movements in Transylvania have been influenced and encouraged by other regionalist and autonomy movements in Europe such as South Tyrol, Catalonia, the Åland Islands or (quasi-)federal states as Switzerland and Belgium. Just the existence of these movements has influenced and encouraged the Transylvanian movements, since they have served as examples and references for the Transylvanians’ own goals – as the representatives of the movements admit. The other movements have supported Transylvanians in conceptual terms, but in addition, through the exchange of experience, knowledge and information within the networks, the Transylvanians

have acquired strategies to galvanize external help and to fight their government. That is to say, the cooperation has had a significant learning effect for the individual movements. In the case of Transylvania we can say that the Hungarians & Romanians have held the position of the learning movements, while the West European movements can be identified as the leading movements in this particular relationship. However, in order to draw a picture for the regionalist and autonomy movements in general, more information on other movements is needed.

Furthermore, both movements have been influenced and encouraged by the European Union's promotion of regionalism and the principle of subsidiarity. With that the EU set a potential pre-existing condition or an institutional constraint for a Beissinger-like "tide" of regionalism or at least regionalist and autonomy mobilization in Europe. One reason why the Transylvanian movements – despite participation in networks – have not been successful yet, is the fact that the European Union was not persistent enough (or simply not interested enough) to set the regionalization of a country as a condition for EU membership – even though it had to chance to do so, since Romania had great incentives to join the European Union. Not to forget the persistent reluctance of the Romanian government.

However, I do not say that the existence of regionalist and autonomy movements elsewhere or the apparent "tide" of regionalism thanks to the European Union has been the trigger for the autonomy and regionalist claims in Transylvania. Historically speaking, autonomy is anything but new in that very part of Europe. The Hungarians have taken the historical Szekerland and its autonomous status as a basis for their territorial autonomy claims, while the Romanian regionalists restore *Transylvanism* having its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and they emphasize the cultural, political and economic uniqueness of Transylvania within Romania. However, the networks have strengthened the movements psychologically, manifesting that they are surrounded by many other movements with equal or similar goals.

**Regionalist and autonomy cooperation has, first of all, had learning effects on individual movements in conceptual terms but also with regard to the acquirement of strategies to galvanize external help (such as other movements and the EU) and to fight the own government. Furthermore, through transnational cooperation the individual movements profit from an increased bargaining power due to the enlargement of the regionalist and autonomist community in Europe as a whole. This bargaining power can be used to lobby the supranational institutions as well as other domestic or external actors.**



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