

PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY LAW

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The European Council held in 1993 in Copenhagen has established for the first time ,among the political criteria which must be met by the candidate countries for the accession to the European Union, the protection of fundamental rights of persons belonging to minorities: however, even if the juridical protection of the persons belonging to minorities has been included in the primary legislation starting with 1997 and after that, at declarative political level, in the Nice Charter of Fundamental Rights, it's the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe that has settled “the rights of persons belonging to minorities “ and the prohibition of discrimination on criteria based on the association with a national minority.

The Community Law, as a whole , including the part which will be adjoined following the ratification of the European Constitution excludes the area of minorities protection in the field of powers of Community Institutions. At the same time, trends expressed since the '90s, the growing role of European Parliament in this specific field and, finally, the European Union's authority in ratifying the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms represent for continuing to respect human rights and, especially, rights of persons belonging to minorities .

I. SHORT OVERVIEW REGARDING THE NATIONAL MINORITIES ON ROMANIAN TERRITORY .

The main purpose of this paper is to offer an outlook on the linguistic landscape of present day in Romania and on the policies which deals with the protection of the linguistic rights of the national minorities, in accordance with the international legislation in this field . The main reason for choosing this topic are the following:

(1). Nowadays , Romania is facing challenges coming from its multicultural milieu offering a various linguistic situations which can be commented in terms of language policy . Although the national minorities represent approximately 10% of the entire population of Romania , their linguistic diversity and their territorial distribution as well increase specific and particular problems which remains to be solved . On the territory of Romania live 18 officially recognized national minorities: *Albanians* (in several cities like Constanta, Craiova, Giurgiu, Ploiesti, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Slatina etc.), *Armenians* (especially in Constanta county), *Bulgarians* (in Arad, Timis, Suceava county), *Czechs* (Caras-Severin and Mehedinti counties), *Germans* (14 counties in Transylvania), *Greeks* (Constanta and Tulcea counties), *Hungarians* (16 counties in Transylvania and Bacau county), *Italians* (Tulcea county), *Jews* , *Lipovan-Russians* (Braila, Tulcea and Suceava counties), *Poles* (Suceava county), *Roma* (Gypsies), *Serbs* (Arad, Timis, Caras-Severin counties), *Slovaks* (in Timis Arad, Bihor, Salaj, counties), *Tartars* (Constanta county), *Turks* (Constanta county), *Ukrainians* (Suceava, Botosani and Tulcea counties).¹

The Hungarians, most important national minority in Romania² , account around 7,1% of the entire population, being concentrated in two countries in Transylvania, Harghita and Covasna , where they represent 75,2%, respectively 84,7% of the population in the area. Today the percentage is estimated to be higher, as well as for the Roma population who are estimated to count around 1 500 000 persons.³ As Szilagyí Sandor⁴ estimates, a significant proportion 27% of

¹ www.unibuc.ro/ro/national_minorities_in_romania_language_and_educational_policies_in_a_multicultural_milieu

² **Endroiú, Nicolae and Puşcas, Vasile.** 1995.” Mahiarii din România “Cluj-Napoca. Fundația Culturală Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane. P.28 .

³ **Szilagyí Sandor N.**” De ce nu-și pot însuși copiii maghiari limba română în școli ?” In Altera. 7 an.IV. p.131-148 .

the ethnic Hungarians of Romania live in localities where they represent between 91-100% of the population in this area .In 1992 , the ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania counties represented 23,9% of the population, comparatively to 25,2% or 31,6%⁵ .

It is estimated as well that until the end of 2010 the Hungarian minority will be far exceed in number by the Roma population , and, therefore this minority will be able to reach being the first important minority on the territory of Romania , which could produce difficulties for Romania because of the main problems that has to be faced by this minority as; social and economical integration among the rest of the population , the daily discrimination, and the prejudice coming from the rest of romanian population .

(2). The second reason for choosing this topic has to be connected with the progresses made by Romania, in the last 5-6 years, in the field of language, educational and cultural policies dealing with national minority problems and matters, especially on the conditions and terms stipulated by the desire of Romania to accede in the European Union .After decades of totalitarianism, which promoted aggressive assimilation and nationalistic policies of their identity and mother tongue Romania , as many other former communist states, is engaged in a process of improving the protection of the linguistic rights of the national minorities, but there is more to be done in this area .

1. The use of some specific terminology .

Since several definitions of the expression “*national minority*” are used, it is important to specify the exact meaning which can be found within the conceptual framework. This definition is given by *Recommendation 1201* of Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE (1993, Sec.I, Art. 1) : “group of persons in a state ho reside on the territory of that state and are citizens thereof; are motivated by a concern to preserve together that which constitute their common identity, including their culture, their traditions, their religion or their language”.

The phrase” *language community*” is used with the meaning which can be found in the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* (Barcelona, 1996, Preliminary Title, Art.1.1) as: “any human society established historically in a particular territorial space , whether this space be recognized or not, which identifies itself as a people and has developed a common language as a natural means of communication and cultural cohesion between its members “.

The term “ *territorial space* “is used not only as a geographical area, but also as “ a social and functional space vital to the full development of the language “.(Art.1.2). The same definition of a language community is confer also to nomad peoples within their historical areas of migration or to peoples historically established in dispersed locations (Art. 1.4).The distinction between “ *language communities* “ and “ *language groups*” it is also used in the spirit of the above mentioned *Declaration*, groups of immigrants, refugees, deported persons, members of diasporas, who do not possess historical antecedents equivalent to those of the host language community (Art.1.5) . As regards of the concept of *ethnolinguistic consciousness* of speaker, studied by Fishman Joshua A.⁶ in 1997, I totally agree that we can not equate language and ethnicity, since the individual ethnicity, since one person can have several mother tongues, as well as plural cultural options . In Romania is the case of people, bilinguals coming from mixed marriages, such as Hungarians-Romanian, Hungarian-German, Hungarian-Jew, etc .

⁴ **Idem.**

⁵ **Endroi, Nicolae și Pușcaș, Vasile.** 1995.” Maghiarii din România.” Cluj-Napoca. Fundția Culturală Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane.p.19-20.

⁶ **Fishman Joshua A.** 1997. “ In Praise of the Beloved Language.A comparative View of Pozitive Ethnolinguistic Consciousness “. Berlin & New York. Mouton de Gruyter. p.23-24 .

The terms “*regional or minority languages* “, so as “*non-territorial languages* “ are to be connected to the concept of “*language community* “, whose linguistic rights are individual and collective at the same time . As *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992) defines it in (Part I, Art. 1), “*regional or minority languages* “ are languages traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population, languages different from the official language(s) of that State, from the dialects of the official language(s) of that State, from the languages of the migrants .

“*Non-territorial languages* “ are languages used by nationals of the State which are different from the language(s) used by the rest of the State’s population, but which, although are traditionally used within the territory of that State and can’t be identified with a particular area .

In Romania , the national minorities speak several regional languages, and two non-territorial languages (Romany, Yiddish). The status of these languages in term of linguistic geography is quite diverse . Most of them correspond to majority languages spoken in the states situated in the immediate vicinity of Romania (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Serbian, Ukrainian), in the Balkan area (Croatian,Greek, Slovenian,Turkish, Tartar), or in territories which are not in direct linguistic contact with the Romanian language (Armenian, Czech, Italian, Polish, Slovak). Other idioms are dialects historically related to a language of origin: it is the case of Swabian (Schwabish) and Transylvanian Saxon (Sächsisch) which must be related to German standard language; a comparable situation have the Carashovenian and who speak the standard Croatian, the dialects spoken by Ruthenians and Hutzuls who use the standard Ukrainian ⁷.

II. PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY LAW .

At present, the Community law does not contain norms exclusively regarding the law of national minorities or of persons belonging to a national minority .The project called “*Treatise instituting a Constitution for Europe* “, adopted by the European Council of the 18th of June 2004 in Brussels and signed in Rome on the 29th of October 2004 by the leaders of the states and governments of the member states of the European Union, also includes the first references to the “*rights of persons belonging to minorities* “, as well as the interdiction regarding discrimination by criteria of “*appurtenance to a national minority* “, which will become the fundamental act of the European Community Law . The protection of national minorities evolved during the last 15-16 years under the aegis of **UNO, OSCE, and European Council** .

A. As part of the **UNO** - *The General Meeting, The Economic and Social Committee, The Commission and Sub-Commission for Human Rights* as well as *The (Permanent) Workgroup for Minorities* .In Art. 27 of the Pact of civil and political rights, as well as in the Convention for the elimination of racial discrimination, both within the UNO, these are endowed with monitoring mechanisms controlled by the International Committees composed of independent experts, to whom all states, including the European ones, periodically submit reports .The national minorities that consider that rights are prejudiced may submit complains to these expert committees . Within the same UNO,is taking into consideration the: *Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities*, adopted in 1992 and the *General comment of Art. 27 of the Pact of civil and political rights, performed by the Human*

⁷ www.unibuc.ro/ro/national_minorities_in-romania_language_and_educational_policies_in_multicultural_milieu p.4 .

Rights Committee in 1994.⁸ Besides the periodic reports sent by the member states, including the European ones, with regard to the situation of national minorities on their territory, there exist also the obligation (at least moral), of reporting the state how it implemented the recommendations made by the experts committee at the end of the examination of the periodic report⁹. The *UNO Workgroup for minorities* has a permanent quality since 1995.¹⁰

B. For the first time in history, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities of Europe represented the Document **CSCE of Copenhagen (June 1990)**. Among its prerequisites were the *Final act of Helsinki*, of 1975 of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, where all the Euro-Atlantic states undertook: “*to observe the rights of persons belonging to national minorities equally according to the law, allow them every possibility of effectively enjoying the human rights and fundamental liberties, to protect their legitimate interests in the field* “. In this document , the following rights are also provided : the use of mother tongue in public and in private, the freedom of association, cross-frontier contacts of the minorities with the related state, suitable opportunities of education in the native language, the use of the mother tongue before the public authorities, all these rights being able to be exercised individually or jointly, in common .¹¹ **CSCE** was transformed in 1994 into **OSCE- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe**, which created a monitoring system for the compliance by the European states of the human rights standards in general and of protection of national minorities in particular, this monitoring system was originally created by **CSCE Reunion in Viena 1989** . And the **CSCE Reunion in Geneva 1991** restated that the rights of national minorities are not the exclusive internal affairs of the states .

The protection of national minorities through the OSCE mechanisms was supplemented by means of the *Institution of the High Commissary OSCE for national minorities*, thus promoting the rights of minorities, as well as the decrease of interethnic tensions . Thus the OSCE “ space” completes and develops the European legislations regarding national minorities . The *Recommendation from the Hague of 1996 regarding the educational rights of national minorities*, *Recommendations from Oslo of 1998 regarding the effective participation of national minorities to the public life*¹² .

C. The **European Council** promotes par excellence the democracy and human rights .These principles are found in various resolutions and recommendations voted by the plenum of the Parliamentary Meeting, especially after 1990, in the decision of the European Court of Human Rights and also in the two international European treatises regarding the minorities : *Frame – convention regarding national minorities* and the *Charter of regional or minority languages* .

The **Recommendation 1134/1990** of the Parliamentary Meeting of the European Council requested the member states of the organization to elaborate an additional protocol to the European Convention of Human Rights, or a special convention for the protection of minorities . The **Recommendation 1201/1993** contains an important European definition of the notion of national minority . There are also other parliamentary recommendations and resolutions, without

⁸ **Alexander H.E Morawa** in “Mechanisms for the Implementation of Minority Rights “. (ed). Gaetano Pentassuglia, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, 2004 , p.45-56 .

⁹ **Idem.** p. 32-39 .

¹⁰ **Ibidem.** p. 41-43.

¹¹ **Arie Bloed** in “ Universal Minority Rights “, Alan Philips & Alan Roses (eds). Abo Academy and Rights Group (International), Turku/Abo and London, 1995, p.112-122 .

¹² **Rolf Ekeus** in “Filling the frame. Fine years of monitoring the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities “.p. 24-29 .

having a mandatory internationally legal character, for example; the recommendation regarding the autonomy by ethnic criteria that member states can take into consideration .

Although the *European Convention of Human Rights* does not contain specific provisions regarding the minorities, many decisions of the European Court of Human Rights are taken into account or represent important sources of inspiration for the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg . Many decisions were given with regard to expulsion, discriminating treatment, freedom of expression, language and religion, etc. regarding national minorities ¹³.

The **Frame –convention regarding national minorities, adopted in 1994, entered in force in 1998** is the *first* treaty defining the current international regime of national minorities in Europe .35 of the 45 member states of the European Council and 21 of the 25 member states of the European Union are part to this convention (Romania is the first state to sign this document, on the 11th of May 1995) . The frame – convention defines : preservation and development of culture, religion, language and traditions, the freedom of meeting, association, expression, thinking, conscience and religion, the access to use of the mother tongue in mass-media, linguistic liberties, the use of the native language in private and in public, as well as before the administrative authorities, the use of the personal name in the mother tongue, topographic signs in the native language, education in the mother tongue, freedom to create own educational institutions, teaching in the mother tongue, cross-frontier contacts, etc.

The states that took part to the Frame –convention are bound by result duties, being obliged to transpose them into their national legislation at the internal level . After the ratification, each state must present a detailed report regarding the situation (political, legal, economic and social) of the national minorities existing on the territory of that state . These reports are subsequently examined by a Consultative Committee composed of independent experts appointed by the member states . The Committee of the Ministers of the European Council, based on the opinion of the Consultative Committee, issues for each separate state a resolution regarding the application and the evolution of the status of the Frame-convention, which must be implemented by the term of the next periodical report . In 2003, the European Council finished the first monitoring cycle of the Frame-convention regarding national minorities .

The **European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages** is the *second* important legal instrument of the European Council, which contributes to the protection of the minorities on the old continent . It was elaborated in 1992 and entered into force in 1998, among the eight ratification instruments . This treatise does not have the purpose of enunciating individual or collective rights belonging to national minorities that can be invoked before the administrative authorities or before the courts of law, but its purpose is to “*promote multilingual use and cultural diversity which forms the common patrimony of the European citizens* “. The Charter has three parts : The first part clears up certain specific notions and terms, such as; “*regional or minority languages*”, “*non-territorial languages* “, or “*linguistic community* “, notions that have been explained in the beginning of this paper . The second part contains minimal rules that must be observed by each state with regard to all the regional and minority languages existing on its territory . The third part contains a hundred optional obligations . Each state must choose at least 35 obligations of these- at least three in the field of education and culture and one regarding the official use of the minority language in administration, in the courts of law, in mass-media and in the economic and social life that it has to execute entirely and in good faith as international

¹³ C. Hillgruber, M.Jestaedt, “The European Convention of Human Rights and the Protection of National Minorities.”, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, Koln, 1994 , p.82-85 .

obligations.¹⁴ The state is monitored through periodical reports submitted by each government. The report of the state is analyzed by a Committee of independent experts of the member states. The evaluations of the Committee of experts are presented by the Committee of Ministers who adopt the final resolution regarding the observance by the state of the provisions of the European Charter of regional or minority languages that it undertook.

D. The **European Parliament** became the promoter of the rights of national minorities, of the right of persons belonging to national minorities, particularly during the 90's. In 1994. The activity of the European parliamentarians materialized through specific programs, which were coordinated by the **European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL)**, and through the proclamation of year **2001** as the **European Year of Linguistic Diversity**. The resolution of the European parliamentarians determined the European Council, upon the proposition of the European Commission, to adopt community law norms in this specific field, such as : the *Council Directive 2000/43/EC of the 29th of June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin* and the *Council Directive 2000/78/EC of the 27th of November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation*.

E. **Directive 2000/43** is the most important community law instrument regarding minority protection, because it forced the member states that, by the 19th of July 2003, they harmonize their internal legislation and national practice with the international norms in the field. Also *Directive 2000/78* continued the previous directive on the subject of non-discrimination based on gender and nationality in employment. It is important to mention the operation of the **European Racism and Xenophobia Monitoring Centre**, which was created based on the *Council Regulation (EC) 1035/ 97*, which will later be transformed into the "**European Agency for Fundamental Rights**".

F. The **European Court of Justice from Luxembourg**, was also involved in the field of protection of national minorities and of persons belonging to national minorities. In the cases *Goerner* and *Angonese*, the Court decided that the protection and promotion of all minority languages of Europe must be observed on the entire territory of the European Union, in accordance with the free circulation of persons and of workforce. The cases *Mutdch and Bickell / Franz*, in which the Court showed that the norms that grant special linguistic rights to residents of certain regions must be extended onto all European citizens that speak the same language before the administrative and judicial authorities of that country¹⁵.

G. The **European Council of Nisa 2000**, adopted the political connotation document called **Charte of the Fundamental Rights of European Citizens**, which completes the *European Union Treatise*. According to Art.7, the European Parliament or the Commission may decide with a majority of four fifths on the proposition of at least one third of the number of member states, when one of the member states infringes the fundamental rights of the democracy of the Union a situation they consider to be prejudicial for the fundamental values of the correct functioning of the Union. The Council of the European Union unanimously decides if the member state in question is guilty of a serious infringement of the provisions of article 6 of the European Union Treatise : "*The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for the human rights and its fundamental liberties, as well as on the state of law, principles that are in common to all member states*". The sanctions are drastic, reaching even to the suspension of the

¹⁴ **Rainer Hoffman** in " Filling the Frame . Five years of monitoring the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities "., p. 18-26 .

¹⁵ **Gabriel N. Toggenberg** in " Minority Protection and the Enlarged European Union: The Way Forward " .p. 25-31 .

participation and the right to vote within the institutions of the European Union¹⁶. The common values proclaimed in Art. 6 of the Treatise were tested in the case called “ The Austrian Business“ of 2000 .The formation of the Austrian Government by a coalition formed of far right and conservatories, forces considered to be hostile to democratic values and to the human rights, determined the official community reaction to impose sanctions, such as: suspension of the bilateral contracts with Austria or refusal to support Austrian candidatures for the community and international positions . Although this procedure was not instituted, member states must comply with the democratic values and with the human rights, including here the rights of persons belonging to national minorities .

The annual reports of the independent experts complete the preoccupation of the Union on the situation of the minorities of each member state . The Council of the European Union on the situation of the minorities of each member state . The Council of European Union decides based on these reports .

III. EUROPEAN COMMISSION - BRUSSELS, OCTOBER 2005 ROMANIA-COMPREHENSIVE MONITORING REPORT .

A. Executive summary.¹⁷ The finding of this Report can be summarized as follows:

As regards the political requirements for membership, Romania continues to meet them .Romania has taken decisive steps to further reform the judiciary system towards more independence and to improve the situation on media freedom, property restitution, **minorities** and child **protection** .However, a number of shortcomings still exist : significant efforts are needed to pursue the reform of public administration, effectively implement the reform of the justice system and ensure effective enforcement of the fight against corruption, including high level corruption . In the area of human rights and the **protection of minorities**, further efforts are needed in particular to improve the situation of disabled and mentally ill people .

B. Political criteria¹⁸. **Protection and integration of minorities .**

As regards **minority rights and protection of minorities**, a draft law on the statute of national minorities providing for forms of cultural autonomy of national minorities and setting up the principles of equality and non-discrimination was adopted by the Government in May 2005 but still needs to be approved by Parliament. The situation of the **Hungarians** has continued to improve, all the more so since the *Democratic Alliance of Hungarians from Romania (UDMR)* is part of the governing coalition . The enforcement of the legislation providing for access by the national minorities in one’s mother tongue to administrative and judicial procedures is satisfactory in the case of the Hungarian minority, but more progress could still be made regarding the police . As regards education, the number of pre-university educational units remained roughly constant and private Hungarian university continued to function with several branches throughout Transylvania . While there is no state Hungarian university, access to higher education is provided by Hungarians sections in Romanian universities .

Concerning the **Roma minority**, very limited progress was registered in the functioning of the structures- in particular the *National Agency for Roma* in its capacity as the reorganized *Office for Roma issues* involved in the implementation of the 2001 *Roma Strategy* . The Joint Committee for Implementation and Monitoring remains very weak in terms of activity . The Staffing should be further strengthened and, together with improved inter-sectoral coordination,

¹⁶ **Idem** . 99-103 .

¹⁷ www.edrc.ro **Comprehensive Monitoring Report published by the European Commission which contains only the parts regarded to national minorities or the discrimination issues.**

¹⁸ **Idem** .

budgetary resources should be significantly enhanced at central and local levels . The appointment , in July 2005, of a new head for the National Agency, coming from the Roma community and without political affiliation , is an encouraging sign of the government's willingness to begin integrating Roma organizations in the implementation and monitoring of the strategy .

IV. CONCLUSIONS .

There are few legislative provisions that protect directly minorities and the persons belonging to a national minority. Although Romania continues to define itself as “unitary nation state “ enshrining the primacy of the Romanian population over its minorities .

The Law on the Status of National Minorities is currently going through parliamentary procedures and deliberations and increases problems on the “cultural autonomy” notion .

There is more to be done in this field especially to change the people mentality to fight against the nationalistic tendencies which are still present within a part of the Romanian contemporary society .The issues of the Roma community are also, far from being solved in Romania .The protection of their linguistic and cultural identity should go with a positive discrimination at social and economic level .Except of some summer camps as : Balványos and Tusnad-băi witch has an inter-cultural character, little has been done yet especially for the young generation to share, to understand, and to respect the “others” the differences between nationalities. Many people in Romania learn international languages, but just a few of them are really interested in the minority languages spoken on their territories or countries .Even the intellectuals and the linguists have done almost nothing for the multilingual education .But I'm hoping that there will be a fresh start in the future .I can give as an example my grandfather who was brought up in a multilingual and multicultural region from Târgu-Mureş . He spoke: Romanian, Hungarian, German, and Romanes ; considering that those who come from a multicultural milieu should learn also the other minorities language. This mentality perhaps is considered being an exaggeration but in reality it is not .

In the end I would like to emphasize that in an European Union, based on unity and built on the principle of *non-discrimination, of tolerance and the respect of ethnic differences*, all the nationalities (nations) became minorities in the big” European Family”. That's why must be created specific mechanisms which could “protect “ the minorities from the majorities .

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