



THE TRANSYLVANIA TANGLE

Driving through the rolling Transylvanian countryside from Cluj toward Tîrgu-Mures one wintry Sunday afternoon some six weeks after the fall of Ceausescu in December 1989, I passed a group of about 100 peasants—virtually the entire village, it appeared—clustered with their priest around a cenotaph. Curious, I backed up the car and joined them. The cenotaph commemorated Romanian heroes of former wars. It was being dedicated again that day to include, especially, the fallen heroes of December. When I approached, the peasants were angry, and suspicious. At first they were afraid I was Hungarian. Their fear was palpable and, I have no doubt, genuine.

Eventually the stories poured out. "It

doesn't matter what will occur, only that the Hungarians don't come back," one very old woman told me. "I have lived under the Russians. I have lived under the Germans. Anybody but the Hungarians." Although Romanians formed an absolute majority of the population of Transylvania, and had for centuries, Hungarian nobles—a minority within a minority—had been their overlords for most of the preceding 1,000 years. The woman who addressed me had, in fact, been born in the dying days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when Transylvania was under direct Hungarian control and the Hungarian government pursued a harsh policy of Magyarization among all its subject peoples. She had lived

through two world wars and under two

BY WILLIAM McPHERSON

monarchies, through the unification with Romania in 1918 and the annexation by Hungary from 1940 to 1944, and finally through 45 years of communism. And today, or maybe yesterday, Hungarian peasants had attacked Romanians in their fields, in their villages, with pitchforks. They had burned their houses.

"Which houses? Who was pitchforked? Where?" I asked. "Here?"

"No, not in our village."

"In what village, then?" Everyone now seemed to be talking at once.

"Not the next village, a village beyond." I left in search of the village, but I never found it. It was always a village beyond the next village. And the same was true in Hungarian villages—stories of Romanians attacking, marauding, raping, pillaging, burning, but always in other villages.

So I made my way to Țirgu-Mures. By the time I got there, I was very familiar with atrocity stories. And by the time violence actually broke out in Țirgu-Mures, little more than a month later, the rumors had escalated to the point where "they were killing our children."

I do not know of a single Romanian or Hungarian who had been pitchforked, or of a village that had been burned, or of a child who had been murdered. I do not believe there were any. But there were many rumors, and soon the stories became all too real.

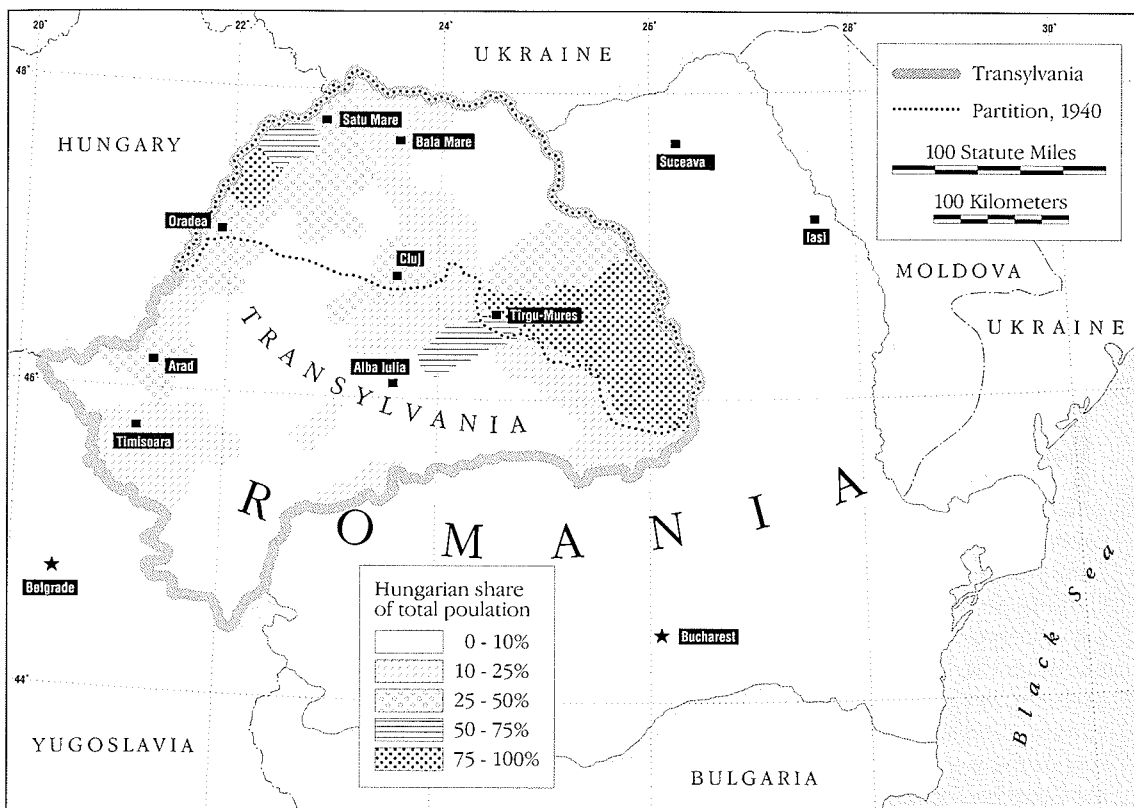
For two days, on March 19 and 20, 1990, Romanians and Hungarians battled with clubs and pipes and bottles in the center of Țirgu-Mures, a once largely Hungarian city whose population is now almost equally divided between ethnic Romanians and Hungarians. Romanian peasants arrived on buses and in trucks from the nearby villages of Hodac and Ibanesti to join the fray. The first death toll was six; the second figure announced was three; local police and medical sources said eight; the

Helsinki Watch investigating mission found five. At least four of the dead were Hungarians. Two hundred sixty-nine—perhaps more—Romanians and Hungarians were wounded, some viciously. András Süt, the best known writer in the Hungarian language in Romania, lost an eye. It was not, as so many Romanians say of their revolution, a "movie," a "scenario," though it seems likely to have been a manipulation. The difference between movies and life is that in life the scenario can kill.

Figures vary as to the number arrested and convicted for crimes committed in those days—42? 47? (accurate figures are extraordinarily difficult to come by in Romania)—but it is clear that of those arrested only two were Romanians; the great majority were Hungarian-speaking Gypsies. Seven of the latter, unable to read their statements (which had been written by the police), were tried and convicted under a Ceausescu-era decree of being social parasites; five are still in prison.

Two days after the disturbances a parliamentary investigating commission was established. Its first report was never officially released. A second report was written because the first was deemed inaccurate, and finally was presented to Parliament in January 1991. Neither report addressed the controversial role the police and the army had played in the events, the worst ethnic violence in Romania in years, in which real people really died as they had during the events of December 1989. (The role of the secret police and the army in the final days of the Ceausescu regime has never been clarified either.) The final report did point out that among the guilty were "some agents of the former political police" whose names it was not able to reveal because it did not have enough proof, largely because of the lack of an intelligence service at the time, an arguable state of affairs that was in any event immediately rectified.

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MapLine / Paul Woodward

A week after the events in Tîrgu-Mures, hinting darkly at foreign “agents provocateurs,” the provisional government of that time reconstituted and rehabilitated the former secret police, known as the S curitat —officially dissolved shortly after the fall of Ceausescu three months before but in fact only reshuffled, under the inoffensive name of the Romanian Intelligence Service (Serviciul Român Informații or SRI).

“From humanity, through nationality, to bestiality,” the 19th-century Austrian dramatist Franz Grillparzer wrote. It was once explained to me that all the seemingly irrational attitudes and behavior in Eastern and Central Europe can be construed as the result of a series of interlocking, more or less aggressive, inferiority complexes: The Austrians feel inferior to the Germans, the Hungarians to the Austrians, the Romanians to the Hungarians, the Slovaks to the Czechs and the Hungarians, the Bulgarians to the Romanians, etc., etc. The

Albanians, in this view, are at the bottom of the explosive heap. “Kiss the hand you cannot bite”—a common Romanian expression that describes a particular mode of survival—applies not only to Romanians. In this part of the world, the Balkans and Mitteleuropa, where the borders of peoples correspond only roughly to the borders of political states, hand-kissing is the custom. But every inferiority complex implies a corresponding superiority complex, and the converse of the duplicity suggested in the statement, “Kiss the hand you cannot bite,” and implicit in it, is the straightforward message, “Bite the hand you can.” That seems to be the custom, too.

In the terrible, tangled politics of Romania, the past is always present, never forgotten and never forgiven—especially in Transylvania, the largest and richest and in many ways the most beautiful area of Romania. Enclosed within the great protecting arc

of the Carpathians, the Bihor Massif, and the Tisa Plain, it is—or has been—rich in gold and silver, vital salt and copper, forests, rivers, and fertile earth. Its history is complex, with an early mysterious gap of some 1,000 years, and inextricably entwined with the idea of the Romanian nation struggling to be born—and of the Hungarian nation fighting to establish and then to preserve itself against the forces of Constantinople and of Vienna, the Ottoman invaders and the Hapsburg Empire.

Fierce Magyar horsemen crossed the Carpathian passes from the northern Urals and the steppes of Central Asia at the beginning of the tenth century to terrorize the Christian West with their arrows. Before being driven back to the Carpathian Basin, they succeeded in dominating whatever indigenous peoples were (Romanians, as the Romanians claim) or were not (nobody, as the Hungarians claim) in Transylvania, as well as the Slavs and Germans in the rest of the region. By the year 1000, Stephen the Great had brought his warrior nobles to the still-united Christian Church, for which Rome later canonized him, and the Kingdom of Hungary was established under the Crown of Saint Stephen: a gift, it is said, of the pope. Although a part of Hungary, Transylvania was ruled for the next 300 years by its own Orthodox princes, who gradually became Magyarized, especially after 1365, when Catholicism became a qualification for holding land and titles. The Romanians, after the Great Schism of 1054, had remained loyal to the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople.

But how the mighty are laid low. Hungary's King John I, who waged war against the powerful Hapsburgs, was forced to kiss the hand of Süleyman the Magnificent a year after the disastrous Battle of Mohács in 1526, which is to the Hungarians what the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 is to the Serbs: the burial ground of their greatness as a nation. After Mohács, the Turks occupied Budapest, and Hungary was split into three parts: Royal Hungary to the west and north, which became

part of the Hapsburg Empire; the middle triangle of the Turkish *pashalik* of Buda, which was increasingly absorbed into the Ottoman Empire and now included a large Sephardic community; and Transylvania—Erdély as the Hungarians call it—a semi-autonomous principality nominally loyal to the sultan and jealously coveted by all and which, until 1686, remained largely independent. Encouraged by an influx of Hungarian nobles fleeing the *pashalik*, the purest Hungarian culture was here preserved, free of extraneous influence of Turk and Jew and German and Slav—and presumably of the autochthonous Romanian as well. Thus for some Magyars here and abroad, the cradle of Hungarian civilization indisputably lies within Romania today—in that exact same Transylvania which a fact sheet from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes as “the cradle of the Romanian people and the inexhaustible source that has kept alive and constantly strengthened the Romanity, East and South of the Carpathians.”

As a people, the Romanians are presumed to descend from the Dacian tribes who inhabited present-day Romania (including Transylvania) and Trajan's Roman legions who conquered them in A.D. 106. Rome abandoned its province of Dacia 170 years later but left its language with the people, who remain an isolated “island of Latinity in a sea of Slavs,” as the somewhat inaccurate saying goes. It is inaccurate because the Magyars are not Slavs. Surrounded but certainly never enslaved by the Slav—and German and Latin—people, the Magyars are equally if not more isolated by their language, which does not belong to the Indo-European family but is related to Finnish and more distantly to Turkish.

As a country, however, Romania is young, younger even than the United States. On the edge of three great and contending empires, Russian, Ottoman, and Austrian, it was formed by the union of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859, but it did not gain real independence until 1878, when it was at last released from some 400 years of Turkish suzerainty and—with the arrival from

Germany of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen line—turned its face toward the West, toward Europe. Three years later, Carol I, prince of the Regat, or Old Kingdom, since 1866, was crowned king of Romania. The dynasty he founded held the throne until the communists forced King Michael to abdicate at the end of 1947. The deposed king now lives in exile in Switzerland but remains a source of considerable irritation to the present regime.

Until the 19th century, it was not possible to think in terms of nationalism or nationalistic movements in this part of the world. What united people, and what separated them, was social class. At the top was the single political class: a tiny group of nobles, an often charming and well-spoken supranational elite who, like the royal houses of Europe after Queen Victoria, were mostly related or otherwise connected to one another. In Transylvania, whatever Romanian aristocracy there was having long since been Magyarized, these nobles were entirely Hungarian, although the circumstance of their being Hungarian was far less important than the astonishingly privileged circumstances of their birth.

Shortly before his death in 1991, one of the last survivors of this class, Ioan de Mocgony Stircea, born an Austrian in Bukovina but bearing both Hungarian (Mocgony) and Romanian (Stircea) names, a “double baron” who could trace his ancestry to Charlemagne and who once possessed the “the greatest fortune in Romania after the king’s,” told me quite unself-consciously, “When I was arrested [by the communists], 43,000 of my peasants marched in protest in Timisoara. Our family founded Moldavia in 1212.” During World War II he saved 1,000 Jews from deportation from Bukovina. “We used to run our places with them,” he said. His places included a 200-year-old oak forest of 54,000 acres, and this after the most thorough interwar land reform in Europe. In another place in Transylvania, “we had all the stone.” He had places in every region of the land-banks, too. Prompted by

President Truman, he organized the Romanian anti-communist underground, joined by 314,000 peasants, many of them “his.” After 15 years in prison, and penniless, he was released and made his way—with four bottles of *uica*, four bottles of vodka, and a sandwich in his knapsack—to Switzerland, and to his wife. “Luckily, she inherited.”

Below that loftiest aerie, for centuries there was the vast sea of peasants. Then came 1848, the year of revolution in Europe. The peasants—Hungarian as well as Romanian—had been subject since 1517 to “the lords of the land in absolute and eternal servitude,” as the Werbóczi Code, or Tripartitum, put it. (Serfdom was abolished in Wallachia in 1746, and in Moldavia in 1749.*) Although there had been several violent rebellions, more violently quelled, it was only in 1848 that what in Transylvania had been primarily a social conflict—serf against virtually absolute lord—became clearly, strongly national: Romanian peasant against Hungarian peasant.

The Romanian majority demanded status as a nation equal to the three long-recognized “nations” of the land: the Hungarian nobles, and the lesser, quasi-noble Germans and Széclers (a Hungarian subgroup). The Romanians demanded equal recognition of their Orthodox church, which had been merely “tolerated” alongside the four “privileged” religions: Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Unitarianism. They also wanted the right to their language in schools and in administration and legislation (rights, incidentally, which the Hungarians in Transylvania are claiming today). In exchange for social equality and the abolition of serfdom, the Hungarians demanded that Transylvania, still under the rule of Vienna, be incorporated into the Hungarian state.

By the end of 1848, serfdom had been reinstated and all the Romanian demands rejected. In 1867, Hungary and Austria resolved

*Until the 19th century, the word *român* (Romanian man) in both principalities was synonymous with “serf.”



Admiral Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary, leads his troops into Nagy Varad, a town in the part of Transylvania that Hungary acquired in 1940.

their quarrels, and Transylvania was incorporated into the Hungarian "unitary" state under the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. An intensive campaign of Magyarization began. The Romanian demands that had been rejected since they were first formulated in 1791 continued to be rejected until 1914.

With the signing of the peace treaties at the end of World War I, Romania more than doubled its size and population, from about 137,000 to 295,049 square kilometers, and from 7,160,682 people in 1912 to 15,541,424 in 1920. For the first time in history, the vast majority of the Romanian-speaking people were united in one political state—excessively centralized after the French model, and now with significant minorities and cultural differences. Although Romania gained Bessarabia from the ruins of the Russian Empire, Bukovina from Austria, and Southern Dobrudja from Bulgaria, România Mare, or Greater Romania, came into being largely at the expense of Magna Hungaria, defeated in the war and shrunk to one-third of its former size by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, losing three-fifths of

its population in the process. Most of those three-fifths, however, were not Magyars but other nationalities. The Hungarian census of 1910 indicates that Magyars were a minority in their own country, making up only 48.1 percent of the 18.3 million inhabitants. (The largest minority—14.1 percent, almost entirely in Transylvania—was Romanian.) Twenty years later, Magyars composed 89.5 percent of the 7.2 million inhabitants of post-Trianon Hungary, which had become in fact a "unitary" state.

The popular response in Budapest to its radically diminished status in Central Europe after 1918 was "*Nem, nem soha!*" (No, no, never!) After a

brief interlude in 1919 as the Hungarian Socialist Republic under Béla Kun—enthusiastically assisted in its fall by the invading Romanians—a truncated but now ethnically homogeneous Hungary settled into the fascist regime of Miklós Horthy, an admiral who no longer had a sea. István Lázár, the Hungarian author of a history of his country that seems otherwise predictable in its national feeling, wrote that "the chief and, at times, the only rallying cry heard during the quarter century of the Horthy period concerned the enlargement of the country, rectification of its borders: 'Dismembered Hungary is not a country, undivided Hungary is heaven.' . . . From the very first moment, Horthy and his White Army made efforts to revise the borders."

In 1940 Horthy succeeded. The Vienna Diktat—the Second Vienna Award whose anniversary is still dolorously noted in the Romanian press every August 30—forced Romania to cede northern Transylvania to Hungary, the so-called "Horthyist tongue," an area of 43,243 square

kilometers—two-fifths of the territory that Hungary had lost to Romania under Trianon—with a population of 2.6 million. According to not-always reliable Romanian statistics, 50.2 percent of them were ethnic Romanians, 37.1 percent Hungarians and Széclers. (Hungarian figures allot Romanians a less generous portion, 48.4 percent, and Magyars an additional four percentage points.) Admiral Horthy rode triumphantly into the Transylvanian capital of Cluj—Kolozsvár, now that it was Hungarian again—on a white horse, as he had in Budapest in 1919. Romania had had its revenge in 1918; now, in the implacable dialectic of progress and violence that followed 1848, it was Hungary's turn. The notion of heterogeneity within a single imposed political framework, which the Ottomans, the Austrians, the Russian tsars, and finally their Soviet heirs tried to realize, was never deeply rooted in the Europe of the West, much less in the East, and it had died with the archduke at Sarajevo; the Soviet empire was simply an anachronism. Neither Hungary nor Romania gave it much more than lip service.

Although the Vienna Diktat was reversed after World War II when a defeated Hungary once again retreated to the borders established by Trianon, it is in this "tongue" where Romanian nationalist feeling is most intense today. It is fueled in part by Hungary's refusal thus far to sign a treaty with Romania, such as it signed with Ukraine and Germany signed with Poland, stating that neither country has any territorial claim on the other. Romania, for its part, refuses to sign an agreement guaranteeing minority rights, saying that its minority policy is exemplary and is in any event an internal matter. Both Hungary and Romania rather disingenuously justify their refusal on the grounds that the inviolability of borders and minority rights are already affirmed in various international agreements, including the Helsinki Final Act. Despite Helsinki, three East European states have broken up since 1990, two of them bordering Romania.

The Helsinki Final Act, to which both countries are signatories, prohibits the changing of borders by force—but not by peaceful means, a loophole left in order to allow for the eventual reunification of Germany. It is worth noting that the Vienna Diktat was *technically* a peaceful arbitration, as both parties—certainly Romania—are doubtless aware. However, Budapest has said unequivocally that it has no territorial claims on Romania and considers the current borders permanent, "irrespective of their being just or unjust," as a statement of the six Hungarian parliamentary parties put it. The political parties that head the governing coalitions in both countries—the newly renamed Romanian Party of Social Democracy in Romania (formerly the Democratic National Salvation Front) and the Hungarian Democratic Forum—in an attempt to maintain their tenuous holds on power, play to varying degrees the nationalist card, which has always and everywhere served as a useful distraction from more immediate problems.

As to Admiral Horthy, Hitler's ally who died in exile in Portugal 36 years ago, he was reburied in Hungary on September 4 of last year, with much of the grandeur of a hero's funeral. The obsequies were covered live on state television, and the mint issued gold and silver coins in commemoration. Although Hungarian prime minister Jozsef Antall (who died last December) chose not to attend the ceremony—his wife did—he praised Horthy as a patriot and anticommunist. So far, at least, the Romanians have not reburied with such honors their wartime leader, Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was also a staunch anticommunist and Hitler ally and was executed for that in 1946—though many would if they could.

This cursory sketch of a history that has consumed untold thousands of pages and the productive lives of nationalist Hungarian and Romanian historians alike may explain, if it does not excuse, Romania's current fear of Hungarian irredentism, a fear that sometimes seems to verge on the irrational, and Romania's attitude toward the restive Hungarian minority within its borders.

As Ceausescu pursued his vigorous policies of industrialization and homogenization in the last two decades of his rule, the populations of the great Transylvanian cities—Cluj, Oradea, Tîrgu-Mures—began to change character. The factories needed workers. Large numbers of Romanian peasants from the countryside and especially from other regions, particularly Moldavia, moved in to the stark new blocks on the edges of town which they had first been brought in to build. The proportion of Magyars diminished. The new arrivals had a different accent, different values—more Balkanic, the Transylvanians would say, less civilized. They had more children. The population of Cluj is now 328,000.

Urban Transylvanians—Romanian as well as Hungarian—are proud of their heritage, and scornful of the Byzantine and slothful ways of Moldavia and Wallachia, where Bucharest is located. The newcomers, in turn, were envious—and of course the Hungarian language, still heard daily on the streets, was impenetrable to them. It was clear that these cities possessed a kind of provincial imperial style, however faded—almost a grandeur quite unlike anything in the places where the new residents had come from or the cities they had seen. It was also clear, to Hungarians and Romanians alike, that living conditions were steadily improving across the border, in Hungary, while at home the reverse was true. To divert attention from this disastrous economic condition, the already chauvinistic Ceausescu became even more stridently nationalistic, and to a paranoid degree. Hungarians became his scapegoat. The message sank in, especially among those who did not know any Hungarians.

After the dictator fell, Hungarians remained the scapegoats, blamed, with the Jews, for bringing communism to Romania because a disproportionate number of the early communists were one or the other or both, the indigenous Communist Party in Romania at that time numbering only about 1,000, which made it the smallest such party in Europe.

The displaced workers in the great industrial complexes, resentful of their lot and fearful of their future, by and large, form the popular base of the Romanian nationalist parties today, which repeat in one form or another the old Ceausescu propaganda. These people elected the virulently nationalistic mayor of Cluj, Gheorghe Funar, a laughingstock to the outside world but a man to be reckoned with in Romania. He ran for the presidency in 1992 and placed third, getting almost 11 percent of the vote. He heads the largest nationalist party in the Parliament, the Party of Romanian National Unity, a vital part of the ruling government coalition. The Party of Social Democracy (formerly the Democratic National Salvation Front), which ranked first with 28 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections, also includes among its embarrassing but necessary allies the extremist România Mare and Socialist Labor parties. The former is headed by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, whose notoriously anti-Semitic journal of the same name declares in a banner headline each week: "The year 1993 Continues the Fight against Hungarian Fascism." The president of the latter is Ilie Verdet, Ceausescu's prime minister in the early 1980s; its vice president is Adrian Paunescu, a favorite of Ceausescu's, who tried to seek refuge in the American Embassy when the crowd spotted then attacked him in December 1989.

Amild nostalgia for past glories—a common enough phenomenon in the world, especially in a diminished present—does not necessarily entail a fanatical irredentism or a virulent nationalism; it is only nostalgia, neither the most constructive of human feelings nor the most malign, but familiar to all. The emphasis, however, is on mild. With all this, a few things must be kept in mind.

First, Hungary would be destroyed if it suddenly returned to its 1914 borders. The great majority of Hungarians know this full well. Instead of 11 million not entirely satisfied Hungarians, the state would contain an additional six million very unhappy Romanians, and another million each of Slovaks and Serbs,

not to mention Ukrainians, Croats, Slovenians, Ruthenians, and so on. The dream of a Greater Hungary, which figures far more prominently in the minds of Romanian extremists than in actual Hungarian designs, would be a nightmare, not only for Hungary but for Europe. Incipient Hitlers, of which there are several waiting in the wings (as has been amply demonstrated in the former Yugoslavia), would sprout like mushrooms after a rain.

Second, it is in no one's interest to escalate ethnic conflict to a point where it cannot be controlled. Open, armed conflict would utterly destroy both countries. The horror now being enacted in the former Yugoslavia has been salutary in this regard. Fortunately, neither the Romanian people nor the Hungarian people are toting Kalashnikovs, and the military leaders of both countries are generally behaving responsibly.

Third, fanning nationalist flames in order to deflect attention from the real and difficult problems at hand is in the narrow interest of certain groups in Romania, and in Hungary as well, who wish to maintain power, to augment it, or to achieve it—not by force of argument or superiority of political program but by manipulating in the most cynical way (or the most stupid) the passions of those unhappy people most grievously affected by the changes in their countries, particularly the economic changes. These latter are not the old communists who were in power before—they have adapted all too well to the new situation in both countries, which is one of the problems—but those who were miserable before and, bearing the brunt of economic changes and a new and unfamiliar capitalism whose laws are more akin to the laws of the jungle than to the modern (and to varying degrees mixed) market economies, are indeed more miserable now.

In this vein, Antall several times stated that he felt in his soul that he was prime minister of 15 million Hungarians. Only 11 million of them live within the Hungarian border, a fact not lost on any of Hungary's neighbors. Just before Funar was elected mayor of Cluj,

the Hungarian minister of defense, Lajos Für, said that the safeguarding of Hungarians everywhere was inseparable from the security of the Hungarian state. "This nut in Cluj is the direct result of the Hungarian defense minister's popping off," a high Western diplomatic source told me. The Romanian government immediately accused the Hungarian government of being "irredentist and revisionist." In the autumn of 1993 the Hungarians lobbied forcefully (but fruitlessly) against the admission of Romania into the Council of Europe and the granting of most-favored-nation status by the United States. Shortly afterward, Romania's President Ion Iliescu accused the Hungarian government of using Hungarians from abroad as a "subversive fifth column" in neighboring states—an old charge: It was the reason, in fact, that Romania at first refused international observers for the 1992 national elections. The Hungarian government was "shocked." And on and on. The polarizing effect of these actions makes radicals out of moderates. Bad money drives out good, as the economists say.

Fourth and finally, no rational person could argue that the Magyars are a persecuted minority in Romania today, although without doubt some injustices have been inflicted upon them, and innumerable smaller and larger harassments. Nonetheless, it is irresponsible and a degradation of the language to speak, as some have done in this regard, of "ethnic purification." Magyars may be envied, even feared, but they are not despised. That misfortune falls on the Gypsies, disdained by Romanians and Hungarians alike.

So what then do the Magyars in Romania want? Essentially what Romanians in Transylvania before Trianon wanted: to be citizens, not subjects. In the local context, that means first the right to public education, local government, and the administration of justice in their mother tongue by their own people—all of which were enunciated in the Declaration of Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, the birthday and since 1990 the national day of today's Romania. Although there are Hungarian schools

in Romania, most of the promises in the declaration, repeated in January 1990, have never been kept. In an attempt to achieve their goals, Hungarians formed the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania, the first new political party in Romania after the fall of Ceausescu. It is not a monolithic organization, however, but a coalition of some 16 different parties and associations spanning the political spectrum and held together largely by their self-identification as Hungarians against the attacks of the extreme nationalists.

Specifically, Hungarians want the 400-year-old Hungarian Boylai University in Cluj re-established. It was incorporated into the Romanian Babes University in 1959 and effectively terminated a few years later under Ceausescu. In the early autumn of 1993, however, the decision was taken to begin by yearly stages the teaching of the entire curriculum in Hungarian as well as in Romanian. As of last October, out of almost 3,500 first-year students, some 500 are in the Hungarian section. (Of course, some Magyars enroll in the Romanian section.) They can compete for entrance in the Romanian section, too, so if they fail at one they have a chance at the other. Now the more radical Magyars want a completely separate university, with a separate administration. Andrei Marga, the Romanian rector of the combined university, called Babes-Boylai, and an intelligent and rational man, is worried. "This is a potential source of serious conflict in Cluj," he says. There are so many. Older Romanian physicians remember 1940, when the Romanian medical faculty there was closed and they had to move it to Sibiu, which was outside the "Horthyist tongue." Many of these doctors now vote for the nationalist parties, whose support is not limited solely to the urban proletariat. Physicians have considerable influence in Romania. They are not inclined to be sympathetic to demands such as the call for a separate university.

Below the university level, Hungarians want history and geography taught in their own language. They want bilingual street

signs in areas where minorities make up a significant proportion of the population. They want a law on national minorities enacted, and a ministry of minorities. They want collective rights for their community, an embryonic concept that the Hungarian government is promulgating in international forums. In his biography, *With God, for the People*, the Calvinist pastor László Tokés, a hero to all Romanians in December 1989 but today a hero to only a few, wrote: "The concept of 'the rights of the individual' has always sounded somewhat strange to me. Individualism is a kind of alienation, and in many parts of the world, community has been lost as individuality has thrived." True enough. Tokés is honorary president of the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania and leader of its radical wing.

Hungarians also want a somewhat hazily defined cultural, not territorial, autonomy. The word is anathema to Romanians because they consider autonomy the first step toward the dismemberment of Romania. Unfortunately, Prime Minister Antall, seeking to bolster his party's plummeting popularity at home by focusing the attention of the nation on Hungarians abroad, recently vowed to support Magyar aspirations to autonomy within Romania, which he characterized as "fundamental."

Autonomy is a difficult problem, but one might think that bilingual street signs, common for years and still seen in many Transylvanian cities, would be a simple and insignificant concession. But in the increasingly divided city of Cluj, the fanatical mayor has changed the names of many streets to eliminate any that honor Hungarians and has threatened to melt down the statue of a Hungarian king in the center of the city, although the king, Matthias the Just, was the son of a Romanian noble and born in Cluj. There, the most minor concession—any conciliatory gesture at all—is viewed as opening the gates to the Hungarian invaders. It is no wonder that the Hungarians joke, "We are a double minority. First, we are clever. . . ."

In a normal country, in a normal time, Funar would be laughed out of office—and investigated for corruption as well. Neither the country nor the times are normal, however. Last summer the headline in a local newspaper loyal to the mayor proclaimed, “Hungary Planning Surprise Attack In Next Five Months.” The distinguished elderly woman who showed it to me believed it. She also believed that Hillary Clinton had adopted an extraterrestrial, and proceeded to describe the creature to me. His skin was a green crust, and he was an “absolute vegetarian.” She had read it in the newspaper.

Absurd as some of this may seem, it is just such absurdities that could be the cause of serious ethnic conflict, particularly in a country where rumor replaces information and the economy is headed over the brink of disaster. Another absurdity: The largest money-making machine in Romania—and the largest scam going in all of Europe—is a pyramid scheme called Caritas, which has been running in Cluj for 18 months now and has attracted the savings of virtually the entire adult population of the city plus some three million other Romanians—more than one-sixth of the adult population—with the promise of a sevenfold return on investment in three months. As of October 1993, it was taking in the equivalent of almost five million dollars each day. Cluj now boasts several Caritas dollar millionaires—in a country where the average monthly income is less than \$70 and annual inflation approaches 300 percent. Caritas—no connection with the international charity of the same name—is run by an obscure accountant from Fagara and promoted by Funar, who has gotten rich off it. Right now, it is the single factor uniting Hungarians and Romanians in Cluj: They all want to be rich. The only good thing this indicates is that if Romania ever really gets its economy going, ethnic problems will fade fast. But when

Caritas collapses—as it must—the repercussions will be staggering.

Tristan Tzara, founder of the Dadaist movement, was born in Romania. So was absurdist playwright Eugène Ionesco. Surely there is some connection.

“This is the Balkans,” the editor of Romania’s largest newspaper told me a while ago, making the connection. “We are at the gates of the Orient. Everything is dangerous, and nothing is serious.”

That is the Balkanic excuse, but the rest of us can only hope he is correct. The “power” needs scapegoats. When Caritas collapses, it will need them desperately. In Romania, the most popular scapegoats are first Gypsies and then Hungarians, followed at some distance by Jews. Hungarians and Romanians have lived together in Romania for hundreds of years, usually with a reasonable degree of peace and within living memory too. If left to their own devices, there is no reason to believe that they cannot continue to work out existing problems or others that may arise. There is reason to believe, however, that neither Romanians nor Hungarians are left to their own devices. The Romanian Intelligence Service is quite keen on maintaining an undefined “national spirit,” which it appears to find under threat from foreign influences both sacred and secular. If the Hungarian government is up to a tenth of what the Romanian government seems honestly to believe, then there is a very big problem.

“We don’t have a functioning economy,” a Romanian told me recently, “but we do have history.” The springtime of hopes that began in the euphoria of December 1989 had pretty much faded when the leaves were still in bud. Right now, except for the Caritas millionaires, the mass of the population does not have much else besides history. For this and other reasons, ethnic tensions are kept on the simmer but still below the boil.