

# TURKISH AND HUNGARIAN MINORITIES IN THE BALKANS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Zoltán EGERESI  
Freelance Researcher, Hungary

## Abstract

The paper aims at making a comparative analysis between two minority parties being in the Balkans: namely the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania and the Movement for Rights and Freedom in Bulgaria. The analytical framework is based on a comparison of history and party development after 1990, of two minority groups – Hungarians in Romania and Turks in Bulgaria. The paper also reveals the minority parties' formation, political programme during the last two decades, the emergence of alternative minority political parties, and the cause of these new movements' political failure to establish a stable and vast electorate.

## Introduction

After the collapse of Yugoslavia and the declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, the ratio of national minority groups in the Balkans has started to decline rapidly. Due to the changes in demographic features and State formation in the peninsula, Hungarians in Romania and Turks in Bulgaria have become the two biggest minority groups in the Balkans. Although the two ethnic groups are declining in number in line with the demographic trends in the Balkans, they represent the largest minorities in their countries. Having a community of 1.2 million, Hungarians living in Romania constitute around 6.5 percent of the total population. The official census in 2011 shows that the number of Turks in Bulgaria is 586 000 (representing around 6 percent of the total population), but due to the fact that approximately 600 000 people had not confessed their ethnic affiliation, it is probably higher.

The history of the two minority groups has many similarities which ease the use of a comparative framework. Each of them lost its privileged position after the collapse of Ottoman and Austrian-Hungarian Empires. They needed to face the assimilationist policies of the new Romanian and Bulgarian states whose elites intended to create their own nation-states. The wars, the changes in state administration, sometimes forced emigration created mass waves of migration to their kin-states. These oppressive policies were extremely strong during the last decade of communism when the Ceausescu and Zhivkov regimes were using the nationalism as a legitimising force to empower the system. The homogenisation process in Romania, and the Revival process in Bulgaria were key measures of these times.

The collapse of communist regimes all over the region paved the way towards a democratic transition in both countries. These changes also had many similarities, such as mass anti-minority protests, long-lasting economic recession and weak, short-living governments in the 90's and slow accession process to the European Union. This accession did not mean the end of economic and political difficulties for these

countries: the international financial crisis in 2008 and 2009 damaged their economies, created social tensions and manifestations against the governments.

The end of communism has also opened a new chapter for Hungarians and Turks in these countries. Benefiting from a much more favourable external and domestic environment for political movements, they created their political parties at the very beginning. The Hungarians had formed the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania and the Turks the Movement for Rights and Freedom. The paper which will mainly focus on these parties, argues that during the last two decades these political parties have become the main tool for minority communities to have parliamentary representation and political protection, and also leverage for State politics.

Although the first years of transition in both countries were rather troublesome for minority communities due to the nationalist protests and attacks, they managed to create their own parties which were successful to become a stable – even the most stable – political parties of the party system in their countries. Furthermore, the party elites managed to be integrated through parliament and state administration into the ruling political hegemonic blocs. This process eased for them to allocate state and later EU funds to help their local minority communities, but this integration was based on a minority-majority compromise which moderated the party programmes or the nationalist tendencies. This kind of ‘compromise’ has created tension within the minority communities and gave an impetus to the emergence of various alternative parties, but these organizations did not manage to become a real alternative for voters.

The paper intends to reveal the party development by analysing the historical background of the two, above mentioned parties’ formation. It will argue that the party elites were successful in integrating to the Bulgarian and Romanian ruling hegemonic blocs. The paper also shows the comparative analysis of alternative party formation in terms of a usually failed attempt to challenge the ruling parties.

## **From Privileged Position to Pariah: Minority History in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The collapse of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empire in line with the formation of new states in the Balkans has changed the status of previously ruling ethnic groups. This process has started with Turks due the gradual decline of Empire. After the Ottoman Empire’s successive territorial losses in 1878 and 1912-13, Turks living in Bulgaria have lost their privileged position and become a minority group. The wars and forced emigration caused huge loss in life for the community<sup>1</sup> which almost lost the ruling intelligentsia by this time. Furthermore, their situation was weaker due to the fact that the nationalist project in the Ottoman Empire was relatively weak, and the creation of Turkish nationhood has happened after the First World War, during the Atatürk era.

The Hungarians living in Transylvania (Western Romania currently) were in a more ‘favourable’ situation: the collapse of Hungary was relatively fast without huge killings and mass emigration (although after the Treaty of Trianon, around 200 000 Hungarian have left Transylvania). The Hungarian community also

---

<sup>1</sup> See more: Justin McCarty: Muslims in Ottoman Europe: Population from 1800 to 1912. In: *Nationalities Papers 2000/1*. pp. 29.-43.

managed to preserve the most of its economic strength which helped it to create a vital cultural life between the two world wars.

The interwar period had similarities for both communities. They needed to face growing assimilationist policies, and restriction in cultural rights, especially after the establishment of more authoritarian systems in Romania and in Bulgaria. The emigration also affected the two minority groups although in a different extent: due to a Treaty signed in 1925 Turkey settled several ten thousand people from Bulgaria. The interwar period also was an era when these communities did the first attempt to establish their (minority) cultural life. This period was determinant for Turks: the Turkish community in Bulgaria during this era has managed to catch up to the modernisation process in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Concerning the political level, in contrast to the Turks, Hungarians have managed to establish their own parties as Hungarian Nation Party (Magyar Nemzeti Néppárt) and Hungarian People's Party (Magyar Néppárt) which merges into the Hungarian National Party (Országos Magyar Párt).<sup>3</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War had an important impact on the Hungarians living in Romania. In 1940, the second Vienna treaty has transferred Northern Transylvania to Hungary (around 43 000 square km) with a Hungarian majority population. For this population the short Hungarian rule was a new revival, boosting its cultural and political institutions. Other Hungarians, remaining in Southern Transylvania under Romanian rule needed to face a new wave of assimilationist policies and oppression, and loss of an important percentage of their schools.

The establishment of Communist regimes in both countries after the war created a similar situation for the minorities. Although the first decade of totalitarianism was usually the most repressive period in the communist era, the minority groups got some 'rights' from the state.

What does it mean? In the Hungarian case, they got an autonomous region in 1952 due to Stalin's wish. *Per se*, this region was a tool to integrate Hungarian elites to the communist structure, permitting limited cultural rights.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Turks, they got support from the state for cultural rights which helped them to create Turkish cultural groups, newspapers etc. In the background of this favourable policy was that the communist elite wanted to modernise Turks by helping to find their 'ethnic' and 'secular' identity in detriment of their religious 'one'.

These 'favourable' policies were gradually terminated after Ceausescu and Zhivkov took the power in 1968 and 1956 respectively. These leaders started to use more repressive policies in order to homogenise the society. In Bulgaria, this process was started with Macedonians and later with Pomaks ('70's, renaming procedure for Pomaks). Later, in the 80's the communist regime turned towards the nationalism in order to find a new, largely accepted ideological tool to legitimize the system which had growing economic difficulties. The targets of these nationalist policies were Hungarians and Turks. In Bulgaria, a renewal campaign was launched in 1984/1985 when the Turkish (Muslim) names were replaced by a Bulgarian one.

---

<sup>2</sup> One of the most important element of this modernisation was the implementation of Latin alphabet.

<sup>3</sup> Nándor Bárdi: *Tény és Való*. Pozsony. Kalligram. 2004. p. 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> During 1946-1952 Hungarians needed to face a repressive state politics which weakened the Hungarian education and Church, as well as purchased Hungarian (non-communist) intelligentsia.

The clashes in various villages in Rhodope, Southern Bulgaria showed the futile resistance of Turkish population against their identity annihilation. After the campaign, several secret groups formed all over the Turkish inhabited regions and started their rather peaceful 'fight' against the oppressive regime (these groups were usually eliminated and their members transferred to a prison or Belene camp by 1986; most famous movement was founded by Ahmed Doğan).<sup>5</sup> In 1989 when Turkish mass protest erupted again, the Zhivkov regime opened the country borders which resulted in the fast emigration some 325 000 Turks to Turkey during the summer of 1989. This migration lasted until the end of August, when Turkish authorities decided to close the borders to avoid the humanitarian disaster in Turkey.

The Ceausescu regime imposing permanent pressure and gradual limitation of education rights after 1968, has launched in 1988 the homogenation project which aimed at rationalizing the settlement of the country, namely to force Hungarians from villages to towns where they could be easily assimilated. This oppression also created emigration wave towards Hungary, which accepted several ten thousands Hungarians in 1989 and 1990.

### After The Regime Change: Minority Party Formation

The Zhivkov regime has ended by an internal *coup d'Etat*, led by Petar Mladenov, Minister of Foreign Affairs. After seizing the power, reform communists have rapidly terminated the oppressive policies: they declared that the revival process has ended and the Turks could return from Turkey. In Romania, a Hungarian reformat bishop, László Tókes had a key role in the Romanian revolution: mass protests have begun to defend him in Timisoara (Temesvár) which spread all over the country. Ceausescu with his wife was executed 25<sup>th</sup> December 1989, and the power was given to Reform Communists's group, led by Ion Iliescu.

Hungarian and Turkish minority elites that played an important role in the transition process realised that they need to create their own party in order to represent the minority groups. The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania was established 25<sup>th</sup> December 1989 by Géza Domokos, the Movement for Rights and Freedom shortly later, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1989 in Varna by Ahmed Doğan.<sup>6</sup>

The creation of these parties was usually highly criticised by the majority. In Bulgaria, Turkish deputies needed to leave the parliament through the backdoor due to the protesters, in Razgrad where Turkish party centre was attacked in 1990, a short-lived Republic was also declared by the Bulgarian nationalists. The former communist nomenclature also supported nationalist tensions.<sup>7</sup> Hungarian party formation was also criticised by Romanians, moreover bloody clashes have happened in March 1991 (after the Hungarian National holiday of 15<sup>th</sup> March) between Romanian protesters and Hungarians in Tirgu Mures

---

<sup>5</sup> Zeynep Zafer: Bulgaristan Türklerinin 1984-1989 Eritme Politikasına Karşı Direnişi. In: *Akademik Bakis*, 2010/6. pp. 27-44. p. 31-32.

<sup>6</sup> See more: Ali Dayıoğlu: *Toplama Kampından Meclis'e İstanbul, İletişim yayınları*, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Maria Bakalova: The Bulgarian Turkish Name Conflict and Democratic Transition. In: *Innovation*. 1996/3-4. pp.233-246. 236. p.

(Marosvásárhely).<sup>8</sup> Nationalists and anti-Hungarian parties also emerged in Romania, as the Vatra Romaneasca.

In Bulgaria, the party formation was more difficult. In order to prevent the parliamentary presence of MRF the Bulgarian political elite had accepted in 1990 a party law which prohibits the establishment of ethnic or religious political parties. That is why, the MRF had needed to accept a liberal agenda and party programme without naming Turks. This prohibition was strengthened in 1991 when this prohibition was incorporated into the Constitution. This legal framework has created a permanent threat for the party which could be easily interpreted as unconstitutional. The first attempt to use this pretext to ban the party has happened before the 1991 elections, when almost one hundred deputies from the Socialist Party turned to the Constitutional Court to eliminate the MRF claiming the party's mostly Muslim and Turkish electorate and membership. However, the party was allowed to run the elections and in 1992 the Constitutional Court decided to do not ban the party. This ruling was also based to the consideration that Constitutional Court wanted to avoid international criticism.<sup>9</sup>

The very first years of regime change were determinant for the creation of party structure and membership. DUHR was formed as a less centralised organization of various political organizations, 'platforms' which intended to represent the whole Hungarian community's interest. The idea of this party structure was that the party has to be the only political formation to channel the Hungarian votes and ensure the stable parliamentary position – but the various platforms could also channel various opinions and lobby group interest, having sometimes huge and heated debates.<sup>10</sup> The Movement for Rights and Freedom compared to the Hungarian party was founded as a monolithic, rather centralised party led by Ahmed Doğan. His position has grown stronger during years by eliminating his opponents from the party leadership (until his sudden resignation at the beginning of 2013, after an assassination attempt).

## Two Decades in the Politics: Minority Related Programmes

The minority parties were slowly accepted by the majority. During the very first years, already having stable parliamentary presence, these parties have managed to pass some minority related laws. In the case of Bulgaria, although MRF could not participate to the round table talks,<sup>11</sup> the party could make accept the most important decision, the so-called Doğan Law which ensured the transfer of houses of Turks who left the country in 1989 and returned. The Bulgarian parliament also accepted the 'Name law' which make it possible for people having lost their original name during the Revival process to get it back. This process was facilitated by a law presented by Ahmed Doğan in November 1990.

---

<sup>8</sup> See more about the Hungarian-Romanian ethnic tensions by this time: Csaba, Zahorán: Románüldözés a Székelyföldön? Egy állítólagos etnikai tisztogatás története In.: *Az új nemzetállamok és az etnikai tisztogatások Kelet-Európában 1989 után*. (Ed.: József Juhász – Tamás Krausz). Budapest. L'Harmattan – Eötvös Lorand University. 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Venelin Ganev I.: History, Politics, and the Constitution: Ethnic Conflict and Constitutional Adjudication in Postcommunist Bulgaria. In.: *Slavic Review*. 2004. 63/1. pp. 66-89 p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> See more about the party internal structure and its evolution: Bárdi Nándor: A romániai magyar kisebbség helyzetének változásai, társadalmi, kulturális önszerveződésének eredményei. In.: *Kisebbségi magyar közösségek a 20. században*. (Ed.: Nándor Bárdi – Csilla Fedinec – László Szarka). Budapest. Gondolat – MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet. 2008. pp. 330-339.

<sup>11</sup> Rechel, Brend: State Control of Minorities in Bulgaria. In.: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*. 2007. 23./3. pp..352–370. p. 354.

The education was another important issue on the list of demands of minority parties. A very important distinction between the Hungarian and Turkish minority education that is in Romania during the communist regime Hungarian language education was kept alive while the Turkish was prohibited. Although the Ceausescu era gradually restricted and limited the Hungarian education, and after the regime change Hungarian politicians and society needed to organize manifestations and campaign for broader education rights they managed to create a relatively stable Hungarian education with primary and high school network.

Later the main aim of the party was rather to make the Hungarian University return. Finally, with the pressure of Hungarian government the full Romanian University of Babes-Bolyai was completed by Hungarian departments and some majors were launched in Hungarian language as well. Actually the proportion of Hungarians is some 15%-20% of total students of the university. During the 2000s the Hungarian government initiated the establishment of a totally Hungarian university which was named Sapientia Erdélyi Magyar Tudományegyetem (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) having various faculties through the Hungarian inhabited regions, while its centre is in Cluj-Napoca.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of Bulgaria, the Movement for Rights and Freedom has managed just getting fewer rights. There are no Turkish schools in Bulgaria, even the Turkish language is just an optional course among the others in primary and high school. This system is rather disadvantageous for Turkish learning because in high schools lots of children prefer to choose English or German at detriment of Turkish classes. This situation – along with the mass emigration of Turks towards Turkey has contributed to the spectacular decline of number of Turkish students. Concerning the higher education, the situation is even worse: there is only one Turkish department with a few students which is not enough to assure the recruitment of Turkish language teachers. The role of Turkey is important from this point of view: by providing various scholarship thousands of Turks have managed to study at Turkish universities, and some of them have returned to Bulgaria.

Despite the constant rhetoric of the Movement for Rights and Freedom to gain educational rights, they could not achieve anything during the last two decades. Even when they got the opportunity to become a government coalition partner in 2001 and 2005 they did not fight to get the Ministry of Education, they rather focused on other positions.

During the EU accession process<sup>13</sup> the parties have managed to strengthen the minority positions. Due to the EU's pressure the membership aspirant countries needed to accept more liberal minority legislation, e. g. ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minority Rights which were accomplished in both country with the buoyant support of minority parties.

By this time in Bulgaria, Ahmed Doğan in line with the Bulgarian elite has launched the Bulgarian Ethnic model rhetoric, which intended to convince the international community and the Bulgarian society that the

---

<sup>12</sup> The third Hungarian, but Church sponsored higher level institution opened its doors in Oradea in 1990 and got its accreditation as a university in 2008 from the Romanian parliament.

<sup>13</sup> Bulgaria and Romania have issued their candidacies in 1995; they got the candidate status in 1999, at Helsinki summit and they joined the EU in 2007.

era of interethnic conflicts is ended and in Bulgaria the people have managed to find the way for the peaceful coexistence. This discourse was also used by Bulgarian politicians by this time.

This very favourable picture has changed after 2005 when the ATAKA nationalist party has emerged in the Bulgarian political scene and entered into the parliament. This new party's support topped in 2006 when its leader, Volen Siderov seized important portion of votes for presidential elections. Later, the party helped the Borisov government in line with growing criticism against the MRF.

## The Road towards the Power

After surviving the first years of the regime change when nationalist parties and groups threatened the minority parties, they gradually consolidated their parliamentary presence. By creating a mutually acceptable rhetoric – a less nationalist discourse –, the Bulgarian and Romanian political elites started to perceive the minority parties as a loyal partner.

The first time when DUHR has become a government member was 1996 when the party joined a right wing coalition led by Ion Diaconescu.<sup>14</sup> This was important because although it got by this time one ministry (Ministry of Tourism, and later Ministry of Health) and several secretary of state positions and prefectures (State governors for districts).<sup>15</sup> During this time the rhetoric of the party was moderated accepting a more cooperative tone.

During the Nastase government (2000-2004) the party did not participate to the government but it signed a protocol which guaranteed its support for the Socialists who needed to fulfil the party's requirements. This period was one of the most successful era for the DUHR. Béla Markó has managed to reacquire lands for the Church which were nationalised during the communism, and by this time the Sapientia University was established as well.

Between 2004 and 2012 the DUHR has practically joined every government.<sup>16</sup> During Coli Popescu Tariceanu's cabinet the party gave various Ministers, e. g. Minister of regional development, Minister of Environment and the Minister of Information and Telecommunication. In the second Boc government (2009-2012) the DUHR seized the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and probably the most unthankful position, the Ministry of Health. The party had minor achievements like the ratification of the new Education Law (2011) easing the formation of Hungarian classes and the establishment of Hungarian Faculties within a university. Although the party's programme has contained the demand for autonomy, practically nothing has happened to acquire it.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it seems that the

---

<sup>14</sup> See more about a comprehensive party history: Nándor, Bárdi: A romániai magyar kisebbség helyzetének változásai, társadalmi, kulturális önszerveződésének eredményei. In.: *Kisebbségi magyar közösségek a 20. században* (Ed. Nándor Bárdi- Csilla Fedinec- László Szarka) Budapest. Gondolat – MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet. 2008. pp. 330-339. [http://adatbank.transindex.ro/regio/kisebbségkutatas/pdf/VI\\_fej\\_03\\_Bardi.pdf](http://adatbank.transindex.ro/regio/kisebbségkutatas/pdf/VI_fej_03_Bardi.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> See more: János Márton: A romániai magyar társadalom sajátos kérdései az RMDSZ 1996–2002 közötti programjaiban és politikájában. In *Magyar Kisebbség* 2003. No, 4. pp. 295–359 and 2004. No. 1–2, pp. 529–572. p. 315.

<sup>16</sup> Except for the first Boc government in 2008.

<sup>17</sup> This failure created measurable tensions within the Hungarian community in Romania, and has become the base of main critics.

party ceases to be an ethnic party when non-minority issues are on the agenda: in these cases it behaves as a normal party.<sup>18</sup>

The MRF has become official government member for the first time in 2001.<sup>19</sup> As a partner of the Tzar movement, the party was awarded by the Ministry of Agriculture and a Ministry without portfolio. The party kept his power for the next government led by Sergei Stanishev between 2005 and 2009. More importantly it got three ministries namely Ministry of Natural Disaster Management, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture, furthermore Emel Etem has become Deputy Prime Minister as well.<sup>20</sup>

This period gave the opportunity for the party to appoint district governors as well, and support Turkish-led municipalities especially after 2007 when Bulgaria has joined the European Union which multiplied the amount of financial sources to drawn from Cohesion Funds. By this time various EU and state sponsored projects were launched in Kircaeli.<sup>21</sup>

After a four-year-long intermezzo during the GERB-government, the early elections in May 2013 have put the MRF a favourable position. Acquiring some 11 percent of total votes (third biggest party in parliament) it has become again an important factor in government formation. While the GERB had not enough mandates to form a government alone, the Socialist Party has managed to gain the support of MRF and ATAKA even if the later one cannot be considered as a loyal and stable partner. This circumstance contributed to the establishment of a 'non-partisan' government led by Plamen Oresharski where MRF-related politicians and businessmen could seize positions.

## Electoral Performance

Due to the ethnic electorate, minority parties have managed to maintain a relatively stable election performance. During the nineties both party got generally the same percentage as the minority represent in the society, but the DUHR had usually a slightly higher ratio. For the MRF, the 1994 election represented the worst election results, as the party got around 5.44 percent of total votes, barely above the electoral threshold. This devastating performance was thanked to the mass emigration of Turks towards Turkey and the emergence of new, alternative parties.<sup>22</sup> In the case of DUHR we can see a gradual decline of number of votes, as Hungarian electorate's turnout has become similar to the majority's pattern. However, during the 2000's a particular split can be perceived in the case of Movement for Rights and Freedom compared to electoral performance of the Hungarian party.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Bakk Miklós: Az erdélyi magyarság politikai érdekérvényesítésének feltételei és uniós perspektívái. [http://www.keh.hu/admin/data/file/2712\\_0012060504bakkmiklos.pdf](http://www.keh.hu/admin/data/file/2712_0012060504bakkmiklos.pdf) p. 1

<sup>19</sup> The party played an important role in the government formation and later its support when the Berov took the power between 1992-1994, but by this time the party could not be official member of the government.

<sup>20</sup> Sofiaecho. 17. 08. 2005. [http://sofiaecho.com/2005/08/17/639577\\_who-are-bulgarias-new-ministers](http://sofiaecho.com/2005/08/17/639577_who-are-bulgarias-new-ministers)

<sup>21</sup> Field research in Kircaeli in 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Nurcan Özgür: Etnik sorunların çözümünde Hak ve Özgürlükler Hareketi. İstanbul, Der Yayınları, 1999. 220-221. p

<sup>23</sup> See more about the RMDSZ electoral performance: Tamás Kiss: Az RMDSZ és az erdélyi magyar választók. In.: *Pro Minoritate*. 2009 Spring, pp. 34-57. <http://www.prominoritate.hu/folyoiratok/2009/ProMino09-1-03-Kiss.pdf>

This divergence is based on various factors. Most importantly, the Hungarian party has remained mainly the party of Hungarians. It got the votes of Hungarians (at least the majority) and some Romas who speak in Hungarian and live in Hungarian inhabited regions. Furthermore, the Romanian electoral law ensured parliamentary representations at the Chamber of Deputies for 18 ethnic minority groups who can elect their own deputies by own will at the parliamentary elections.

In the case of MRF, the party leadership has started to broaden its electorate. This process was based on the acquisition of (Muslim) Roma and Pomak votes. This procedure was de jure mitigated by the Bulgarian electoral law which does not allow the existence of minority or religious parties in the parliament, so the MRF – at least in rhetoric – could become the party of every minority group. During the 2000's, a so-called 'geographical expansion' strengthened this process; for instance MRF could get votes in Vidin district where there is practically no Turkish or Muslim population but the party acquired the Roma's support.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the successful mobilization of voters was also an important part of the results, e. g. in 2005 when the turnout in Turkish inhabited district was higher than the national average.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, another feature has helped the party to increase its votes: due to the Bulgarian electoral law Bulgarian citizens living in Turkey (mainly Turks) could also cast their votes in Bulgarian general elections.<sup>26</sup> The number of these votes is almost constantly increasing. In 2001, the MRF got 35 thousands votes in Turkey, four years later, in 2005 this number was around 40 thousands. The party has reached its best performance: it got nearly 100 thousands in Turkey.<sup>27</sup> In May 2013 the number decreased to 50 thousands, but it still remained an important proportion within the party's total votes.

## Alternative Parties

The emergence of a minority elite and the formation of a minority party which could articulate the interest of this elite did not mean that the differences would have disappeared. In the case of DUHR the platform system tried to channel the various opinions and keep various factions within the party. However, this policy could not avoid internal troubles which led to the resignation of the founders (Géza Szócs and Géza Domokos) and Béla Markó's election for the presidential post in 1993. Later a new cleavage has emerged between Béla Markó and the László Tókéš the famous Reformat bishop of Timisoara who played a crucial role in the revolution against Ceausescu, in 1989.

The gradually deteriorating relation between Markó and Tókéš resulted in the exit of the former one from the party and the creation of alternative organizations. The first step was the foundation of Hungarian National Council of Transylvania (Erdélyi Magyar Nemzeti Tanács) and the National Council of Seklers

---

<sup>24</sup> Marko Hajdinjak: Political Participation of Minorities in Bulgaria. 2008. IMRI policy paper. p. 9. <http://www.imir-bg.org/imir/reports/Political%20Participation%20Of%20Minorities.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Nuray Ekici: Bulgaristan'da 'Hak ve Özgürlükler Hareketi' ve 25 Haziran 2005 genel seçimlerinin derinlemesine analizi. *Karadeniz Arastirmalari*. 2005. No. 7. pp.131-139 p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> During the previous years their rights of vote was limited for European Parliament elections and local elections, and the Bulgarian parliament introduced residency requirements.

<sup>27</sup> Later the Bulgarian Electoral Committee ruled out that 18 000 votes were the result of fraud that is why the party lost one mandate in the parliament out of 38. It is important to note that electoral fraud and vote buying not a unique case but it is rather a common feature of elections – e. g. in 2013 the ruling GERB had a scandal by printing false voting cards.

(Székely Nemzeti Tanács) in 2003, which was followed the creation of the first alternative Hungarian party – the Hungarian Civic Party led by Tőkés close friend, Jenő Szász. Due to bureaucratic (and political) obstacles the party was registered only in 2008.

After a split of Tőkés és Szász, Tőkés decided to create a new party. This was registered in 2011 around one year before the general elections. Enjoying the financial help of Hungarian government, the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania (Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt) has managed to create its structure and membership relatively fast. Although it aimed at becoming a real alternative party for the opposition of DUHR, it got just 50 thousands votes which was under the electoral threshold of 5 percent.

The quarrel between Hungarian parties seems to be constant and the Hungarian electorate seems to be more divided that it was even ten years ago. The emergence of alternative parties and the disappointment of Hungarian voters, in line with demographic crisis contributed the already mentioned decline of votes. The highly centralised MRF under the leadership of Ahmed Doğan also had face various splits but Doğan always managed to maintain its primary for Turks living in Bulgaria. This phenomenon was helped by the Bulgarian electoral law which prohibited the formation of ethnic parties: the right wing of the MRF could not become a real alternative. The attempt of Kenan Adem to establish a mainly Turkish (nationalist) party at the beginning of 90's was defeated by Bulgarian Court. The recent (religious) party formation of Yuzeirov brothers (OTOMAN) was also prevented by Bulgarian authorities.

The defection of more popular politicians from the party, like Güner Tahir, Osman Oktay, and most recently Kasim Dal<sup>28</sup> represented a more threatening danger for MRF. However these politicians' parties' electoral performance remained weak. Why could the MRF preserve its electorate? First of all, the local Turkish minority elites were linked to the party economically, especially when it was in power. As we have already mentioned, for local elite of minority parties is a key tool to allocate money for regional developments which is mitigated when the party has a parliamentary present or when it is a government member.

Secondly, these parties usually could not preserve stable financial sources on the long run without being capable to pass the threshold, or losing the support of Right wing parties who usually supported these attempts. Finally, the MRF is in a monopoly position at creating Turkish identity in Bulgaria. The annual commemorations at the places of most important clashes of the Revival process and the constant rhetoric against the share of votes which could create a situation when no Turkish party would be in the parliament (this rhetoric also appears in the Hungarian discourses) also push the electorate to favour the 'established' MRF rather than a new party. That is why sometimes relatively popular leaders, e.g. Kasim Dal has managed to acquire votes even from Turkey where his party's performance has remained low.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Kasim Dal who left the party in 2011 has formed his Freedom and Dignity People's Party with Korman Ismailov in 2012. This decision was mitigated by the electoral 'defeat' during the 2011 Fall local elections when Kasim Dal's supporters could barely challenge the MRF's strongholds despite the cooperation with Maria Kapon's party.

<sup>29</sup> His party being a coalition partner of a Liberal party got around 8800 vote from abroad (some 7,9% of total) while the MRF got 54 353 votes which is nearly 50% of votes casted abroad. See more: Result of 2013 legislative elections, Bulgarian Electoral Commission: <http://results.cik.bg/pi2013/rezultati/32.html>

## Conclusion

The regime change in 1989 has created a historical opportunity for the Hungarians and Turks living in Romania and Bulgaria to create their own political parties. Although they were facing the opposition of nationalist groups, even constitutional obstacles in Bulgaria, the first years of party formation can be judged as a rather successful period.

The integration of minority elites through these parties reached a new stage when DUHR and MRF could take a power as a coalition member in 1996 and 2001 respectively. As government member they usually intended to acquire ministries of regional development, agriculture or environment in order to make it easier regional development projects in poor, usually minorities inhabited regions. Prior the international financial and the euro crisis in mid 2000's the developments policies were especially spectacular.

The minority elites also accepted a minority agenda – fight for minority rights – which in case of Hungarians seems to have larger claims for the establishment of a regional or cultural autonomy. These minority politicians – especially in Bulgaria – also moderated the nationalist claims which eased the coexistence of various ethnic groups. This features made them acceptable for majority parties in the event of government formation. The DUHR was more flexible as it could join leftist and rightist government as well. The MRF had always closer link to liberals and socialists. The right wing parties always criticizing the party did not manage to make a compromise with the MRF's leadership.

Not without spectacular clashes but these two parties also managed to remain the main minority party. Various attempts to challenge their primacy had limited impact. Newly founded minority parties were never able to pass the parliamentary threshold. They even were not able to become a real alternative party lack of adequate support from Hungarian and Turkish voters.

Concerning the future, these parties would remain the main minority parties in Romania and Bulgaria. Their fate is based on the extent of their electorates which is declining in the case of DUHR but seems to be stable for the MRF who managed to channel new voters: Romas and Bulgarian citizens living in Turkey.

## Annex

Elections	1990		1992		1996		2000		2004		2008		2012	
	Ch*	S**	Ch	S	Ch	S								
Number of votes	991 601	1 004 353	811 290	831 469	812 628	837 760	736 863	751 310	628 125	637 109	425 008	440 4 49	380 513	388 372
Proportion of votes	7.32	7.2	7.46	7.58	6.64	6.82	6.80	6.90	6.19	6.23	6.17	6.39	5.15	5.25
Mandates	29	11	27	11	25	11	26	12	22	10	22	9	18	9

Source: Electoral Commission, own research

\*Chamber of Deputies

\*\*Senate

### 1. Electoral performance of the Union Democratic of Hungarians in Romania

Elections	1990	1991	1994	1997	2001	2005	2009	2013
Number of votes	n.a.	418 168	283 094	323 429	340 395	467 400	610 521	400 466
Proportion of votes	6.02	7.55	5.44	7.60	7.45	12.81	14.45	11.36
Mandates	23	24	15	19	21	34	38	36

Source: Electoral Commission, own research

### 2. Electoral performance of the Movement for Rights and Freedom