

## Interethnic Discourses on Transylvania in the Periodical “Provincia”

### Introduction

The status quo of nation states has to face several significant challenges nowadays. One of these problems is bi-directional. The nation states formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are compelled to exist in an environment which oppresses their existence and functioning with new obstacles. They have to take account of the economic, social, cultural and communication changes and impacts caused by the globalisation processes. Through these transformations the state borders have become increasingly transparent and symbolic. The globalisation processes are enhanced by the appearance of macro-regional entities, such as the European Union with its single market. States taking part in the supranational decision-making mechanism of a macro-regional entity lose a part of their sovereignty. Under such circumstances the modern nation state is required to redefine itself, because its old “content” and operational mechanisms no longer assure appropriate functioning.

In addition the traditional confines of nation states have to face problems coming from the sub-national direction, raised by the regions themselves. In many cases sub-national territories, micro-regions or regions express a political will that sometimes results in the transformation of the nation state (e.g. the cases of Scotland, Catalonia or South Tyrol). “It seems that under the economic, politic and cultural influences of globalisation the traditional nation-state of the 19th century is too complex to resolve the problems of communities living on the sub-national (local and regional) level. At the same time a nation-state is too small to influence the globalisation processes from above.”<sup>1</sup>

Coming from the level of regions, regionalism is a bottom-up process expressing the will of the society (or a part of the society) living on that territory. It gained its present meaning in the 1970s and is sometimes considered a movement. Regional movements usually emphasise the special heritage, culture and idiosyncrasy of their region, which can have numerous reasons: historical and/or ethno-cultural, linguistic, political or economic. The interethnic discourse analysed in this paper can be seen as one of the regional

1 Károly Grüber, Regionalizmus, nemzetállamok, európai integráció: kelet-közép- és nyugat-európai távlatok [Regionalism, Nation States, European Integration: East-Central and Western European Perspectives]. In: Európai identitások: régió, nemzet, integráció [European Identities: Region, Nation, Integration]. Budapest: Pro Minoritate – Osiris 2002, pp. 34–56.

movements in Transylvania, which is a special region in Romania. It is important to note that neither the regional transformation process of the centralized Romania nor the conditions of the country's accession to the European Union contains any references concerning the status or autonomy of Transylvania. Usually the question is seen as a Hungarian problem albeit this issue is more complex and more acute. However, several Romanian-Hungarian interethnic and intercultural debates have been published or held in a number of print media (*Provincia*, *Altera*) and intercultural centres (*Liga Pro Europa*) in Romania, and various conferences have been dealing with this often neglected issue.

The special status or autonomy of this region cannot be imagined without the consensus of all nationalities living there together. Hence, it is very important to emphasize the relevance of the interethnic dialogues which have taken place in the context of Transylvania.

This study analyses the disputes published in the monthly *Provincia* between 2000 and 2002 and aims to present this discourse as a special form of regionalism and to disperse the misunderstanding that the idea of autonomy lives only in the Hungarians' dreams.

It focuses on the following main ideas:

- the short existence and the *ars poetica* of *Provincia*;
- Transylvania as a special multicultural area;
- the importance of regional identity, and transethnic identity in the context of Transylvania;
- the comparison of regionalisation models which give free rein to different forms of autonomies; the inner dimensions of Transylvania as an autonomous territory formed on the basis of territorial principles instead of ethnic ones;
- criticism of Romania's decentralisation process;
- the Memorandum – which seems to be the result of the consensus of intellectuals involved in the analysed interethnic discourse.

### **The scene of discourse**

Existing only from 2000 to 2002, the periodical *Provincia* aspired to initiate a unique process: to rehabilitate and restart the interethnic discourse between Romanian, Hungarian and German intellectuals dealing with taboo issues in the context of Transylvania. "Provincia is often courageous and sometimes even audacious," wrote the Romanian editor of the periodical, and indeed, the publication supplied its readership with a large number of topics neglected by other print media in Romania.

*Provincia* was launched in the spring of 2000 as a supplement of two dailies: *Ziua de Ardeal*, published in Romanian, and *Krónika*, published in Hungarian. After a few months the supplement started to appear separately from these dailies. Its two editors,

Gusztáv Molnár and Alexandru Cistelean, set up the periodical as a stage for interethnic dialogue. One of the curiosities of *Provincia* is that the contributions of Romanian intellectuals were translated into Hungarian and vice versa, so the periodical was published in two languages. The name referred to the main topic, Transylvania, as the most suitable issue through which interethnic dialogue could come into bloom.

The *ars poetica* of *Provincia* was phrased by its Romanian editor, Alexandru Cistelean, as follows: “**What Provincia could do: put transylvaniam right and also redefine its meaning.** This is the recycling procedure of culture [...]. On the cultural map of Europe a spot of transylvaniam would not be superfluous.”<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of this discourse a group of Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals was formed in 2001, the *Provincia* group. With their assistance a Memorandum was petitioned to the Romanian Parliament which caused considerable indignation in the political sphere. This event revealed the discrepancy between political will and the conception of the intellectuals involved in the *Provincia* dialogues. Unfortunately the events led to the discontinuation of the monthly *Provincia* in 2002.

The texts published in this periodical dealt with several issues. Among many other topics, representatives of different intellectual groups discussed the special cultural environment of Transylvania, the social, cultural and economic effects of possible forms of autonomy as well as the regionalisation process of the country. Thus the periodical *Provincia* provided a stage for discussion, discourse and dispute between Romanian, Hungarian and German intellectuals – a unique phenomenon in Transylvania and Romania.

### **Transylvania as a special multicultural area and regional and transethnic identity**

In the context of Transylvania multicultural variegation is often mentioned in professional literature. Its scope is almost unique in Europe, only the situation in Switzerland could be compared to the colourful cultural and ethnic mosaic of Transylvania. As a consequence of this ethnic and confessional variegation the history of Transylvania can be described as a case study in developing mutual tolerance. The present state of the Transylvanian multicultural model is the result of subtle development: each constitutive ethnic group has had its own role in shaping this variegation, albeit with variable intensity in different epochs.

A multicultural environment generates different interactions, which also shape the regional identity itself. What does regional identity mean for the intellectuals of *Provincia*? Alexandru Seres queried if there were regional identities or, at any rate, if identities could be delimited appropriately, which could then legitimise the federalisation of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandru Cistelean, *Provincia minima în căutarea ardelenismului* [*Provincia Minima Looking for Transylvaniam*]. In: *Provincia* (2001) 4, p. 1.

“What kind of argument will be available to support a federal form if the equal distribution system for the budget is introduced in the future? [...] the only argument, throwing it on the scales and standing on its own legs, applies to the existences of regional identities that are different enough to require federal organizing form. In any event, are these identities reliable? Are they clear enough to make federalization an imperative?”<sup>3</sup>

Zoltán Kántor thinks that it is not necessary to delimit regional identity in an area if we wish to treat it as a territorial unit.

Transethnic identity was also mentioned several times in the analysed periodical. This identity is beyond national identities and could take shape in multiethnic regions, helping to surpass nationalism. Some intellectuals emphasised the importance of transethnic identity in the context of Transylvania (e.g. Gusztáv Molnár), but Zoltán Kántor was not among them. Kántor pointed out some misunderstandings about this issue:

“The newer vocational literature and a part of the intellectuals refer by choice to the fact that we have plural identity and that inter-ethnic stress has been decreasing owing to the existence of plural and trans-ethnic identities. I think that the uncritical acceptance of this fashionable concept rather discourages than helps the necessary evolution.”<sup>4</sup>

Transethnic identity was also mentioned by the Memorandum, the petition analyzed in one of the later sections. The Memorandum itself emphasized the importance of developing such an identity, underlining that its existence could surpass nationalism.

“In such multinational regions as Banat, Transylvania or Dobruza the undertaking of regional identity upon civil grounds can contribute to building up transethnic identities. This could help to transcend excessively nationalist nostalgia, fears and also oblique nationalism using civil and democratic phraseology.”<sup>5</sup>

The collation of the opinions above makes it obvious that the Transylvanian cultural model carries unique area-specific values. One of the main objectives of the analyzed interethnic discourse was to conceive an approach based on these common Transylvanian values and peculiarities.

## **Discourse on the decentralisation process and the autonomy models**

The Provincia texts dealing with decentralisation possibilities in Romania visualised a strongly decentralised country in which the concept of subsidiarity would predominate. This could be achieved only via a paradigm change in which the centralised country would be undergoing a transformation process. The authors of these texts linked these

3 Alexandru Seres, Utopia federalizării și crizele identității [The Utopia of Federalisation and the Crises of Identities]. In: Provincia (2001) 12, p. 2.

4 Zoltán Kántor, A Memorandum, a nemzet és az állam [Memorandum, Nation and State]. In: Provincia (2002) 3-4, p. 5.

5 A Memorandum szövege és aláírói [Text and Signatories of the Memorandum, i.e. the 8th item of the Memorandum]. In: Provincia (2002) 1, p. 2.

transformation possibilities to the idea of federalism. They highlighted a general interpretation of federalism as presented in one of Jacques Lévy's texts, namely that federalism can be adopted worldwide and that its advantage lies in the fact that it "does not obligate the usage of only one organising principle." Besides, the federalist process takes into account the multifariousness of the spatial situations.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Romania the argument for federalisation is based on the fact that the traditional territories (Wallachia, Banat, Moldova, Transylvania) have differentiated from each other as a consequence of the historical course of events. Compared with the country's other territories the case of Transylvania is more specific because significant economic and social differences have taken shape there over the ages. With regard to Transylvania Provincia presented some decentralised European models, such as the federal German, the con-federal Swiss, the regionalised Spanish and Italian as well as some other models, while the texts argued for one or the other specific model. Alexandru Vlad, Gheorghe Săsărman and Traian Ștef analysed the federal and con-federal state structures, while Daniel Vighi explored the possibilities of autonomy inherent in regionalised systems (Catalonia, South Tyrol) and their peculiarities guaranteed in the respective constitutions.

During one of the Provincia roundtable discussions Gusztáv Molnár gave account of the idea of a region based on territorial rather than ethnic/national principles, where the region itself with its historical identity would be the political subject and not the two (or more) nations living there. He added that under such circumstances the constitution model worked out by the European Union for Kosovo could be adapted for Transylvania, too. Naturally this would not imply the independence of Transylvania from Romania, since the present state of Kosovo has not been based on the EU strategy mentioned above. Andrei Pleșu rejected the possibilities of a federal structure in Romania and called the country a "naturaliter federal" state, because the implemented decentralisation process took into account all the specifics and differences of the historical regions.

Even so, the Romanian decentralisation process was criticised by several writers in Provincia, such as Smaranda Enache, Sabina Fati and Traian Ștef. They stated that this decentralisation process did not seem to be adequate and suitable, that subsidiarity could not predominate and that some areas or regions could be forced into a worse situation or status (for example Transylvania). They also thought that the creation of eight development regions in 1998 did not actually mean a sharing of power.

"The elements of paradigm change do not mark [...] the Romanian decentralization process. The adoption of legal instruments concerning the development regions, the local administration and the local budget does not mean a real decentralization. [...] The Romanian decentralization process, which is seen to be adequate by the present political and intellectual elite, suffers from a large mistake on every account: this conception of autonomy means the maintenance of the same centralized model based on the logic of the homogenization

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<sup>6</sup> Lévy's related study published in Provincia: Jacques Lévy, Vertikális és horizontális föderalitás [Vertical and Horizontal Federalism]. In: Provincia (2001) 3, p. 14.

reflex of the uniform nation. It is like the idea of the state in a dictatorship in which [...] the variegation of regions and the regional integrative energies are ignored.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Memorandum (2001) – political dimensions**

Soon after the foundation of Provincia, the Provincia Association was founded. Its first public discussion was held in Cluj-Napoca on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2000 with the following participants: Gábor Ádám, Miklós Bakk, Marius Cosmeanu, Marius Lazăr, Gusztáv Molnár, Ovidiu Pecican, Traian Ștef, Elek Szokoly, as well as the guests Gabriel Andreescu and Dan Pavel from Bucharest, Paul Philippi from Sibiu, Octavian Hoandră, Cristian Popa, Adrian Avarvari and István Székely from Cluj-Napoca. These Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals are mainly teachers, writers, political scientists, sociologists and artists. They formulated and unanimously adopted the so-called Memorandum on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2001. This Memorandum dealing with the creation of Romanian regions was addressed to the Parliament of Romania. The petition treated this issue in the European context, following the European trends, and argued for regions organized on a territorial rather than national-ethnic basis.

Zoltán Kántor described this approach emphasizing the nature of the European processes:

“The European processes mark that nation states are under transformation. This metamorphosis has three main attributes. The first one is that states pass on a part of their sovereignty to the EU. [...] The second is that a part of the authority is transferred to the already existing territorial, regional, county, urban levels. The third and in our regard the most important attribute is that newer and smaller units are worked out. These can be dual. On the one hand, regions can evolve adhering to historical traditions, economic rationalism, while their organizing principle is not national. On the other hand, political units, adhering to the national principle can evolve in some cases and can gain strength. The authors of the Memorandum have taken these trends into consideration.”<sup>8</sup>

The comprehensive, but not too factual Memorandum summed up the signatories’ intention and conception in ten points. They suggested administrative reforms in virtue of which the developed regions could have regional councils and parliaments: “It is a basic principle in the formation of regions that the administrative and political competencies should be given to territorial units and not national or ethnic communities” (item 3). These reforms were inconceivable without a reform of the constitution, so the signatories urged it: “We suggest an administrative reform which would reformulate the status of the present territorial units and would introduce new political-administrative forms based on the development regions and historical provinces” (item 5).<sup>9</sup>

It is indisputable that the Memorandum entering the political sphere caused a tremen-

7 Smaranda Enache, Regionalizmus és integráció [Regionalism and integration]. In: Provincia (2001) 6, p. 1.

8 Kántor, A Memorandum, p. 5.

9 A Memorandum szövege és aláírói, p. 2.

dous storm of indignation in Romanian political life. These issues had been taboo for a long time. The Romanians signing the petition were stigmatized as ‘used Romanians’, Romanians who were used by the Hungarians to achieve Hungarian aims. The president himself stated that the Memorandum aimed at “the destruction of the nation state”, which would obviously lead to a situation resembling the one before the union.<sup>10</sup> Under these circumstances and in this atmosphere the Romanian-Hungarian intellectual dialogue was disparaged and the goal of the memorandists was set back years.

## Conclusions

The periodical *Provincia* is a special phenomenon in the Transylvanian and Romanian history of society, media and culture. This phenomenon has not been analysed before, hence it is urgent and important to study the texts that appeared during those three years. The mission assumed by the editors and writers of *Provincia* was exemplary: they illustrated how the different views of ethnic groups and intellectuals could be published side by side, initiating discourse or even dispute.

Analysing the texts according to the main themes listed above, we can draw the following conclusions: the Hungarian-Romanian discourse that evolved in *Provincia* was very progressive, albeit sometimes – being intellectual discourse – it seemed beyond hope. At the same time, interestingly, there was no clear-cut dividing line between the Hungarian and Romanian opinions: there were no separate Hungarian and Romanian viewpoints. The aim was the same, only the approaches and sometimes the definitions of notions differed.

From in-depth analysis we can point out that the representatives of these interethnic discourses often did not use definite notions, and sometimes they were even indecisive concerning the practical introduction of the models they outlined. Taking the disputes about the autonomy models as a basis, we can observe that concrete references to the economic, legal or administrative details of a desired autonomous status were not mentioned. Without the elaboration of these details, however, the topic will remain only within the confines of theory. Nowadays the discourse seems to be continued at various conferences and by intercultural centres. Maybe one day these new dialogues will lead to a detailed and precise conception.

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<sup>10</sup> From the speech of president Iliescu on 23 January 2002 in Iași – quoted in *Provincia* (2002) 2, p. 1.