# INTRODUCTION: NATIONALITY/ETHNIC SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

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### Introduction

Western experts claim that the end of the Warsaw Pact and the artificial stability it provided, together with what are routinely called "traditional ethnic animosities," are the causes of continual and inevitable clashes between states in East Central Europe. This area, a triangle formed by the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas, covers the Western border area of the former Soviet Union, and all of Poland, ex-Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, ex-Czechoslovakia and the eastern territories of Germany. This issue of *Nationalities Papers* is dedicated to the Hungarian ethnic minorities of East Central Europe, in part to examine the validity of the "traditional ethnic animosity" thesis. Spread among seven states, roughly three and a half to four million souls, they constitute the largest diaspora in Europe, and, in relative terms, are more numerous in states around Hungary than the ethnic Russians outside of the Russian Federation on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

This introductory essay serves two purposes: (1) to outline a simple framework for analyzing the relationship of ethnic distribution to political behavior (mostly non-violent); and (2) to apply the framework directly to the Hungarian minorities of Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Slovakia and the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine.

## **Background**

Romania, and the former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were enlarged or established as states by the treaties that dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War. Romania in 1918 incorporated an area called Transylvania, previously an independent principality and part of the Hungarian polity since the arrival of Magyars in the Carpathian Basin (896 AD). The term Transylvania today is defined more broadly and includes areas that traditionally belonged to the Hungarian plain and historically were never considered to be Transylvanian. Since the region was always populated by a multitude of nationalities, including Hungarians, Germans, Romanians, Gypsies, Ruthenians, Serbs and others, it has been

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described as a potential "Switzerland." Various ethnic groups live in compact villages and counties, whose ethnic composition began to change after the territory became a part of Romania, and industrialization and other forms of resettlement altered their original ethnic profile.

The other successor states also obtained territories that were mixed in ethnic terms. In the former Yugoslavia the area called Vojvodina was one such region. Until 1918, it had been an integral part of the Hungarian Kingdom and was known as the Bácska and Bánát, or designated by county subdivisions as Temes, Torontál and Bács-Bodrog. Following World War II Vojvodina was incorporated into the recreated Yugoslavia as an autonomous province. Its population until this time was almost evenly divided among Hungarians, Germans and Serbs. Following the war, however, almost all the Germans and many Hungarians were deported. Yet even after its "autonomy" was revoked by the Serbian government in 1989, the province was still very heterogeneous, including not only Serbs and Hungarians, but also Croats, Germans, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Romanians and a host of other nationalities in smaller clusters.

Czechoslovakia was also constituted of territories that were overwhelmingly "minority" in 1918. All these successor states inherited mixed and dominantly Hungarian territories and cities, territories dominated by their own nationality, as well as territories dominated by other ethnic groups, such as the German-speaking descendants of Saxon and Swabian settlers.

Indeed, in all of the successor states there are border regions that are mostly inhabited by Hungarians. This is complicated by mixed border regions, as well as by mixed and island areas dominated by ethnic Hungarians, surrounded completely by the majority nationality of the given state. Other remnants of empires, such as the territory of the former Soviet Union, are rife with border regions, mixed areas, and distinct islands of specific nationalities. The *type* of ethnic distribution and not the relative proportion of a minority to total population, explains political behavior within the context of the emerging democratic or neo-authoritarian regimes. The distribution of Hungarian minorities should be compared to other settlement patterns, including those of the Albanians, Kurds and Palestinians. All three are potential statelets trapped within several successor states, and their location in relation to the dominant nationality of the region shapes their political behavior more than does their relative proportion within the larger population.

While the relative distribution of ethnic groups is an important factor, the central proposition of this introduction is that the distribution of clusters of minorities within a state dominated by another ethnic group is a useful predictor of their behavior. The analyst should refrain from assigning much meaning to macro-scale figures such as country X has a minority population of 20 percent because *where* that minority is (on the border, deep within a state's territory or evenly distributed) may be a more important piece of information.

It is not the overall proportions of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia that explains the

behavior of the local Serb militia. Instead, it is the existence of isolated enclaves far from the mother country, and mixed border areas well within the logistical reach of outside supporters, that leads to the declaration of new statelets. By comparison, the absolute and relative proportion of Hungarians in Slovakia, though greater, has not led to similar behavior because of Hungary's moderation and a border region where in many instances Hungarians control local government. Similarly, in the second Slovak state (the first one came into existence in 1938 after Czechoslovakia was partitioned), the largest Hungarian political organization, "Coexistence," considers the Hungarian ethnic population to be a state-forming partner nation, not a minority. This of course is totally rejected by the advocates of Slovak independence, who consider Slovakia to be a unitary nation-state founded only by the Slovak population.

Throughout East Central Europe and the territory of the former Soviet Union, relations among ethnic groups, particularly conflictual relations, can be traced to the three following factors:

- (1) National self-determination, a supposed basis for legitimating current borders, was never implemented through a series of internationally-validated plebiscites at the end of either world war;
- (2) Some post-communist states still lack a democratic civic culture among the populace, and some regimes still engage in autocratic practices;
- (3) There is no comprehensive system of treaties and workable procedures to guarantee the collective and individual rights of members of ethnic minorities, and minority protection clauses of peace treaties have not been enforced.

The disposition of Hungarian minorities and their political initiatives, as well as the reactions of the regimes controlled by the dominant nationalities, must be placed into this context.

## An Algorithm for Evaluating the Political Dimensions of Ethnic Interaction

The dissolution of three states at the end of the Cold War—Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union—placed Hungarian minorities into five new states. In addition, in Romania the Hungarian minority is subject to a society controlled by neo-communists with an underdeveloped commitment to democracy. Political analysts cannot be expected to know, understand, and utilize over one thousand years of Central European history to explain the current behavior of multi-ethnic states and the fate of minority groups within these states. An algorithm for evaluating ethnic activity, including the political behavior of Hungarian minorities, should answer at least some of the following questions:

- (a) Does this issue involve recognized states?
- (b) Are there conflicting political movements/groups within a state?
- (c) Does it involve a state (historical, potential or *de facto*) buried within an existing state?

- (d) Does this issue involve an ethnic group which overlaps existing state borders as defined by international conventions and treaties?
- (e) Are existing states altered through the creation of new political jurisdictions within their territory, or by new states seeking diplomatic recognition from the world community?
  - (f) How developed is the democratic civil society in the territory under discussion?
- (g) Are inevitable conflicts between centralizing national governments and emerging local governments complicated by ethnic issues?

One must also take into account that activities by states, political movements or minority and majority groups can be directed against multiple targets. These include majority groups or the ruling regime dominated by one ethnic community. With so many permutations, reasoned conclusions about ethnic political behavior become more problematic. Analysts are misled by ruling philosophies which desire to create "unitary national states" that, by assumption, mean the eventual absorption or removal of ethnic minorities.

The following framework is not all-inclusive for drawing conclusions about the political behavior of ethnic groups in East Central Europe. But using this framework will enable an analyst to describe *more accurately* events related to ethnic minorities, and to classify the actors according to goals, geographic distribution, and activities, in the hope of showing a relationship between each of these factors. The purpose is to avoid blanket descriptions of groups by citizenship or ethnicity, by specifying which group, living in what type of distribution, is interacting with what type of dominant or minority nationality.

- 1. Determine the pattern of ethnic distribution under discussion. It is not enough to typecast by ethnicity or citizenship; the distribution of ethnic groups and their organizations must be identified. The types of distributions include: statelets, border, island, and mixed.
- (a) Statelets. This is a geographic area, largely homogeneous, that is a potential nation-state. These potential states were not necessarily ever independent historically. In essence, these areas are trapped inside states whose borders were drawn during peace negotiations after the two world wars by Allied powers, and not through self-determination based upon plebiscites. These "trapped statelets" could have democratically elected leadership who demand autonomy and independence from an authoritarian center, as in the case of the Baltic states before the demise of the former Soviet Union.
- (b) *Border*. A border distribution means that a single ethnic group overlaps the territories of two or three neighboring states in which they become a minority, but are in close proximity, along the border of a state where their own people composes a majority.
- (c) Island. Compact ethnic groups who have lived in an area for centuries and are now trapped inside states dominated by the majority of another nationality. The minorities in this case are surrounded by other nationalities, and are physically

separated from the state dominated by their own nationality. An island distribution differs from a statelet in that a statelet contains virtually the entire global population of a particular ethnic group, while islands are scattered and numerous, and contain only a small fraction of the total global population of that particular ethnic group.

- (d) Mixed. Some areas are hopelessly heterogeneous ethnically, and multiple cases of migration and forced settlements throughout recorded history make it difficult to adjudicate fair boundaries without additional transfers of population. The population is diverse within settlements, as well as in the countryside.
- 2. Determine the type of government or state environment in which these minority groups are located: neo-communist, ethno-nationalist or democratic-pluralist. This is perhaps an inaccurate and arbitrary classification, but it is obvious that Poland, Romania, and Serbia reflect a spectrum of democratic attitudes for the majority of the population and a range of authoritarian and restrictive practices for the local and national minorities. The extent to which a civil society has been constructed in multi-ethnic states defines the range of options that an ethnic minority has to express political demands, via parliamentary activity or civil disobedience, as opposed to insurrection or terrorism.
- 3. The most important step is to classify the actions of these ethnic groups by their ultimate goals. The process by which these groups choose their end goals is a function of the type of state they live in, and of the type of their characteristic pattern of distribution. Groups organized along ethnic lines could be classified as seeking four different types of goals in relation to the "ruling nation."
- (a) "Independentists:" group desires to break away and form its own state which will eventually seek diplomatic recognition in the world community, i.e., by the United Nations and by sovereign states.
  - (b) "Separatists:" group desires to join another existing or new state.
- (c) "Parliamentarists & activists:" group works within the existing state through the political process by forming political parties, lobbies and other peaceful, non-violent organizations. They recognize current borders, seek to act as good citizens, while demanding ethnic and human rights guaranteed by international conventions, treaties, and precedent.
- (d) "Autonomists:" group wishes to create or recreate a self-controlled or self-governing area within an existing state.

Some of the "indicators" of political behavior, listed below, can be used to determine the goal of each individual ethnic community based upon its pattern of distribution. In other words, a numerically dominant minority in a border region may have significantly different political objectives from an island or mixed area minority:

- (i) Legitimate activities by political parties in parliament, mass organizations engaging in non-violent civic action and voluntary associations;
- (ii) Outright attacks by a majority upon a minority with the cooperation of authorities, or at least the passive acquiescence of the latter;

- (iii) Terrorism and guerrilla activities, blockades, assassinations by ethnic minorities and subsequent retaliation by the central authorities;
- (iv) Intervention by the "mother country" on world *fora* such as the CSCE, European Parliament, Council of Europe, or the UN Commission on Human Rights;
- (v) Intervention through publications, radio and television broadcasting aimed at diasporas living beyond current borders.
- 4. Determine link between distribution and end goal. A complex process links each ethnic community's pattern of distribution to its ultimate goals. International organizations such as the United Nations and the European Community could influence the end goals and the process if intelligence is perceptive and accurate enough in identifying why a particular ethnic distribution and its spokesmen pick a certain end goal. The typical, though not all-inclusive associations, are the following:
  - (a) Submerged statelets ultimately seek independence.
- (b) Border distributions, given sufficient internal pressure and adequate outside support, tend to become separatist. In states with a moderate level of civil society, border distributions tend to engage mainly in parliamentary activities.
- (c) Populations dispersed in an island or archipelago distribution have a tendency toward seeking autonomy or concentrating on parliamentary activities.
- (d) Ethnic groups in mixed areas tend to limit their options to autonomist and parliamentarist goals.

The classification system outlined above applies to the situation in East Central Europe as of early 1993. On this basis, the following linkages are possible between different minorities and behavior patterns, as examples:

Separatists (wishing to join another existing state) -

- (i) Island, border and mixed areas: Serbs in Slavonia, Southwest Croatia and Bosnia: Romanians in Moldova: some Germans in Polish Silesia and Pomerania:
  - (ii) Border and mixed: Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Autonomists (creation of a self-governed area within an existing state)—

- (i) Statelets: Croatia and Slovenia until June 1991; some Slovak parties and movements until January 1993 [Public Against Violence supports the Federation; National Unification Party of Slovaks supports independence, but "Slovak" describes citizenship, not ethnicity in their view];
  - (ii) Island & mixed: Moravia.

Parliamentarists (use existing political system to protest and to obtain individual and collective rights for minorities) -

- (i) Border, mixed & island: Hungarians in Slovakia [Independent Hungarian Initiative, Coexistence]; Hungarians and other minorities [Gypsies, Germans, Jews] in Transylvania [Democratic Federation of Hungarians in Romania]; Hungarians in Vojvodina; Hungarians in Trans-Carpathian Ukraine; non-Balts in Baltic states;
  - (ii) Border & mixed: Germans in Poland;
  - (iii) Statelet: some Slovak parties and movements.

Independentists (break away and form own state with diplomatic recognition)—
(i) Statelets: Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia.

## An Application

Former Yugoslavia demonstrates the result of failed democratization. The popularly elected governments of Slovenia and Croatia staged referenda on independence. Yugoslavia, or, more accurately, Serbia, was not willing to accept this decision. Violence ensued due to a variety of factors, but it is certain that a truly democratic and liberal Serbia would not have ravaged Bosnia and Croatia in the name of protecting ethnic Serbs. Furthermore, if Croatia had emphasized its liberal policy on minorities, including Serbs, then the armed insurrection by ultra-nationalists would have had less fear to feed upon. Czechoslovakia split in a peaceful fashion, though the Slovak government never allowed a direct referendum on the question of independence, and even those deputies who opposed total independence were ordered to pledge loyalty to the independent Slovakia or else lose their mandates.

A worst-case scenario assumes that full democratization fails to materialize in multi-ethnic states. Consequently, formerly parliamentary and autonomy-seeking groups may switch to seeking separation and independence. Purely parliamentary groups may also begin to demand territorial, not just legal or constitutional autonomy. The abomination of ethnic cleansing, used to create islands and corridors linked to other states, is an exceptional situation. The alteration of ethnic distribution by terror and physical extermination is designed to prevent the success of autonomist, parliamentary and independentist solutions. Ethnic cleansing reinforces the critical factor of distribution, and so the cleansers have taken measures to create conditions ripe for separation.

Potential separatists: border and mixed areas, for example, Hungarians in Southern Slovakia and Ruthenians in Eastern Slovakia;

Potential autonomists: border and mixed areas, e.g., Hungarians and other non-Serbs in Vojvodina; Germans in Poland [Silesia].

Border, mixed and island areas, (perhaps on a cantonal basis) Hungarians and other minorities, including Gypsies, in Transylvania; Ruthenians in Slovakia and Trans-Carpathian Ukraine; Poles in Lithuania and Ukraine.

## Suggested Filters for Data on "Ethnic" Events

Rapidly developing and complicated "ethnic events" can be categorized using this framework. A clearer, more standardized description of problems enable the analyst to evaluate who is doing what to whom. Yet the observable indicators and the conclusions drawn from them are still complicated by numerous factors, and should be factored in by considering the following:

1. In the long run, ethnic political activity can be normalized and become part of the mainstream through democratization. In the short run, the volume of conflict "indicators" will rise and information overload could mislead analysts. The fundamental unresolved problems must be correlated with the conditions which inflate the *volume of conflict indicators*, for example, contradictory goals of self-determination by minorities and the desire of the dominant ethnic groups to achieve unitary state status.

Some activities by ethnically-based parties and organizations represent not "conflict" but spirited civic action. The open-source materials that report ethnic activities and are intercepted and interpreted may mislabel or exaggerate the activities of an out-of-favor ethnic group. For example, legitimate requests to reopen the four hundred year-old Hungarian Bolyai University in Cluj (Kolozsvár) which was merged into a Romanian institution by Ceauşescu in 1959, and similar attempts to restore education in minority languages, are denounced by some Romanian officials and organizations as "separatism." Extreme responses to legitimate civic action in parliament or at the local level are sometimes greeted with violent reactions on the part of the majority ethnic group, authorities, and the government, indicating a lack of a civil culture, tolerance, and democracy. Press reports are logged and interpreted as evidence of "separatism" or as indicators of conflicts which are distorted by the reporting sources.

2. Ethnic events often mask other significant issues, such as defining the roles of central and local administrative bodies. Significant questions of privatization and the introduction of market mechanisms become "ethnicized," and simple acts such as multilingual official forms and street signs take on an elevated emotional significance. Federalism and related issues of center versus periphery are complicated by the existence of statelets, islands and other settlement patterns.

The erstwhile debate between the Slovak and Czech governments over the nature of their relationship and the role of the Slovak government in international economic and political affairs also happened to intensify differences in ethnicity. The Czech government could have tempered the desire of some Slovak politicians for an independent Slovakia by pointing out that, to avoid hypocrisy, Slovakia's Hungarians living mainly along the border with Hungary also have a right to self-determination based upon historical, linguistic, and cultural grounds.

In Romania, the appointment of prefects from the center to act as "governors" of the counties appears at first to raise issues of self-government versus central control, since locally elected officials may represent the opposition, especially in Transylvania. When a Romanian prefect is appointed to an area where the Hungarians form a majority and the Democratic Federation of Hungarians in Romania overwhelmingly won the election, the normal center versus periphery debate becomes an ethnic issue.

Federalism with a clear delineation of the rights and powers of all levels of government would also mitigate ethnic issues. Some disputes perhaps would be "de-ethnicized" if the roles of local and central authorities were discussed openly and defined consistently, regardless of the ethnic affiliations of the parties involved.

- 3. The reliability of data is affected by changes in relationships among ethnic groups in heterogeneous states. New local administrations, publications and the general rise in the noise level of democratizing states may create confusion. Events could be described in a variety of ways by media sources, depending upon their relationship to the dominant nationality. Official statements from the central government may mislabel and distort events which took place in a contentious area. However, new sources of information among the ethnic groups, especially in those societies with organized ethnic parties and associations may confirm, deny or support official statements made by governments. A broader spectrum of information must be processed than in the past, with careful attention paid to the various shades within and among ethnic organizations.
- 4. The distinctions between government, dominant ethnic community, disaffected minority community, and spokesmen for the minority abroad are all very important. When drawing conclusions about the political behavior of citizens, it is important to distinguish between "Latvians" and the Russian and Latvian residents of Latvia. Unfortunately, the English language calls for the addition of qualifiers when describing collectives such as "Yugoslavs" or "Romanians." There is a clear distinction between Romanian citizenship or residency and being an ethnic "Romanian." Thus one must be accurate in describing the ethnicity and citizenship of individual political figures. Rev. László Tökés, the hero of Timisoara (Temesvár) is (1) an ethnic Hungarian from Romania, (2) a Romanian citizen and (3) a resident of Romania, but not an ethnic "Romanian."
- 5. In a cynical fashion, ethnic friction may be exploited and provoked by unsavory forces for internal political gain. Indicators may be mislabeled, events and reactions artificially escalated, and disinformation and covert operations can divert attention from other problems and divide opposition parties. Frequently, declarations of self-determination reveal a great deal of hypocrisy among those using it to advance their political goals. Croatia's declaration of independence was at first countered by the Yugoslav army's goal of "preserving" the Federation. That goal became transformed as armed Chetniks occupied villages in mixed and Serb-inhabited areas. In these settings, the Chetniks—with the active support of the Yugoslav Army—terrorized the Croatian authorities and non-Serbian villages. Croatian self-determination was answered by expressions of Serbian self-determination and war. On the other hand, Serbia's concern for self-determination for non-Serbs in Kosovo or Vojvodina is non-existent, even though the recently annexed autonomous regions are respectively 45 percent and 90 percent non-Serbs.

### **Policy Alternatives**

At this point several obvious implications emerge for the policy of the major Western powers toward Central Europe:

- Not all ethnic movements operating within currently recognized states are illegitimate, and supporting their aspirations for independence, autonomy, and parliamentary activity could act to mitigate past, current, and future tensions.
- Autonomist demands of border groups can be adjudicated by encouraging them
  toward parliamentarist goals, and offering incentives for the state in which they
  live to adopt democratic, tolerant behavior. This could mean potential mutuallysupported non-violent border changes which the Helsinki process does not rule
  out.
- A near optimal solution would be to encourage all aggrieved ethnic groups to
  utilize parliamentary and autonomy options, while punishing ethno-nationalist
  states if they do not make progress towards tolerant minority policies.

Since aligning state, national, linguistic and ethnic borders in East Central Europe can only be achieved through a tragic repetition of the genocidal deportations and coerced assimilation that this century has already seen so much of, we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that almost any solution will leave aggrieved parties. A careful mix of policies is required, adjusted not only to particular ethnic groups but also to their distribution.

It is thus not enough to support either the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, or of its successor states, and the peaceful resolution of differences if the underlying problem is not addressed. A correct policy would modify the approach not toward each nationality but toward each distribution. Specifically, autonomy for island areas is a reasonable solution, as well as border adjustments for obvious border-straddling distributions, and pluralistic, Swiss-type minority protection laws within current states for mixed areas. A refusal to grant "your own" minorities the same rights which you claim has the potential of altering, if not destroying, the territorial and philosophical integrity of your own claim.

For example, Slovakia declared and obtained independence on the basis of ethnic differentiation and self-determination. These two justifications used by Slovak proponents of independence can make the Slovak state face the claims of a minority population of 1.4 million out of a total 5 million inhabitants. The nearly 600,000 Hungarians concentrated in the South along the Hungarian border and in key cities and river valleys, as well as Poles in Teschen, and Ruthenians in the East, along with more than half a million Gypsies, can lead to claims of autonomy at least, and in the case of the Hungarians, a border adjustment in Hungary's favor. (There are as many Hungarians in Slovakia as there were Serbs in Croatia, and the concentration in Slovakia is higher and nearer the border, and the historical, cultural and linguistic gap between Hungarians and Slovaks is much greater than among Serbs and Croatians, or Czechs and Slovaks.) Thus, blanket "self-determination" by ethnicity is in itself incapable of solving inter-ethnic tensions. Instead, degrees of self-determination can be prescribed for each distribution in question.

#### Conclusion

The key question for the future is how long minority populations living in island areas will persevere with only parliamentary methods and goals, and how long minorities concentrated on borders will resist the legitimate temptation to follow the example of other nationalities who have already declared themselves to be autonomous or independent from the state in which they never chose to live. The greater the pressure applied by authorities in mixed and island areas, working in collusion with certain political parties, and central authorities controlled by ex-communists and neo-nationalists, the greater the chance that frustration with violations of due process, constitutional guarantees and international treaties will lead some minority politicians to pursue goals other than legitimate non-violent political action.

If Romania ever succeeds in annexing the former Moldavian Soviet Republic (now Moldova) with areas of Russian, Gagauz and Ukrainian minorities (a total of 1.5 million), ethnic politics in Greater Romania will take on a regional dimension that overwhelms acrimony between the Hungarian minority, its supporters abroad, and the Romanian government and its political allies. The addition of Russia and Ukraine as potential minority rights watchdogs (and rivals) may suffice in achieving a modus vivendi for all minority-majority relations.

This collection of essays on Hungarian ethnic minorities in East Central Europe should be placed in this context. The historical experience, the geographical location, as well as the contemporary political activity, reflect the behavior and goals defined by the group's pattern of distribution.

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